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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 Day of the Philippines and the National Day of Portugal 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: Officials face surprise inspections as austerity drive intensifies

(ld) Since mid-March, Chinese officials have been scrambling to comply with President Xi Jinping's austerity policy – introduced in 2012 –, as inspection teams arrive unannounced at government offices across the country. The latest campaign was launched in early May, with eight central inspection groups dispatched to evaluate compliance with recently updated conduct regulations. These teams are examining ministries, local governments, state-owned enterprises, and universities to ensure adherence to new rules that emphasize frugality and proper conduct in everything from official meals to office furnishings.

A comprehensive list of 80 prohibited behaviors—widely referred to as the "80 red lines"—was issued earlier this year by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), China's top anti-corruption

body. Cai Qi, China's fifth-ranking official and Xi's chief of staff, is overseeing the renewed enforcement push.

Designed specifically for public servants, an app has been introduced that ensures officials cover their own meal expenses during work trips, preventing abuse of travel stipends and reducing burdens on local budgets. The app is being piloted in provinces such as Sichuan, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang as a practical tool to promote accountability and limit waste.

The central government's 2025 budget for official receptions, vehicles, and overseas travel has been reduced by 5 percent to CNY 6.124 billion (USD 851 million). [Xinhua]

Despite the decade-long effort, breaches of austerity rules have surged. According to CCDI data, nearly 44,900 violations were recorded in the first quarter of 2025—up 75 percent from the same period in 2024—with 39,400 individuals punished, a 50 percent increase.

Analysts note that while the campaign serves to improve governance and reduce waste, the austerity push now carries an added fiscal urgency. Beijing is increasingly focused on channeling public funds into key areas such as science, technology, and social welfare, particularly in light of rising debt levels and competition with the United States.

Despite official resolve, experts remain skeptical about the campaign's ability to root out corruption in a system without independent oversight or free press. [South China Morning Post]

China: Beijing's Panchen Lama vows to reinforce party control over Tibetan Buddhism

(lb) In a rare private meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at Zhongnanhai, the central government compound in Beijing, located within the Forbidden City, Gyaltsen Norbu, China's government-appointed Panchen Lama, pledged loyalty to the Communist Party and vowed to support the "sinicization" of Tibetan Buddhism and its alignment with Tibetan Buddhism with socialist values and Chinese cultural traditions. [State Council, China] [AP]

Gyaltsen Norbu has been a controversial figure since 1995, when he was named by the Chinese government as the 11th Panchen Lama, bypassing the boy selected by the Dalai Lama—Gedhun Choekyi Nyima—who was

then six years old. Gedhun disappeared shortly after his recognition, and his whereabouts remain unknown. In 2020, Chinese authorities claimed he was a university graduate with a stable job and a private life, though no independent verification has been offered.

The Panchen Lama traditionally plays a central role in identifying the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. Beijing's selection of Norbu is widely viewed as an attempt to control the succession process and weaken the influence of the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader. The Dalai Lama, now 89, has suggested that his successor will be born outside China in the "free world," signaling a direct challenge to China's claims over Tibetan religious authority. With his 90th birthday approaching in July, expectations are growing that he will soon reveal more details about his succession plan. [CNN]

The term "sinicization," which features prominently in President Xi's policies on religion, refers to reshaping faiths to reflect Chinese identity and ensure political loyalty to the Communist Party.

China: Government sets new rules to streamline data sharing

(lb) China has introduced new regulations aimed at standardizing how government data is shared across agencies, in a move to boost digital governance and improve public services. Premier Li Qiang signed a State Council decree to enact the rules, which will come into force on August 1.

The regulations stipulate that government agencies must use existing shared data where possible and avoid re-collecting information already accessible through official channels. This approach is designed to reduce administrative burdens on citizens and businesses, while enhancing coordination between departments. The document explicitly states that, if public duties can be met using shared data, repeat collection is prohibited.

As part of the overhaul, an integrated national government affairs big data system will be launched. Existing government data platforms are required to merge into this unified system.

Security responsibilities will rest with departments requesting data access. These departments, along with any third parties they authorize, will be accountable for safeguarding the integrity and confidentiality of the data. [Xinhua]

China: Deepening deflation highlights fragile recovery amid trade and property pressures

(lb) China's producer prices dropped further in May, marking the steepest decline in almost two years and underscoring deepening economic challenges. The producer price index (PPI) fell 3.3 percent year-on-year, worse than April's 2.7 percent decline and the most severe contraction since July 2023. Consumer inflation also weakened, reflecting lackluster domestic demand despite repeated policy efforts to stimulate the economy.

Mounting deflationary pressure is being driven by several overlapping factors. Weak domestic consumption, intense price competition—particularly in the automotive sector—and ongoing uncertainty over trade relations with the United States are all weighing on sentiment.

The consumer price index (CPI) dipped 0.1 percent in May compared to the same period last year, matching April's fall. On a monthly basis, prices slid 0.2 percent, reversing a slight uptick the previous month. While core inflation, which excludes food and energy, showed a modest rise of 0.6 percent year-on-year, economists warned this improvement is precarious.

The backdrop includes a slow-motion housing correction and job insecurity that continue to dampen spending. Retail sales growth faltered again last month. Tariff pressures from the United States have further complicated China's export outlook. [Reuters] [CNBC]

China: Yuan hits near two-year low against major currencies

(ld) China's yuan weakened on June 6, falling to its lowest level in nearly two years against a basket of major trading partners' currencies, following a high-profile phone call between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping that failed to resolve key economic and geopolitical tensions (see article in this edition), leaving investors uncertain about the prospects of a comprehensive trade agreement between the two largest economies.

The yuan closed domestic onshore trading at 7.1847 per U.S. dollar, down 0.08 percent from the previous

session. Offshore, it traded at 7.1852 around the same time. The Chinese currency's CFETS index, which measures its value against 25 currencies of major trading partners, slipped to 95.58—its lowest since mid-2023 and down 5.8 percent so far in 2025. In contrast, the yuan has gained 1.6 percent against the dollar year-to-date.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) set the yuan's official midpoint at 7.1845 per dollar on June 6, stronger than *Reuters'* forecast of 7.1935, and the firmest since May 26. The currency is allowed to trade within a 2 percent range on either side of the daily midpoint. [PBOC, in Chinese]

While Beijing maintains it is not deliberately devaluing the yuan, the currency's passive depreciation amid strained Sino-U.S. ties comes as China grapples with deflationary pressures and subdued domestic demand. Investors are now looking ahead to key economic indicators next week—including inflation and trade figures—to better understand the overall health of the Chinese economy as it contends with ongoing tariff impacts. [Reuters]

China: Unified ecological compensation system for Yangtze and Yellow rivers to be launched by 2027

(lb) China plans to establish a unified ecological compensation mechanism for the Yangtze and Yellow rivers, the country's two largest waterways, by 2027, according to a joint announcement by the Ministry of Finance and four other government agencies. The initiative, part of a broader strategy to improve water environment governance, will be gradually expanded to cover major tributaries and key river basins nationwide by 2035.

The mechanism will include diverse compensation methods, more flexible arrangements, refined standards, and a robust operational framework. China's central fiscal authorities will coordinate and guide implementation to ensure that compensation indicators and funding scales reflect local ecological realities while staying financially viable for provincial governments. [Ministry of Finance, China, in Chinese] [China Daily]

The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers are not only China's two longest rivers but also serve as critical economic lifelines, underpinning the country's agriculture, industry, energy, and transportation sectors.

China: Services sector sees modest growth in May

(ld) China's services sector expanded slightly in May, driven by a rise in new domestic orders, although uncertainty surrounding U.S. tariffs continued to weigh on overseas demand.

The Caixin/S&P Global services purchasing managers' index (PMI) rose to 51.1 in May, up from 50.7 in April, remaining above the 50-point threshold that separates growth from contraction. The reading aligns with the official PMI from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which recorded a marginal increase to 50.2 from 50.1. [S&P Global] [NBS, in Chinese]

While the uptick reflects growing consumer demand at home, new export orders declined for the first time this year. Economists attribute the drop to lingering trade tensions between China and the United States, despite a 90-day pause on tariffs that was agreed in an effort to de-escalate the situation. Concerns remain that broader economic risks and slow progress in negotiations may limit the impact of this temporary reprieve. Businesses also faced higher average costs, particularly from increased purchase prices and wages. However, selling prices continued to decline, adding pressure to already thin profit margins.

The gains in the services sector were not enough to offset weakening industrial activity. The Caixin China General Composite PMI, which includes both services and manufacturing, fell to 49.6 in May from 51.1 in April, indicating the first overall contraction since December 2022.

In response to these challenges, China's central bank eased monetary policy last month, including a reduction in the ceiling for deposit rates. The move was intended to encourage consumer spending and investment while alleviating cost pressures on commercial banks (see AiR No. 19, May/2025, 2).

Both supply and domestic demand improved slightly in May, as firms actively sought to attract new customers. Nevertheless, employment trends remained mixed. While some companies hired more workers to meet demand, others continued reducing staff to control costs.

Service sector input costs rose at their fastest pace since October 2024, but average output charges declined for the fourth consecutive month. Despite this, business sentiment remained optimistic, with

many firms hopeful that the adverse effects of U.S. tariffs would ease over the coming year. [South China Morning Post]

China: Fourth set of satellites launched for planned internet network

(lb) On June 6, China launched the fourth group of low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites intended to form a nationwide internet constellation.

The satellite launch is part of China's broader plan to establish a high-speed, space-based internet system that mirrors similar efforts led by companies like SpaceX and Amazon. The system will rely on hundreds of LEO satellites to improve internet coverage across remote and underserved regions in China. Though specific commercial or public sector goals have not been detailed, the ambition is clearly to enhance digital infrastructure and reduce connectivity gaps. [Ecns.cn]

This successful launch marks the 580th mission for the Long March series, indicative of the consistency and scale of China's space launch program. It also reinforces Beijing's push to strengthen space-based infrastructure as a strategic asset.

While China has not revealed the total number of satellites planned for the full internet constellation, analysts anticipate several dozen more launches over the next two to three years. The constellation may support both civilian broadband access and dual-use applications for emergency response or national security. The move aligns with other national priorities aimed at technological self-reliance and securing critical digital infrastructure. [Global Times]

China: J-36 fighter jet leaked image reveals new details

(lb) A recently leaked image has revealed new details about China's sixth-generation stealth fighter, known as the J-36. The photograph shows a ground-based prototype with a rare cockpit layout featuring side-by-side seating—an arrangement more commonly seen in bombers like the F-111 or Russia's Su-34. This is a departure from conventional fighter designs, which typically feature tandem seating or a single pilot. The J-36's broad cockpit may support multi-role operations, suggesting a shift toward integrating bomber-like capabilities into a stealth fighter airframe.

The aircraft also appears to include three air intakes two underneath and one on the top hinting at a triple-engine configuration. This setup is highly unconventional for modern fighters, which usually rely on two engines for an optimal balance between power, safety, and maintenance complexity. A three-engine layout could potentially deliver greater thrust, enabling heavier payloads and longer-range missions. However, it may also increase fuel consumption and mechanical complexity. [South China Morning Post]

According to estimates, the J-36 could measure around 75 feet in length and weigh between 99,200 and 119,000 pounds. This would make it significantly larger than China's current fifth-generation jet, the J-20, which weighs about 75,000 to 82,000 pounds. The aircraft's size supports the reported existence of three internal weapons bays—one large center bay flanked by two smaller side bays offering space for both short-range and long-range weapon systems, including standoff missiles. The side bays had previously been speculative, but this new image appears to confirm them.

While the authenticity of the photo remains unverified, elements in the background match known features of the Chengdu Aircraft Corporation test facility; the site is believed to be developing the J-36. The image itself appears to be a photo of a screen, raising questions about possible digital distortion or editing. [Interesting Engineering]

China – Hong Kong: New national security charges against prominent pro-democracy activist filed

(dql) Hong Kong authorities have filed new national security charges against jailed pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong, in a move rights groups say reflects an ongoing effort to keep prominent dissidents imprisoned.

Wong, already serving a 56-month sentence for his role in the "Hong Kong 47" case, was arrested on June 6 again and is now accused of conspiring with exiled activist Nathan Law and others to urge foreign entities to impose sanctions or obstruct policymaking in Hong Kong and China. Wong, who has been in detention for over four years and is due for release in January 2027, appeared in court without seeking bail. If convicted of the new charges, he could face a life sentence. [The Guardian] [Global Times]

The charges fall under the Beijing-imposed National Security Law for Hong Kong, introduced in 2020 following the 2019 pro-democracy protests (see AiR No. 26, June/2020, 5). Critics, including foreign governments and human rights organizations, have denounced the law as overly broad and frequently used to suppress dissent, demanding the immediate drop of the charges against. Authorities, however, defend it as necessary for restoring order. [Amnesty International]

The "Hong Kong 47" refers to a group of opposition politicians, activists, and community leaders who were charged with subversion after organizing and participating in unofficial primary elections in 2020, ahead of the Legislative Council elections. Prosecutors argued that the primaries were part of a plan to paralyze the government by winning a majority and blocking legislation (see AiR No. 28, July/2020, 2). The trial, the largest under the national security law, resulted in convictions for most of the defendants, with only two acquitted.

Japan: Partisan politics intensify amid snap election speculation

(ja/dql/ad) Partisan politics took center stage last week amid growing speculation that Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba may dissolve the House of Representatives to pre-empt a possible no-confidence motion by the opposition.

Senior lawmakers from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) did not rule out the possibility of a snap election, widely seen as a warning to the main opposition party, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ). With 148 out of 465 seats, the CDPJ is the only one among the eight opposition parties capable of submitting a no-confidence motion independently.

A source close to the LDP leadership quoted Ishiba as saying that dissolution was "in sight," prompting speculation that he may act before any no-confidence motion is formally submitted.

CDPJ leader Yoshihiko Noda criticized the ruling coalition's posture, suggesting that it reflects a readiness to risk a political vacuum—a factor he said would weigh heavily in his party's decision-making process. Expectations that the CDPJ might delay submitting the motion increased after it reached an agreement with the ruling LDP-Komeito coalition on a key component of pension reform.

The center-right opposition Democratic Party for the People (DPP, 28 seats) argued that the CDPJ should move forward with the motion if it genuinely seeks a change in government, adding that it may join the effort, depending on how the situation develops.

Ishiba's minority government is currently grappling with rising rice prices due to a poor harvest, alongside ongoing efforts to persuade U.S. President Donald Trump to lower tariffs on Japanese goods.

A dissolution would trigger the second general election within a year, following last October's Lower House vote in which the LDP and Komeito lost their majority (see AiR No. 44, October/2024, 5).

A House of Councillors election is already scheduled for this summer. However, Komeito has rejected the idea of holding both elections simultaneously, citing the importance of respecting each chamber's constitutionally defined term limit. [Kyodo News] [The Asahi Shimbun]

Rice controversy deals blow to Ishiba administration's approval ratings

In May, the Ishiba administration continued to face declining public support, as reflected in major Japanese media polls. Approval ratings hit record lows across five surveys, ranging from a high of 34 percent to a low of 20.9 percent. Disapproval ratings also rose, peaking at 62 percent.

The decline in support was largely attributed to surging rice prices, dissatisfaction with the government's response to U.S. trade pressure, and the rejection of a proposed consumption tax cut. Public frustration further intensified after Agriculture Minister Etō Taku was dismissed for a controversial remark in which he claimed he never needed to buy rice. He was replaced by Koizumi Shinjirō in an effort to restore public trust (see AiR No. 21, May/2025, 4).

With the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election scheduled for June 22 and the House of Councillors election set for July, both ruling and opposition parties are closely monitoring shifts in public sentiment. [Nippon.com]

Japan: Government to set up council promoting regional revitalization

(ja) Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba stated on June 7 during a visit to Maebashi, the capital of Gunma

Prefecture, that he plans to establish a council tasked with promoting regional revitalization led by the private sector. The council will be directly supervised by Ishiba, and the basic concept is expected to be finalized later this summer.

The new council is part of a government plan that will shift focus toward sustainable economic growth in the regions, incorporating digital technology and youth relocation incentives.

The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan criticized Ishiba for launching new initiatives without fully evaluating past efforts and argued that true revitalization must prioritize agriculture. The CDPJ will make rural and agricultural policy a central part of its campaign for the upcoming July Upper House election, with proposals to increase support for new farmers and boost rural populations. [The Japan Times] [The Japan News]

Japan: Birth rate drops to record low

(ad) In 2024, Japan recorded fewer than 700,000 births for the first time since Japan started to collect such data more than 100 years ago, with the total dropping 5.7 percent from the previous year to 686,061. This decline reflects ongoing trends of delayed marriage and childbearing.

The country's total fertility rate also fell to a historic low of 1.15, down from 1.20 in 2023, as reported by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan]

Both the birth count and fertility rate have now declined for nine consecutive years. Notably, the birthrate's decline is 15 years ahead of previous government estimates. The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research had originally forecasted that births wouldn't drop to the 680,000 range until 2039. [Kyodo News]

Marriages, which influence future birth patterns, rose for the first time in two years, reaching 485,063—an increase of 10,322 from 2023.

Meanwhile, Japan reported 1,605,298 deaths in 2024, the highest since World War II, resulting in a record natural population decrease of 919,237. This marks the 18th year in a row of population decline due to more deaths than births. [Nippon.com]

Japan's birthrate has steadily declined since the end of the second baby boom in 1973, falling below one million births in 2016 and under 800,000 in 2022. If the trend continues, Japan's population of 124 million could drop to 87 million by 2070, with 40 percent aged 65 or older. This demographic shift poses major challenges for the economy and national security, particularly as Japan seeks to strengthen its military in response to regional threats.

Despite policy efforts, marriage and birthrates continue to fall, as financial insecurity, high living costs, and rigid workplace norms—especially for women—discourage young people from starting families. [The Guardian] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Anti-stalking law under scrutiny amid record cases

(ad/dql) Japan's anti-stalking law is facing renewed criticism as stalking cases surged to record levels in 2024, highlighting persistent gaps in law enforcement. Public anger intensified after the murder of 20-year-old Asahi Okazaki in April. The victim had filed multiple police reports before her death but received minimal protection.

According to the National Police Agency, 1,341 individuals were arrested for anti-stalking law violations in 2024, marking a 24.1 percent increase from the previous year. Restraining orders reached an all-time high of 2,415—60 percent of which were emergency orders. Additionally, 1,743 stalking-related crimes were investigated under other laws, including home intrusions, assaults, intimidation, rape, and attempted murder.

Despite little change in the overall number of stalking reports—19,657 cases—arrests for restraining order violations rose to 233. Around 8 percent of arrests involved repeat offenders, prompting police to intensify monitoring efforts, including regular home visits and phone check-ins.

Authorities are also increasing referrals to mental health services. In 2024, 3,271 counselling interventions were recorded—an eightfold rise from 2016—but only 184 offenders complied with treatment. The National Police Agency is now developing a system to improve access to mental health care for stalkers.

Japan's anti-stalking law, enacted in 2000 after a high-profile murder in Saitama Prefecture, imposes up to

one year in prison or fines of up to JPY 1 million (USD 6,900) for stalking. More severe penalties apply for violations of restraining orders. Although revised over the years, critics argue the law still fails to adequately protect victims. [NHK World] [Kyodo News] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: New law to extend nuclear plant lifespans comes into effect

(ja/dql) A law enacted in 2023 (see AiR No. 23, June/2023, 1) entered into force on June 6, allowing nuclear reactors in Japan to operate beyond the previous 60-year limit. It replaces regulations introduced in 2013 following the 2011 Fukushima disaster, in which the Fukushima Daiichi No. 1 plant experienced a meltdown after a tsunami struck. The earlier rules permitted reactors to operate for 40 years, with extensions of up to 60 years possible if approved by regulators.

Under the amended law, nuclear plant operators may extend the operating life of reactors beyond the 60-year limit to account for stoppages caused by "unforeseeable circumstances." However, such extensions require approval from Japan's nuclear safety watchdog. The law also includes provisions aimed at strengthening safety inspections at aging reactors.

The legislative change follows the release of Japan's 7th Strategic Energy Plan in February (see AiR No. 7, February/2025, 3), under which the country aims to maintain nuclear power at around 20 percent of total energy output by 2040. The policy seeks to address the growing energy demands of artificial intelligence and semiconductor industries, mitigate energy supply risks —especially in light of market disruptions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine—and reduce reliance on fossil fuels to meet Japan's 2050 carbon neutrality goal. [The Japan Times] [The Mainichi] [Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan]

In a separate development, a Japanese high court on June 6 overturned a ruling that had ordered former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. (TEPCO) to pay unprecedented compensation for failing to prevent the 2011 Fukushima disaster. The court found that TEPCO's management at the time could not have reasonably foreseen the massive tsunami—estimated at up to 15 meters—that triggered the crisis. As a result, the court revoked a 2022 decision that had ordered the former executives to pay

approximately JPY 13 trillion (USD 90 billion), the largest damages award ever in a Japanese civil lawsuit. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Government begins reviewing rice policy amidst rising prices

(ja/dql) The government held its first ministerial meeting on June 5 to examine the ongoing surge in rice prices and reassess its current rice policy with the aim of boosting production and preventing supply shortages. Over the past ten months, rice prices in Japan have nearly doubled—from an average of approximately JPY 2,266 (USD 15.64) in August to JPY 4,300 (USD 29.67) in May. [Kyodo News]

Several factors have contributed to this upward pressure, including panic buying fueled by online rumors of a major earthquake, increased demand from the hospitality sector driven by the tourism boom, and a global wheat shortage caused by the Russia-Ukraine war, which has led to heightened international demand for rice as a substitute. Additionally, the unusually hot summer of 2023 resulted in a particularly poor harvest for rice farmers. [Al Jazeera]

The government convened the meeting after government-reserve rice began appearing on store shelves in May, priced at roughly half the market average for that month. Previously sold via auction, the rice is now being distributed directly to retailers. Plans are underway to release 610,000 tons—two-thirds of the government's stockpile—into the market.

Amid growing public frustration, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba called for increased rice production. Although the government no longer exercises direct control over rice output, it retains the authority to set production targets based on anticipated demand and to offer subsidies to farmers.

Recently appointed Minister of Agriculture Shinjiro Koizumi (see AiR No. 21, May/2025, 4), proposed that the government establish a safety net and expand support measures for farmers vulnerable to price volatility. He also urged a review of the current rice export policy and support framework. [Kyodo News]

In addition, Koizumi signaled the possibility of emergency rice imports if existing measures fail to contain soaring prices, emphasizing that there would be "no sacred cows" in agricultural policy. Taking office in mid-May, Koizumi has stressed a pragmatic

approach to achieving price stability, echoing the reformist stance of his father, former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Japan currently imports 770,000 tons of rice annually tariff-free under WTO rules, primarily from the United States, with up to 100,000 tons designated for human consumption. [Reuters] [Japan Today]

Japan: Real wages decline for fourth consecutive month

(ad) Japan's inflation-adjusted wages declined for the fourth month in a row in April, as salary increases continued to lag behind rising consumer prices. The latest wage figures have heightened concerns about Japan's economic outlook, especially as global uncertainty grows due to sweeping tariffs imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

According to preliminary data from the labor ministry, real wages fell 1.8 percent compared to the same month last year. The survey covered around 30,000 businesses nationwide with five or more employees.

The consumer inflation rate used by the labor ministry to calculate real wages slightly decreased to 4.1 percent in April from 4.2 percent in March. However, it has remained around 4 percent for five consecutive months.

The average monthly earnings in April, including base pay and overtime, were JPY 302,453—just over USD 2,100. This marked a 2.3 percent increase year-on-year and the 40th consecutive month of nominal wage growth.

Base salaries rose to JPY 269,325, or nearly USD 1,900, a 2.2 percent increase from a year earlier and the 42nd straight monthly rise. Ministry officials noted that the higher base pay reflected wage hikes implemented at the beginning of the new fiscal year in April. However, the gains were still outpaced by inflation. [NHK World] [Reuters]

Japan: Government aims to boost nominal GDP by 2040 in election pledge

(ja) Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said on June 9 that Japan should aim to boost its economy to JPY 1,000 trillion (USD 7 trillion) in nominal terms by 2040. Ishiba

instructed his ruling party executives to include it in the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) pledge.

The goals were set as major political parties are looking for ways of swaying voters with their campaign pledges for the House of Councillor election scheduled later this summer. The election will replace approximately half of the 248-members in the chamber.

Meanwhile, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition party, seeks to reduce the consumption tax on food, currently at 8 percent, and offer cash handouts, to curb inflation. Party leader Yoshihiko Noda said on June 9 that combatting inflation is one of the largest issues in the coming election.

The LDP is currently taking a more cautious stance on lowering the consumption tax. The LDP's election chief Seiji Kihara stated that their party will, however, consider "effective" cash handouts via surplus tax revenue after it formalizes its election platform. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Cabinet approves massive USD 139 billion plan to bolster disaster resilience, upgrade infrastructure

(dql) In a major effort to strengthen Japan's disaster resilience, the Cabinet on Friday approved a five-year, JPY 20 trillion (USD 139 billion) plan focused on addressing aging infrastructure and mitigating climate-related risks. Covering fiscal years 2026 to 2030, the plan was prompted by recent crises, including prolonged water outages following the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake and a massive sinkhole in Saitama Prefecture, which highlighted vulnerabilities in the country's critical infrastructure.

The plan outlines more than 320 measures to be implemented by national and local authorities, with regional governments contributing to the costs. Of the total budget, JPY 10.6 trillion (USD 73.1 billion) will be allocated to the maintenance of essential infrastructure, including transportation, communications, and energy systems. All sewer pipes at risk of causing accidents due to corrosion or damage are to be repaired by 2030. The repair rate for approximately 92,000 bridges managed by central and local governments is set to increase from 55 percent in fiscal 2023 to 80 percent by 2030, with full completion targeted for fiscal 2051.

A further JPY 5.8 trillion (USD 40 billion) will be invested in disaster prevention infrastructure, including river embankments and erosion control dams to address increasingly severe flooding. An additional JPY 1.8 trillion (USD 12.4 billion) will support disaster preparedness measures, such as upgrading evacuation centers by installing air conditioners in schools. [Kyodo News]

Mongolia: Mongolian People's Party nominates Gombojavyn Zandanshatar for prime minister

(fs) The ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP) has unanimously endorsed Gombojavyn Zandanshatar, Chief of Staff to the President, as its nominee for Mongolia's next prime minister during a meeting of its governing council on June 9.

His nomination will be submitted to the party's National Consultative Committee for a vote. Although the MPP has put forward Zandanshatar's candidacy, alternative nominations may still be proposed.

This comes after former Prime Minister Luvsannamsrain Oyun-Erdene resigned on June 3 after failing to win a confidence vote in parliament. The vote followed weeks of public protests over corruption allegations (see AiR No. 22, June/2025, 1).

According to the Constitution, a new Prime Minister must be appointed within 30 days of the post becoming vacant. As the ruling party, the MPP and the State Great Khural (parliament) are expected to confirm the appointment before July 3.

Zandanshatar has held various senior positions, including foreign minister, cabinet secretary, speaker of parliament, and member of parliament. Since 2024, he has served as Chief of Staff to the President of Mongolia. [Bloomberg TV]

Mongolia: USD 560,000 in state funding allocated to political parties in 2024

(fs) Mongolia's General Election Commission reported that a total of USD 560,000 in state financial support was granted to the four main political parties in 2024.

The ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP) reported around USD 2.4 million in income, with 54 percent

from internal assets, 27 percent from membership fees, and 18 percent from state support, totaling USD 450,000.

The Democratic Party earned around USD 1.7 million, 89 percent of which came from membership dues, and received USD 124,000 from the state.

The HUN Party generated nearly USD 840,000 entirely from donations, while the Civil Will-Green Party declared USD 240,000 in income. Most parties, except the MPP, relied primarily on donations and membership fees.

A legal provision effective January 2025 grants annual state funding to parties or coalitions receiving over one percent of votes. Based on the results of the 2024 parliamentary elections, seven parties and coalitions will receive approximately USD 2.07 million in 2025. [Bloomberg TV]

Mongolia: Government approves pension and tax reforms

(fs) The government on June 4 endorsed a series of legislative reforms aimed at strengthening the pension system, reducing the burden on social insurance funds, and improving the country's tax regime.

A draft law on Private Supplementary Pensions was approved, aiming to diversify elderly citizens' income sources and encourage longer employment and continuous social insurance contributions. The law proposes a framework for the voluntary accumulation of private pension savings, their investment, inheritance, and use for health, education, or housing purposes. Officials expect the measure to enhance labor market activity and financial market development while reducing pressure on the public pension fund.

In addition, the cabinet approved amendments to a package of social insurance laws, targeting a reduction in the financial load on the pension insurance fund. The reforms will introduce a multi-pillar pension model and more flexible contribution schemes for part-time workers, retirees, students, and youth. Employers hiring vulnerable groups may be exempt from social insurance payments.

A draft amendment to the General Tax Law was introduced, which proposes to eliminate the current provision that allows full freezing of bank accounts in cases of tax debt. Instead, only a portion of the

account may be sealed, to allow businesses to maintain operations while repaying debts.

The government also approved amendments to the Corporate Income Tax Law in order to ease the tax burden on small and medium enterprises.

Finally, the revised Value-Added Tax (VAT) Law proposes returning up to 100 percent of paid VAT to individuals on a tiered basis to ease household financial pressures. [Sonin]

Mongolia: Exports decline by 14.5 percent in first five months

(fs) Mongolia's exports reached USD 5.4 billion in the first five months of 2025, exceeding imports by USD 884.5 million, resulting in a positive trade balance. However, the total export value decreased by 14.5 percent compared to the same period last year.

The main raw material exports saw a significant drop, with coal revenue falling by 42 percent to USD 2.2 billion, despite exporting 29.3 million tons of coal. In response, the government aims to offset this loss with increased gold and copper sales.

As of May 2025, Mongolia sold 3.4 tons of raw and semi-processed gold for USD 330.6 million, though this marked a decline from the previous year. Gold exports were mainly directed to Switzerland and the United States.

Despite a 10 percent tariff on Mongolian goods, US exports surged by nine times, with gold constituting the largest share. Additionally, copper ore and concentrate exports totaled USD 1.8 billion.

Overall, the trade turnover for the first five months of 2025 reached USD 10 billion. [Bloomberg TV, in Mongolian]

North Korea: Authorities launch corruption probe into Osoksan Granite Mine

(fw) North Korean prosecutors have initiated an investigation into suspected corruption at the Osoksan Granite Mine, located in South Pyongan province. The probe was triggered by an anonymous tip highlighting significant discrepancies between the mine's reported

production and actual sales figures, raising concerns about possible illicit activities involving high-level officials in Pyongyang.

Preliminary findings reveal that while the mine reported production volumes exceeding initial plans, the revenue declared to local financial and mining authorities was substantially lower. Prosecutors suspect that some granite may have been clandestinely sold to private enterprises or foreign currency-earning joint ventures, bypassing official channels.

Further irregularities include the mine's failure to establish proper unit pricing and maintain transparent sales records. Although the mine claimed foreign currency sales at USD 240 per ton, bank statements indicate the actual income was less than half that amount. Testimonies from mine officials and anonymous whistleblowers corroborate these discrepancies, prompting prosecutors to consider the possibility that corruption was sustained over an extended period due to involvement from officials in Pyongyang.

Additional evidence of corruption emerged from police records showing frequent passage of vehicles carrying building materials through the mine en route to Pyongyang since late 2024. Prosecutors interpret these findings as indicative of deliberate misappropriation rather than mere accounting errors. [Daily NK]

North Korea: MiG-29 fighters enhanced with foreign-assisted air-to-air missile upgrades

(fw) North Korea is actively modernizing its aging MiG-29 fighter fleet to enhance its mid- and long-range aerial combat capabilities, following recent successful tests of air-to-air missiles integrated into these Soviet-era aircraft.

This upgrade effort, reportedly ordered by leader Kim Jong-un in mid-May 2025, involves key military and defense organizations including the Defense Industry Department, the Academy of National Defense Science, and the Air Force Command, aiming to transform the MiG-29s into more capable platforms for modern aerial warfare.

This modernization initiative is part of a longer-term vision outlined in technical manuals, which include short-term goals to boost combat responsiveness of existing MiG-29s, mid-term ambitions to field fighters

capable of beyond-visual-range engagements, and a long-term objective to integrate detection, jamming, communication, and strike systems into a unified aerial combat platform.

The recent public display of an air-to-air missile resembling the American AIM-120 AMRAAM, launched from a North Korean MiG-29, has sparked speculation about the source of North Korea's advanced aviation technology. Analysts suggest that this missile may be a Chinese PL-12 variant, given China's known missile designs, but the integration of such missiles into MiG-29s—originally Soviet aircraft—likely required Russian technical assistance. This triangulated cooperation among North Korea, China, and Russia points to deepening military-technical collaboration within this alliance. [Defense Express]

Further evidence of this cooperation includes reports of North Korean pilots training in Russia since late 2024 and Kremlin discussions about transferring additional MiG-29 and Su-27 aircraft to North Korea, potentially in exchange for soldiers. These developments indicate a strategic effort by Pyongyang to modernize its air force with external support, overcoming technological hurdles that have limited its capabilities for decades. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Damaged warships relaunched

(fw) North Korea has successfully relaunched its 5,000-ton destroyer after a failed initial launch in May that left the vessel partially submerged and damaged. The botched sideways launch, which occurred at the Hambuk Shipyard in Chongjin, saw the ship's bow stuck on the slipway and the hull crashed, forcing the warship to capsize and remain on its side. Satellite images captured the incident, with the damaged vessel covered by tarps to obscure it from observation (see AiR No. 21, May/2025, 4).

The initial failure, described by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as a "criminal act caused by absolute carelessness, irresponsibility and unscientific empiricism," exposed significant vulnerabilities in North Korea's defense modernization efforts.

Analysts attribute the mishap to the shipyard's inexperience with large vessels and the regime's push to rapidly build warships under tight deadlines imposed by leader Kim Jong Un. The Hambuk Shipyard had not previously constructed ships of this scale, and the sideways launch method used was unprecedented

for a destroyer of this size in North Korea. [Indo-Pacific Defense FORUM]

Experts remain skeptical about the extent of the damage and the feasibility of full restoration within the stated timeframe. Salvaging the sunken portion of the ship could cause irreparable harm, possibly requiring the vessel to be dismantled. The incident highlights broader challenges faced by North Korea's military, which has struggled to modernize its aging Soviet-era fleet amid prioritization of nuclear weapons development, resulting in underfunded conventional forces. [Reuters]

North Korea: Defectors sent to political prison camps

(dql) Four North Koreans who attempted to defect by sea in late April were reportedly swiftly sentenced to political prison camps in mid-May.

The group included three family members and a boat captain employed by a fisheries company. All admitted during interrogation that they were trying to reach South Korea. [Daily NK]

South Korea: Lee Jae-myung elected and sworn-in as new president

(dql) Lee Jae-myung of the liberal Democratic Party of Korea (DP) has won the presidential election, following six months of political turmoil sparked by former President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law on December 3. The snap election, held on June 3 after the Constitutional Court impeached and removed Yoon from office on April 4, marks a significant shift in power from the conservative People Power Party (PPP) to the DP, which now controls both the executive and legislative branches.

Lee secured 49.42 percent of the vote, defeating his main rival Kim Moon-soo of the PPP, who received 41.15 percent. Lee Jun-seok of the New Reform Party garnered 8.34 percent, falling short of the 10 percent threshold required for campaign expense reimbursement. Lee received 17.29 million votes—the highest number ever recorded in a South Korean presidential election. Voter turnout reached 79.4 percent, the fourth-highest since the country's first direct presidential election under democratic rule in 1987.

This was Lee's third bid for the presidency, following a third-place finish in the 2017 DP primary and a narrow loss to Yoon in 2022. Although he did not achieve an outright majority, his victory is widely viewed as a mandate to restore political stability. [The Korea Herald 1]

Inaugural address

Due to the snap nature of the election, Lee Jae-myung was sworn in without delay on the morning of June 4 during a brief inauguration ceremony at the National Assembly in Seoul. In his inaugural address, Lee laid out an ambitious agenda to confront critical global shifts and domestic challenges, calling for efforts "to bridge division and hatred with coexistence, reconciliation, and solidarity."

Addressing a complex web of crises affecting social cohesion, livelihoods, economy, diplomacy, security, and democracy, Lee committed to restoring national integrity and democracy through unity and pragmatic governance. He pledged immediate actions to revive the economy amid challenges posed by rising protectionism and supply chain restructuring, initiate societal reforms, and enhance national security, promising thorough investigations into past internal conflicts and ensuring safeguards against future upheavals.

Lee advocated for a pragmatic, market-oriented approach to governance, focusing on supporting entrepreneurship and innovation while enforcing strict regulations against violations that harm society. He stressed the importance of societal balance and fair growth, promising to decentralize development, eliminate regional disparities, and promote cultural industries to enhance global soft power.

Furthermore, Lee underscored the significance of peace and safety, outlining plans to strengthen national defense and uphold peace on the Korean Peninsula through robust military alliances and diplomatic engagements, pledging to pursue the resumption of dormant talks with North Korea while bolstering the trilateral partnership with the U.S. and Japan. [The Korea Times 1] [DW] [BBC] [The Guardian]

Lee's victory is widely seen as marking a new chapter for South Korean democracy, highlighting the system's resilience amid recent political upheaval. However, the new president faces the formidable task of achieving national reconciliation in a country deeply divided by the martial law crisis. At the same time, he must confront a range of pressing policy challenges, including economic stagnation, demographic decline,

and mounting security threats—most notably an increasingly assertive North Korea and growing uncertainty over the future of the U.S. military presence in the region. [France 24] [The Conversation]

PPP floor leader's resignation

Taking responsibility for the electoral defeat, People Power Party (PPP) floor leader Kweon Seong-dong resigned from his post. At a general meeting of PPP lawmakers, Kweon acknowledged his share of the blame and stressed the need for the party to rebuild from the ground up. He stated that the defeat was not solely a judgment on the December 3 martial law incident or the impeachment of Yoon Suk Yeol, but also a stern rebuke of the party's internal divisions.

Although signs of internal discord within the PPP had emerged in recent years, they became more pronounced following Yoon's attempt to declare martial law and in the lead-up to the presidential election. During Yoon's impeachment trial earlier this year, party lawmakers were divided between those who continued to support him and those who did not.

Tensions escalated further just before election day, when party leaders—including Kweon—unsuccessfully attempted to replace the elected presidential candidate, Kim Moon-soo, with former Prime Minister and acting President Han Duck-soo. The effort failed after Kim refused to withdraw. (see AiR No. 19, May/2025, 2).

PPP's reform challenge

Beyond the fate of individual members, the PPP faces a critical juncture, marked by internal divisions, leadership uncertainty, and mounting pressure for reform. With the Democratic Party (DP) now controlling both the presidency and the National Assembly, the PPP is grappling with its most serious crisis in years.

Interim party leader Kim Yong-tae announced on June 7 that a party convention will be held by early September to elect new leadership, in an effort to unify the conservative bloc ahead of next year's local elections. [The Korea Herald 2]

Prominent voices, including former Daegu Mayor Hong Joon-pyo, have called for radical renewal, stating in strong words: "A sick forest must be burned down and replanted with healthy trees," Hong said, highlighting long-standing frustration over the PPP's failure to modernize after Park Geun-hye's 2017 impeachment.

The party remains split between backers of Yoon and supporters of former PPP leader Han Dong-hoon, who had emerged as a vocal critic of the martial law declaration. Despite retaining its base in the southeast, the PPP's defeat has intensified calls for centrist leadership and internal restructuring. Analysts have pointed to presidential candidate Kim Moon-soo's failure to appeal to key demographics and called for serious reflection ahead of local elections.

The PPP leadership pledged sweeping reforms, vowing to discard "privileges and complacency." However, skepticism remains over the party's capacity for meaningful change, given its inability to distance itself from past scandals or present a compelling vision to moderate and young voters. [The Korea Times 2] [Reuters]

Meanwhile, the DPK is expected to capitalize on its dominant position by advancing stalled legislation, including judicial reforms and special prosecution bills (see article below).

South Korea: President Lee Jae-myung announces first cabinet member selections

(fw) On June 4, President Lee Jae-myung announced his first round of senior government appointments, selecting experienced lawmakers, former officials, and seasoned diplomates to lead key positions in his administration.

Among the notable nominations, four-term ruling Democratic Party (DP) lawmaker Kim Min-seok was selected as Prime Minister. President Lee cited for Kim's selection his extensive political experience, ability to implement policies, and expertise in international affairs. Kim, a former DP policy chief who worked closely with Lee during his tenure as party leader, will require a confirmation hearing at the National Assembly, where the Democratic Party holds a majority.

Lee Jong-seok, a former unification minister and standing member of the National Security Council under former President Roh Moo-hyun, was nominated as Director of the National Intelligence Service (NIS). Like Kim Min-seok, Lee Jong-seok's nomination is subject to a National Assembly confirmation hearing.

Lee also named three-term DP lawmaker Kang Hoon-sik as Presidential Chief of Staff. Kang, who will be the

first chief of staff born in the 1970s, is expected to expedite state affairs and will resign from his parliamentary seat to assume the position. Wi Sung-lac, a veteran diplomat and former South Korean ambassador to Russia, was named as National Security Adviser.

Rounding out the appointments, Kang Yu-jung, who previously served as a spokesperson during Lee's primary campaign and presidential race, will continue in the role at the Presidential Office. Hwang In-kwon, a retired four-star army general, was tapped to lead the Presidential Security Service, with the administration emphasizing his leadership and reputation in the military to foster a "more open and citizen-focused" approach to presidential security. [The Chosen Daily] [The Straits Times]

South Korea: National assembly approves special probes into ex-President Yoon Suk-yeol

(fw/dql) The Cabinet approved multiple bills on June 10, two of which target former President Yoon Suk-yeol and his wife, Kim Keon-hee. President Lee Jae-myung is expected to sign these bills into law. This decision follows the National Assembly's approval of these bills last week. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

On June 5, leveraging its majority in the parliament, the ruling Democratic Party (DP) passed three special counsel bills aimed at investigating former President Yoon Suk-yeol and his wife. The most notable bill establishes a permanent special prosecutor to probe 11 charges against Yoon, including insurrection and military mutiny, related to his failed attempt to impose martial law in December of the previous year. This legislation had been vetoed twice under by Yoon but was reintroduced with an expanded scope.

Another bill targets former First Lady Kim Keon-hee, focusing on allegations of stock price manipulation, acceptance of luxury gifts, and interference in candidate nominations before the April 10 general elections.

The third bill calls for a special counsel to investigate claims that the presidential office and defense ministry improperly interfered in the military's investigation of a Marine's death during a July 2023 search mission.

The bills passed overwhelmingly with 194 votes in favor, 3 against, and 1 abstention, out of the 300-member National Assembly. The relatively low number

of votes is due to a boycott by most opposition lawmakers from the People Power Party (PPP), who chose not to attend the session in protest and criticize the DP for pushing the bills without bipartisan agreement. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency 2]

Amid ongoing legal challenges, including the Supreme Court's recent decision to overturn President Lee Jae-myung's acquittal on election law charges related to alleged false statements about a city official and land-use issues, the DP has advanced a controversial plan to expand the Supreme Court from 14 to 30 justices. Critics view this move as an attempt to "pack" the court and shift its ideological balance in favor of the new administration. However, the DP argues that the expansion is necessary to reduce the justices' heavy workload and increase diversity on the bench.

The proposal has faced strong opposition from conservatives, legal experts, and notably Chief Justice Cho Hee-dae, who on called for a broader public forum to discuss the bill's implications for judicial independence and the constitutional role of the Supreme Court. While acknowledging that increasing the number of justices could help address issues like trial delays, Cho emphasized that the reform involves complex, long-term considerations vital to the country's future. He plans to submit an official opinion to the National Assembly and continue dialogue through the Court Administration, stressing the need for careful deliberation before enacting such significant changes. [Chosun Biz]

The bill was approved by the Assembly's Legislation and Judiciary Committee but was delayed for a final vote amid growing public and political backlash. [The Korea Times]

These legislative efforts came immediately after Lee secured victory in the June 3 snap presidential. Lee is expected to sign the special counsel bills into law, with his office indicating little reason for veto given strong public support for uncovering the truth behind the alleged insurrection and related scandals.

The opposition PPP has condemned the DP's actions as politically motivated and harmful to democratic norms, warning that bypassing bipartisan consensus could undermine the country's democratic institutions. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

In addition, the DP has called for a prompt and thorough investigation into alleged online opinion manipulation by the far-right education group "Rhee

Park School" during the final days of the June 3 presidential campaign.

The party emphasized the need to determine whether the group was involved in spreading far-right propaganda and manipulating public opinion, including attempts to indoctrinate children. It pledged to hold accountable any actions that undermine democratic discourse or compromise educational integrity.

The move follows a report by local investigative online newsroom *Newstapa*, which alleged that the group operated an online commenting team to boost conservative candidate Kim Moon-soo and discredit liberal candidate Lee Jae-myung, who ultimately won the election. In response, the DP has formed a special committee to investigate the claims. [Yonhap News Agency 3]

South Korea: Over 370,000 sign petitions to expel Lee Jun-seok over misogynistic remarks

(fw) More than 500,000 South Koreans have signed an online petition demanding the expulsion of Lee Jun-seok, presidential candidate of the minor New Reform Party, from the National Assembly. The petition was launched following Lee's controversial use of a misogynistic remark involving chopsticks and a part of the female body during a televised presidential debate on May 27, just days before the June 3 presidential election (see AiR No. 22, June/2025, 1).[The Korea Herald 1]

The petition was posted on parliament's website on June 4 and had rapidly surpassed the 50,000-signature threshold required for the National Assembly to formally review it. The petition calls on the Assembly to assess Lee's qualifications as a lawmaker and to impose disciplinary measures, accusing him of betraying public trust and damaging the dignity of the legislature over what it perceives as as verbal sexual violence against women.

The National Assembly is expected to deliberate on the petition in the relevant standing committee within 30 days, as mandated by parliamentary rules for petitions exceeding 50,000 signatures. [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea: Central bank calls for bold structure reforms to avoid Japan-style economic stagnation

(fw) The Bank of Korea (BOK) has issued a warning that South Korea's economy is increasingly mirroring Japan's prolonged stagnation, urging bold structural reforms to avoid a similar fate. The central bank highlighted mounting private-sector debt, demographic challenges, and slow growth as critical risks that require immediate policy action. [BOK Working Paper NO.2025-12]

The central bank points out that private-sector debt surged to 207.4 percent of GDP in 2023, approaching Japan's peak level of 214.2 percent during its asset bubble period in 1994. Japan's subsequent bubble burst led to destabilized banking, distorted capital allocation, and investments flowing into low-productivity sectors such as real estate and "zombie" firms. To prevent a repeat, the BOK emphasized the need for tight control of debt through precise macroprudential regulation, coordinated monetary policy, rigorous household debt management, and swift corporate restructuring.

Demographic trends further compound South Korea's economic challenges. Similar to Japan's experience, South Korea faces a rapidly aging population and a persistently low birth rate. The country officially became a "super-aged" society in December 2024, with over 20 percent of its population aged 65 or older. Its total fertility rate plummeted to 0.75 in 2024, far below the replacement level of 2.1, signaling a shrinking workforce and potential negative growth after 2050.

The BOK stressed that expanding the labor force is critical, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This includes increasing participation from currently underrepresented groups, enhancing innovation-driven education and training, and adopting a more systematic approach to foreign labor. Additionally, efforts to gradually raise the birth rate remain essential.

Governor Rhee Chang-yong underscored these concerns during a Monetary Policy Committee meeting on May 29, where the central bank lowered its benchmark interest rate by 0.25 percentage points to support growth amid sluggish domestic demand and external uncertainties, including the impact of U.S. tariffs. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan: Opposition parties mobilize against ruling party-led recall campaigns

(yl/lo) The opposition parties, Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP), have formed an alliance to counter a ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)-led recall campaign, with elections expected on July 26 or August 23. Lower voter turnout among KMT supporters—60–65 percent compared to the DPP's 75–80 percent—has prompted coordinated mobilization to secure at least 65–70 percent turnout to retain key legislative seats.

Senior opposition figures—TPP Chair Huang Kuo-chang, PPP Legislative Speaker Han Kuo-yu, and mayors Chiang Wan-an (Taipei), Lu Shiow-yen (Taichung), and Hou Yu-ih (New Taipei)—are leading the campaign, leveraging their popularity and local influence.

Huang accused the DPP of using recalls to reclaim a legislative majority and vowed to fully mobilize TPP resources. The KMT is defending three seats each in Taichung and Taipei, while the DPP needs six gains to flip the legislature. Out of the total of 113 seats in the parliament, the KMT holds 52 seats, the DPP 51 seats, and the TPP eight seats. The two remaining seats are held by two Independents. [Taiwan News] [Mirror Media] [UDN]

In Taichung, vulnerable legislators include Huang Chien-hao, Liao Wei-hsiang, and Lo Ting-wei. Their defense may shape Lu's leadership prospects and potential 2028 presidential bid. In Taipei, Wang, Hsu Chiao-hsin, and Lee Yen-hsiu are at risk. Early votes in Taipei could set the tone nationwide. [ETtoday]

On June 8, recall petitions against two DPP lawmakers were rejected. One campaign failed to be registered as the initiator of the campaign was not present to submit the collected signatures, while the other fell short of the required number of signatures. [Taipei Times 1]

KMT officials detained over recall petition forgery

In the latest setback for the KMT, twenty of the 195 individuals charged with forging documents in recall campaigns targeting DPP lawmakers were detained on June 10. Over 80 of the defendants have been identified as workers for the KMT, though the actual number is believed to be higher.

Ahead of a series of recall votes starting next month, prosecutors searched 16 KMT regional chapters and questioned suspects across the country. These included major chapters in Taipei, New Taipei City,

Taichung, Yilan, Keelung, Chiayi County, Tainan, Pingtung, and their respective district offices. [Taipei Times 2]

Taiwan: Bill on volunteer soldier monthly bonus rise passes parliament

(dql) Volunteer soldiers are set to receive a monthly bonus of NTD 30,000 (USD 1,000) under amendments to the Armed Forces Pay Act passed by the parliament on June 10. Aimed at boosting recruitment and retention, the revisions, proposed by the main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), were approved on third reading and will take effect on January 1.

The amendments respond to the demands of modern warfare by offering increased financial incentives and introducing a mechanism for future bonus adjustments. A combat unit bonus will also be added to encourage service in high-demand roles, particularly amid rising tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

To ensure fairness, location-based bonuses will now be determined by the remoteness or difficulty of a service area, rather than rank or duty category. Overtime compensation is also being codified, allowing unused training or duty leave to be converted into pay.

Premier Cho Jung-tai warned that passing the bill without Cabinet consultation may violate the Budget Act and constitutional principles, and said the Cabinet would consider seeking constitutional remedies if necessary. [Taiwan News] [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Sharp rise in female poverty

(lo) According to government data, over the past decade, the number of women in Taiwan living near or below the poverty line has grown by 20,000, with single mothers making up nearly a third of that group. Female-headed low-income households rose from 91,000 in 2013 to 110,000 in 2023, now accounting for nearly 44 percent of all households in poverty. Over a quarter of female-led poor households are single-parent families with children under 18.

Experts point to high childcare costs, lack of spousal support, and career disruptions due to motherhood as key contributors. Structural issues like Taiwan's weak pension system, gender pay gap, and cultural

expectations could also exacerbate the problem. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Opposition pushes for 2028 coal exit at Taichung Power Plant

(yl) Opposition lawmakers passed on June 3 a resolution calling for the Taichung Power Plant, a major state-owned thermal power facility, to end coal-fired power generation by 2028, six years earlier than the government's target of 2034. The proposal was jointly submitted by the opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), who argued that newly added gas-fired units could offset the capacity of coal units.

According to the resolution, outdated subcritical coal-fired units currently used at the plant have low efficiency. It cited the two gas-fired units under Phase 1 of the plant's transformation and the privately owned Chung Chia gas-fired plant, both expected to begin operations by 2026.

The opposition parties criticized the government's timeline, noting that 71 percent of coal units will remain operational by 2031 despite official promises to retire one coal unit for every new gas unit added. [Focus Taiwan]

Taipower Chairman Tseng Wen-sheng warned that advancing the coal exit could reduce Taipower's power supply capacity by 14 percent, posing a risk to national energy stability. Under the current plan, gas-fired units will gradually replace coal units between 2025 and 2034. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Communist Party leaders acquitted of Chinese infiltration charges

(lo) On June 9, Taiwan People's Communist Party (TPCP) Chairman Lin Te-wang and Vice Chairman Cheng Chien-hsin were acquitted by the Taipei District Court on charges of Chinese infiltration and election interference.

Lin, a former official of the main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), was expelled in 2016 and founded the TPCP in 2017. He has led the party since. Alongside Cheng, he was indicted in October 2023 under Taiwan's Anti-infiltration Act and Public Officials Election and Recall Act for allegedly receiving funds and COVID-19 rapid test kits from China's Taiwan

Affairs Office (TAO) to boost the party's 2022 election performance. [Taipei Times]

Meanwhile, on June 10, four former ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) members were indicted for espionage. They are accused of providing government secrets to China, leaking and relaying sensitive information under the Classified National Security Information Protection Act and money laundering under the Money Laundering Control Act [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Kamikaze sea drone to be tested

(yl/dql) Taiwan is set to test a domestically developed kamikaze sea drone later this month, aiming to bolster its naval defenses amid increasing pressure from mainland China. Developed by Taiwan's top weapons developer, the National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST), the vessel will undergo combat evaluations this month and subsequent tests later in the year.

The defense ministry has allocated over NTD 800 million (USD 25 million) for the project. Planned to be less than 10 meters in length, with a displacement of under four tons and a draft of less than 0.5 meters, the vessel aims to complete testing by year-end, paving the way for mass production starting in 2026. [SCMP]

Meanwhile, researcher at the US-based Jamestown Foundation, called on the Taiwanese government to place large-scale orders to support domestic drone companies, arguing that weak demand remains a bottleneck for both US and Taiwanese drone manufacturers.

Speaking at a press conference in Washington, D.C., Sunny Cheung emphasized the need to build a strategic drone reserve—even in peacetime—and reduce reliance on foreign suppliers. She highlighted the importance of establishing a China-free supply chain and urged stronger US-Taiwan cooperation in component security and platform development.

Cheung further suggested Taiwan set a monthly production target of 15,000 drones by 2028 and focus military drone development on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), electronic warfare, and strike capabilities. [Taiwan News]

The remarks come as the Taiwan's NCSIST announced it is partnering with local firms to advance drone capabilities. The institute, Taiwan's premier state-

owned defense R&D organization, has developed key components for tube-launched drones and will license these technologies to private sector players to boost domestic supply chain resilience. [UDN]

Taiwan: Maritime exercises conducted

(dql) The Ministry of National Defense and the Ocean Affairs Council held the Hai'an No. 12 maritime security exercises in Kaohsiung on June 8. The drills featured Navy and Coast Guard units involved in sea interception, encirclement, and helicopter-based rescue operations.

Attending the drills, President Lai Ching-te addressed Taiwan's maritime security challenges, emphasizing the need for sustained investment in defense and his administration's proposed NTD 410 billion (USD 13.6 billion) special military budget, aimed at supporting shipbuilding, drone technology, and the development of thermal imaging systems for coastal surveillance.

Lai urged the opposition parties, Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP), to back continued defense funding. [Taiwan News 1]

Meanwhile, Lai's party, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has called on the KMT and TPP not to block a bill aimed at strengthening the Coast Guard's ability to counter China's escalating gray-zone tactics.

The party that without adequate funding for homeland security and maritime defenses, Taiwan risks being unprepared for future challenges. It highlighted that while the opposition parties TPP have expressed support for defense spending, they have yet to endorse the NTD 150 billion (USD 5.01 billion) segment of the Cabinet's proposed NTD 410 billion special budget dedicated to Coast Guard upgrades and homeland security. This funding would cover military infrastructure, storage facilities, and the deployment of drones and thermal imaging systems along the coast. [Taiwan News 2]

Wu quoted Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling, who said radar alone cannot reliably detect illegal entries due to signal interference, underscoring the need for thermal imaging. He added that the Coast Guard is overstretched, tasked with monitoring Chinese vessels, combating smuggling and drug trafficking, and protecting local fishers.

A full survey of Taiwan's 1,800-kilometer coastline has been completed, with identified sites for radar and infrared installations, but legislative approval for funding is still pending. Wu also noted that apart from a recently deployed U.S.-provided JUMP 20 drone, Taiwan's Coast Guard operates only about 20 small drones—insufficient for comprehensive coastal surveillance.

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

Bangladesh: April 2026 election date announced

(lm) Bangladesh's interim leader, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has announced that the country's next national election will take place in the first half of April 2026, marking the first clear timeline since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government in early August 2024. In a televised address, Yunus framed the date as a balancing act between the competing demands for urgent elections and the need to complete institutional reforms and judicial processes, especially regarding crimes committed during the July 2024 mass uprising which preceded Hasina's ouster. The Election Commission is expected to present a detailed roadmap in due course. [The Daily Star]

Yunus emphasized that the interim government's threefold mandate—reform, justice, and elections—is on track to reach tangible milestones by the next Eid-ul-Fitr, expected in late March 2026. He called on citizens to hold political parties accountable for implementing agreed reforms and to demand pledges

on democratic rights, anti-corruption, and national sovereignty. He also expressed hope that a comprehensive "July Charter"—a consensus-based reform document involving all major parties—will be presented in the coming month. The charter, he said, will embody a unified national commitment to rebuilding a welfare-oriented and democratic state. [The Daily Star]

Government officials have justified the April timeline with logistical and practical considerations, including teacher availability, Ramadan (set to begin mid-February), winter fog, and international observer participation. According to these sources, an April election avoids Ramadan campaigning restrictions and potential disruptions to school exams or textbook distribution. [The Daily Star]

Reactions to the announcement have been mixed, largely reflecting long-standing positions and arguments that the respective parties and groupings have maintained since the interim government assumed power in August 2024. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the archrival to Hasina's ousted Awami League – and several leftist parties have criticized the April schedule as a disappointment, insisting elections should be held by December 2025 to avoid prolonging interim rule. They argue that core reforms and judicial progress could be completed earlier and question the legitimacy of the extended timeline. [The Daily Star] [The Daily Star]

In contrast, Jamaat-e-Islami—the country's largest conservative Islamist party—and Islami Andolan Bangladesh—an Islamist movement focused on Islamic governance and social justice—have welcomed the announcement, describing it as a step toward stability and democratic restoration. The National Citizen Party (NCP), a party that was formed earlier this year by two key student-led groupings carrying last year's mass protests, has taken a conditional stance, stating it would accept an April election if key reforms and constitutional changes—including elections for a Constituent Assembly—are implemented beforehand. [The Daily Star] [The Daily Star] [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Political parties debate reforms to Article 70 and caretaker government framework

(ms) Thirty political parties in Bangladesh, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the youth-driven National Citizen Party (NCP), and the country's largest Islamist group Jamaat-e-Islami, convened on June 3 for

talks with the National Consensus Commission—a temporary multiparty body tasked with drafting a National Charter to guide political reforms during the post-Hasina transition. While partial consensus emerged, key divisions remain over the structure of a future caretaker government and the scope of parliamentary independence. [The Daily Star]

A core focus of the talks was reforming Article 70 of the Constitution, which currently prohibits Members of Parliament (MPs) from voting against their party line. Most parties expressed support for allowing greater parliamentary independence by limiting Article 70's scope to critical votes—namely on finance bills, no-confidence motions, constitutional amendments, and in some cases, matters of national security. The BNP, while defending Article 70's stabilizing function, proposed allowing MPs to vote freely outside these domains. Jamaat-e-Islami and left-leaning parties favored even broader reform, advocating that MPs should vote independently on all but the most sensitive legislative issues. Some smaller parties called for a 50–50 split in parliamentary committee leadership between government and opposition members to strengthen checks and balances. [Dhaka Tribune]

On institutional reform, there was broad agreement on increasing the number of parliamentary seats to 400 and expanding opposition roles in committee leadership—especially over the four expenditure-related committees. However, the BNP opposed proposals to give opposition parties control over all key parliamentary committees, while the NCP and others supported extending opposition oversight to areas like home affairs, finance, planning, and public administration.

The parties were also divided on women's representation in parliament. While the BNP proposed doubling the number of reserved seats for women from 50 to 100, the NCP advocated reserving 25 percent of total seats for women via direct election. In contrast, Khelafat Majlish and some Islamist parties rejected the idea of reserved seats altogether.

Discussions also touched on the formation and timeline of a non-partisan caretaker government. The BNP insisted that only national elections—not local polls—should be overseen by such a government and proposed a maximum tenure of three months. This contrasts with the National Consensus Commission's four-month proposal. The NCP and Jamaat-e-Islami, however, supported placing both national and local elections under a caretaker government, with the

length of tenure adjusted depending on the election scale. [BSS News]

Bangladesh: Islamist leader demands credible elections after party's registration restored

(lm) Bangladesh's Election Commission (EC) has decided to reinstate the political registration of Jamaat-e-Islami, a conservative Islamist party that was deregistered in 2018. The move follows a June 1 ruling by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court directing the EC to restore the party's registration and resolve related procedural matters.

Jamaat-e-Islami, formerly allied with the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), is a religious-political organization known for advocating Islamic law and conservative values. It was declared unfit for registration by the High Court in 2013 for violating the country's secular constitution, and subsequently barred from contesting elections.

The EC also agreed to restore Jamaat's traditional electoral symbol, the "Daripalla" (weighing scale). Though the Supreme Court registrar had requested in 2016 that the symbol not be used by political parties, citing its association with the judiciary, the court later ruled that its electoral use does not compromise judicial integrity. [The Daily Star 1]

Against this backdrop, party leader Shafiqur Rahman urged an electoral process free of manipulation and foreign interference. Notably, he invoked the legacy of the country's liberation martyrs to emphasize the need for electoral integrity—a rhetoric that stands in contrast to Jamaat-e-Islami's historical opposition to Bangladesh's independence in 1971. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Student-led party pushes for registration ahead of elections

(lm) The National Citizen Party (NCP), a student-led political movement that emerged after Bangladesh's 2024 uprising, announced it will file for official party registration by June 15. The move aims to position the NCP for participation in the upcoming national elections, tentatively expected in April 2026.

The party has already established organizational structures in over 100 subdistricts and is calling for

wide-ranging reforms to ensure fair elections. These include judicial independence, professional conduct by law enforcement, and an impartial Election Commission. NCP leaders have urged the interim government to prevent a recurrence of past electoral abuses and to dismantle the legacy of authoritarianism under the ousted Awami League government. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: New ordinance redefining freedom fighters signals deeper recalibration of memory culture

(lm) The interim government of Bangladesh has sparked heated debate with the issuance of the Jatiya Muktijoddha Council (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, which redefines who qualifies as a freedom fighter (Bir Muktijoddha)—a designation for those who directly participated in or supported the country's armed struggle for independence from Pakistan in 1971. The ordinance, published on June 3, also introduces a new category of "Liberation War Associates," expanding recognition criteria while prompting concern over its potential impact on the historical legacy of core national figures.

The ordinance outlines four distinct groups qualifying as freedom fighters: (1) civilians who fought in combat after training either domestically or in Indian camps during the 1971 war; (2) uniformed personnel from the armed forces, East Pakistan Rifles, police, paramilitary units, and members of the Mujibnagar government; (3) women subjected to sexual violence by Pakistani forces (Birangana); and (4) medical personnel who served in field hospitals.

It also introduces a new category of "Liberation War Associates", which includes political organizers, diplomats, cultural workers, medical professionals, and Bangladeshi professionals abroad who supported the independence movement through non-combat roles. Lawmakers affiliated with the Mujibnagar Government —the government-in-exile during the war—are also listed as associates.

Critics warn that the revised definitions blur important distinctions and potentially reshape the symbolic structure of national memory. Particular concern centers on the ordinance's softened references to anti-liberation forces—now described as the "then" Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, and Nezam-e-Islami, all of which were Islamist or pro-Pakistan parties that opposed Bangladeshi independence. Additionally, several references to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—

Bangladesh's founding leader and father of ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina—as "Father of the Nation" have been omitted from the revised text. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

The government has rejected these concerns as unfounded. Officials emphasized that Mujibnagar leaders remain included under the freedom fighter definition, and that the changes aim to enable a broader cleanup of the official list, which they claim includes false entries. A senior press official also warned that legal action would be taken against media outlets spreading "false or misleading" information, particularly reports claiming Mujibnagar leaders had been stripped of their status. Outlets were urged to issue corrections and apologies. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Supreme Court expunges judge's political remarks, reinstates judicial oversight body

(lm) Bangladesh's Appellate Division has expunged politically charged remarks made by High Court Justice Md Ashraful Kamal in a 2016 verdict, ruling that the judge violated constitutional provisions and judicial ethics. The Court also restored the full authority of the Supreme Judicial Council, the constitutionally mandated body for handling allegations of misconduct or incapacity against Supreme Court judges.

The judge's comments, delivered during the tenure of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League, concerned late President Ziaur Rahman—a military officer who took power in the late 1970s and later founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League's main political rival. Justice Ashraful described Ziaur Rahman as a collaborator in the 1975 assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founding president and father of Sheikh Hasina, and accused him of unlawfully seizing the presidency.

The Supreme Court found these statements to be a breach of Article 111 of the Constitution and a violation of the Code of Conduct for judges, stating that they had no place in a judicial verdict.

The ruling also resolved a longstanding legal stalemate. Following the Supreme Court's 2017 decision that declared the 16th constitutional amendment unconstitutional—thereby stripping Parliament of the power to remove judges—the reinstatement of the Supreme Judicial Council under Article 96 had remained incomplete due to a review petition filed by the previous government.

With the dismissal of that petition, the Appellate Division clarified that Article 96 is now restored "in its entirety without any ambiguity," reaffirming that the Council, composed of the Chief Justice and two senior judges, holds exclusive authority over judicial accountability. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government signals possible amendment to contested public service law amid protests

(lm) (lm) Bangladesh's interim government is considering amending the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 following protests by employees of the Secretariat—the administrative hub housing key ministries and civil service offices in Dhaka. Protesters have demanded the full repeal of the ordinance, describing it as a "black law."

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said on June 5 that a high-level advisory committee would be formed to examine objections raised by the employees and propose recommendations. His remarks came after receiving memoranda from representatives of the Secretariat Officers and Employees Unity Forum, which has led the protests.

The ordinance's specific provisions have not been disclosed publicly, but Energy and Mineral Resources Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan also voiced concern over potential misuse, signaling internal tensions within the government. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Former president returns from abroad amid ongoing investigation into controversial departure

(lm) Former President Abdul Hamid returned to Bangladesh in the early hours of June 9 following a month-long medical visit to Bangkok, Thailand. [The Daily Star 1]

Hamid had left for Bangkok on May 8, accompanied by his younger son and brother-in-law, while facing ongoing legal proceedings in Bangladesh. He is a co-accused, alongside ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in a case filed in Kishoreganj related to violence during the July 2024 uprising that led to Hasina's removal from office.

His departure sparked immediate controversy over how an individual under criminal indictment was allowed to leave the country. In response, the interim government formed a special investigative committee composed of three advisers and took disciplinary action against four police officers.

Against the backdrop of Hamid's return, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury emphasized that those responsible for facilitating Hamid's departure "will not be spared" if found guilty. However, he also stressed the importance of due process, stating that Hamid would face legal consequences only if investigations establish wrongdoing. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Opposition mayor warns of 'revolutionary city council' amid legal impasse

(lm) Ishraque Hossain, a senior leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the opposition's claimed rightful mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), has warned that a "Revolutionary City Council" could be formed if unelected officials continue to occupy the mayor's office. His statement comes amid a prolonged legal and political dispute over the mayoralty of DSCC, which has deepened following the expiration of the city council's term on June 2. The impasse, centered around Ishraque, has stalled municipal services and put pressure on the interim government and the Election Commission (EC). [The Daily Star]

Ishraque was declared the rightful winner of the 2020 mayoral election by a High Court ruling, which invalidated the previous result. The EC confirmed this decision in a gazette notification on April 27, 2025. However, after a Supreme Court petition challenging the ruling was dismissed on May 29, the Appellate Division referred the matter back to the EC, which is now reviewing the full text of the verdict.

The legal situation further complicates Ishraque's claim to the mayoralty. According to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, mayors serve five-year terms starting from the first council meeting. Since the DSCC's council term ended on June 2, some legal experts argue that Ishraque no longer has a valid mandate to be sworn in. The law stipulates that if a mayoral vacancy arises mid-term, a new mayor must be elected within 90 days, but some experts suggest the office is no longer legally occupiable. In such cases,

Section 5(1) of the Act permits the appointment of an administrator.

Despite this, Ishraque's legal counsel asserts that he retains the right to assume office until a new election is held, citing provisions in the Act. His supporters, including DSCC employees and grassroots groups, have been staging a sit-in outside Nagar Bhaban since May 14, demanding his immediate appointment. [AiR No. 22, June/2025, 1]

Bangladesh: Government to introduce revised secondary curriculum starting in 2027

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has announced that a revised secondary school curriculum will be implemented in phases beginning in 2027, replacing the previously suspended framework introduced by the former Awami League government of ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. At a press conference, the Education Ministry clarified that the 2012 curriculum—reinstated under the interim administration—will continue to be used in 2026.

The announcement comes as part of broader efforts to restore integrity in educational governance, with the ministry also confirming that a new vice-chancellor selection process has begun at two universities. A search committee comprising ministry officials, University Grants Commission members, and senior academics will oversee the recruitment, aiming to ensure transparency and academic merit. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Inquiry report blames security agencies for enforced disappearances under ousted regime

(lm/ms) A formal investigation by Bangladesh's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has found that key state security and law enforcement bodies—most notably the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), police, Detective Branch (DB), and the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit—were centrally involved in orchestrating enforced disappearances under the previous Awami League government. The commission's findings indicate coordinated and concealed operations that may qualify as crimes against humanity under international law.

According to the commission's second interim report, 1,850 complaints have been received to date, with 1,772 formally registered and 1,350 verified. Of those forcibly disappeared, 345 individuals remain missing. Over two-thirds of the cases were attributed to security agencies, often operating jointly or with support from military intelligence services including the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and National Security Intelligence (NSI). The pattern involved abductions by plainclothes officers, secret detentions, and systemic use of torture techniques such as electrocution, waterboarding, and prolonged confinement in inhumane conditions. [bdnews24] [BSS News] [The Daily Star]

The commission identified 16 clandestine detention sites across major cities, including Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi. It also reported that RAB destroyed two such sites following the political transition in August 2024 in an apparent effort to eliminate evidence. The report concludes that institutional complicity and a culture of impunity enabled these practices, and recommends the dismantling of RAB alongside broad structural reforms of Bangladesh's security sector. [The Daily Star] [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Education suspended for 250,000 Rohingya children as funding dries up

(lm) Education activities for Rohingya children in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, southeastern Bangladesh, have been suspended due to a severe funding shortfall. Around 250,000 children—mostly from the stateless Muslim minority who fled Myanmar's military crackdown in 2017—are affected. The closure was announced in a joint letter by UNICEF and Save the Children to the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), following protests by local teachers over job terminations.

Bangladesh currently hosts over 1.2 million Rohingyas. The United Nations reports a recent uptick in arrivals from Myanmar's Rakhine State due to ongoing violence, with an additional 50,000 refugees expected by the end of 2025. Despite growing humanitarian needs, funding for Rohingya support has drastically declined. Only USD 180 million—20 percent of the estimated USD 934 million needed for 2025—has been secured so far. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Central bank moves to merge five underperforming Islamic banks

(ms) Bangladesh Bank has announced plans to merge five financially weak Islamic banks—Social Islami Bank, Global Islami Bank, First Security Islami Bank, Union Bank, and EXIM Bank—into a single Shariah-compliant entity. The central bank will oversee the process, which is expected to begin after Eid-ul-Azha and conclude within three and a half months. The merged bank will receive a fresh license, operate initially under state control, and receive capital support from both the government and international partners. The restructuring falls under the upcoming Bank Resolution Ordinance 2025 and aims to reduce defaulted loans and improve customer service. [bdnews24]

A high-level meeting at the central bank, chaired by Governor Ahsan H Mansur, outlined the roadmap for what could be Bangladesh's largest banking sector consolidation in recent memory. Joint teams from the central bank and the five banks will oversee the merger, during which the banks will be under temporary government control. The plan follows recent asset quality reviews and reflects the interim government's broader effort to restore depositor confidence and address long-standing issues of insider lending and poor governance. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Interim leader dismisses disinformation over port reforms

(lm) Bangladesh's interim leader, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has rejected growing speculation that Chattogram Port is being handed over to foreign control, calling such claims part of a disinformation campaign designed to undermine national reform efforts. In a televised address, he emphasized that the government is inviting experienced international port operators to assist with capacity building, aiming for Bangladeshis to manage overseas ports by 2036. Chattogram Port—the country's largest seaport and a key hub for over 90 percent of its maritime trade—is described by Yunus as the "heart of Bangladesh's economy" and central to plans for transforming the coastal belt into a South Asian growth corridor serving not only Bangladesh but also Nepal and Bhutan. He stressed that the initiative does not compromise national sovereignty and mirrors successful practices in countries from South Korea to Turkey. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Police reform underway to curb corruption

(lm) Bangladesh's Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (Retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury announced ongoing police reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and tackling corruption. Key measures include the digitization of general diaries (GDs) and case filing processes, which will allow citizens to submit complaints online and eliminate the need for police verification in passport applications. This system will be rolled out nationwide.

Additionally, the introduction of glass interrogation rooms is planned to ensure transparency during remand, allowing public observation and reducing the risk of misconduct. The adviser also highlighted efforts to tackle the misuse of police cases for profit, noting that the digitization of the complaint process would address this issue.

Chowdhury emphasized that corruption remains a significant challenge within the police force, with deep-rooted issues at every level. He confirmed that disciplinary action had been taken against 84 officers, with 30 to 40 being dismissed. He also warned against the spread of misinformation, which he noted could be exploited to benefit corrupt practices and even neighboring countries.

The adviser also acknowledged that an increase in public filings of cases, sometimes involving multiple accusations, has led to delays in investigations. However, he assured that the ongoing reforms would ultimately improve efficiency and integrity within the system. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Border Guard strengthens security in border regions

(lm) Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has heightened security in Chuadanga and Meherpur—two southwestern districts bordering India—ahead of Eid-ul-Azha to counter potential cross-border push-ins and prevent the smuggling of sacrificial animal rawhide. [The Daily Star]

India: Caste census confirmed for 2027 as part of first digital enumeration after 16-

year gap

(kb) The Indian government has confirmed that the next national census will be conducted in two phases beginning in 2026, with data finalized by March 1, 2027. The reference date for the census will be midnight of March 1, 2027, except for snow-bound regions of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, where the reference date will be October 1, 2026. This will be India's first fully digital census and the first since 2011, following a 16-year delay largely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time in independent India, the census will include comprehensive caste enumeration.

The exercise will follow a two-phase structure mandated under the Census Act of 1948 and Census Rules of 1990: first, a house listing and housing schedule; second, population enumeration. The second phase, set to begin on February 27 and conclude on March 1, will include caste data collection alongside the standard population count. This phase will introduce a dedicated caste field beyond the previously recorded Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) categories.

The 2027 census will carry major implications for electoral representation. Under the 84th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2001, the first census conducted after 2026 will serve as the basis for redrawing parliamentary (Lok Sabha) and State Assembly constituencies. It will also activate the women's reservation law passed in 2023, which mandates one-third of seats in Parliament and state legislatures be reserved for women, contingent on a post-census delimitation exercise.

Although the Union Cabinet announced on April 30 that caste data would be included, the move has sparked criticism from some opposition parties. They argue that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seeks to delay the review of reservation policies, especially ahead of the 2029 general elections. The government, however, has stated that the data—once collected—will inform policymaking, resource allocation, and constituency delimitation, although it will not be released immediately.

Notably, the announcement made no reference to updating the National Population Register (NPR), which had originally been planned for the 2021 census and remains politically sensitive. [Hindustan Times] [The Indian Express] [The Hindu]

India: Government prepares legal amendments to support overseas critical mineral exploration and recovery from tailings

(lm) India is preparing to amend its mining legislation to allow state-backed financing of overseas critical mineral exploration and processing projects, signaling a strategic shift toward securing supply chains essential for clean energy technologies, defense, and advanced manufacturing. The planned revisions to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act 2023 would permit the use of approximately INR 56 billion (USD 672 million) in public funds specifically for international exploration and risk coverage. The funds would be drawn from the National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET), which is currently limited to domestic exploration.

The move is a key component of India's National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM), a multi-billion-dollar initiative running through 2030–2031 that aims to reduce import dependency and strengthen mineral resilience. The NCMM includes a total of INR 163 billion (USD 1.96 billion) in planned public spending, with an additional INR 180 billion (USD 2.16 billion) expected from central public sector enterprises. India has identified 24 critical minerals—including lithium, cobalt, nickel, rare earth elements, and tantalum—as strategic priorities.

Recent acquisitions include mineral blocks in Zambia spanning 9,000 square kilometers, with plans for copper and cobalt exploration. The legislative amendments would enable NMET resources to be used for such international ventures, including the possible establishment of processing facilities abroad.

Domestically, the government is also advancing a national policy on tailings reuse, aiming to recover critical minerals from mine waste. A revised royalty regime and new incentives are being designed to encourage private-sector participation in the recovery and beneficiation of strategic materials from tailings, red mud, fly ash, and other industrial residues.

Additional initiatives include a proposed recycling scheme with a budget of INR 15 billion (USD 180 million) and the creation of strategic stockpiles and mineral processing parks, each backed by INR 5 billion (USD 60 million) in state funding. These developments align with broader international trends as countries compete to secure critical mineral access amid tightening global supply and rising geopolitical risk. [The Hindu BusinessLine]

India: Assam invokes 1950 expulsion law to deport suspected foreigners without tribunal process

(lm) The government of Assam has announced that it will invoke the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 to deport individuals identified as “foreigners” by District Collectors without referring their cases to Foreigners Tribunals. The move marks a significant shift from the existing system, under which questions of citizenship are adjudicated by quasi-judicial Foreigners Tribunals (FTs).

Under the current framework, the identification and declaration of "foreigners" in Assam is handled by Foreigners Tribunals. Individuals are referred to the tribunals by border police or flagged as "D-voters" in electoral rolls. Those declared foreigners can appeal the decision before the Gauhati High Court and ultimately the Supreme Court.

Assam shares a 267-kilometer border with Bangladesh, and the issue of undocumented migration remains politically sensitive. In recent weeks, the Assam government reported that around 330 people already declared foreigners by the tribunals have been deported to Bangladesh.

The state now claims it has been authorized by the Supreme Court to implement the 1950 Act, which predates the Foreigners Act and tribunal system. This act allows the government—or delegated district officials—to expel individuals whose presence is considered detrimental to public interest, without tribunal adjudication.

The Chief Minister cited an October 2024 Supreme Court ruling that upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, setting March 24, 1971 as the cut-off date for legal residence in Assam. He stated that the court also affirmed the continuing validity of the 1950 Act, enabling District Collectors to summarily determine whether an individual is a foreigner and order their expulsion.

The government further emphasized that this new measure would not apply to individuals who fled to India due to religious persecution, in accordance with exceptions included in the Act.

The move has prompted strong objections in the state assembly. Critics raised concerns about bypassing judicial procedures, questioning how District Collectors can reliably determine nationality without transparent

legal standards. They warned that this approach could result in wrongful expulsions, particularly in light of past misuse of the 1950 Act.

The Act was briefly used in 1950 but suspended following public backlash and concerns over targeting of Bengali Muslims. Observers also pointed out that the Supreme Court did not explicitly endorse the bypassing of tribunals, and that international legal norms require deportation decisions to be based on clear, verified nationality and the receiving state's consent.

India's Ministry of External Affairs has previously stated in Parliament that deportation of foreign nationals must be preceded by unambiguous verification and agreement by the destination country. [The Indian Express 1] [The Indian Express 2]

India: Protests erupt across Manipur over arrest of Meitei group leader amid ongoing President's Rule

(kb) Violent protests broke out across Manipur following the June 7 arrest of a leader of Arambai Tenggol, a radical Meitei youth group, and four others, prompting clashes with security forces in multiple districts. Protesters defied curfews and prohibitory orders by staging torchlight processions, blocking roads, burning tyres, and setting fire to a Sub-Divisional Collector office, destroying government records.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) confirmed the arrest at Imphal Airport for alleged involvement in the 2023 ethnic violence between the Meitei—Manipur's majority community primarily based in the Imphal Valley—and the Kuki-Zo, a tribal group concentrated in the surrounding hill districts. Authorities have suspended internet and mobile data services in five districts, including Imphal East and West, and imposed curfews to prevent escalation. Security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators, who were joined by women's groups calling for the reinstatement of a state government.

Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 2024 following the resignation of Chief Minister N. Biren Singh. Over 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced since ethnic violence began in May 2023. The State Assembly remains in suspended animation. [The Hindu]

India: 269 million lifted above poverty line in 11 years

(lm) India has significantly reduced extreme poverty over the past decade, according to a new World Bank assessment. The share of the population living in extreme poverty fell from 27.1 percent in 2011–12 to just 5.3 percent in 2022–23, amounting to 269 million people moving above the international poverty line of USD 3.00 per day (2021 purchasing power parity). In absolute terms, the number of extremely poor individuals dropped from 344 million to 75 million.

This reduction was widespread, with rural extreme poverty decreasing from 18.4 percent to 2.8 percent, and urban rates declining from 10.7 percent to 1.1 percent. At the older USD 2.15 poverty line (based on 2017 prices), the poverty rate fell from 16.2 percent to 2.3 percent during the same period, with the number of people below this threshold declining from 206 million to about 34 million.

Five populous states—Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh—accounted for 65 percent of the extremely poor in 2011–12 and were responsible for two-thirds of the overall decline.

India also recorded substantial gains in reducing multidimensional poverty, with the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) dropping from 53.8 percent in 2005–06 to 15.5 percent in 2022–23.

The World Bank credited this progress in part to large-scale social protection initiatives such as PM Awas Yojana (housing), PM Ujjwala Yojana (clean cooking fuel), Jan Dhan Yojana (financial inclusion), and Ayushman Bharat (healthcare), alongside digital infrastructure, Direct Benefit Transfers, and expanded rural connectivity—all of which contributed to more targeted, transparent benefit delivery. [Business Standard] [NDTV]

India: Government grants Starlink license for satellite internet operations after two-year delay

(lm) Elon Musk's satellite internet venture Starlink has received long-awaited regulatory approval from India's Department of Telecommunications, clearing the path for its commercial launch in the country. The license makes Starlink the third satellite internet provider authorized to operate in India, following approvals

granted to Eutelsat's OneWeb and Reliance Jio's satellite subsidiary.

Starlink's application, first submitted in 2022, had faced repeated delays due to national security concerns and regulatory uncertainty. One of the major points of contention was the method of spectrum allocation. While Reliance Jio pushed for auction-based distribution similar to terrestrial mobile networks, Starlink argued for administrative assignment without bidding. The government ultimately sided with Starlink's position.

This regulatory greenlight positions Starlink to provide high-speed satellite broadband across underserved and remote regions of India, where traditional infrastructure remains limited. Meanwhile, Amazon's competing satellite project, Project Kuiper, is still awaiting approval. [India Today]

India: Chenab Bridge inaugurated as world's highest railway arch bridge after two decades of construction

(kb) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Chenab Railway Bridge on June 6, completing a flagship infrastructure project more than 20 years in the making. Spanning the Chenab River in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the bridge now ranks as the world's highest railway arch bridge and forms a central link in the Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla Rail Line (USBRL), aimed at improving integration of the Himalayan region with the rest of India. [NDTV] [The Times of India] [CNN]

India: Navy to induct up to 10 warships by December, starting with ASW vessel

lm) The Indian Navy plans to commission between nine and ten new warships by the end of December 2025, in one of its largest fleet expansions in recent years. The lead vessel, an Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow-Water Craft (ASW-SWC), will be commissioned on June 18. This marks the formal induction of the first of sixteen ASW-SWC vessels built domestically by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) in partnership with L&T Shipbuilders.

Other scheduled commissions include a Talwar-class frigate acquired under a USD 2.5 billion deal with Russia, and potentially two Nilgiri-class (Project 17A)

frigates, along with a diving support ship and a large survey vessel. All have been built or co-produced domestically.

These developments reflect India's growing self-reliance in warship manufacturing and faster delivery timelines due to increased indigenization. The Navy aims to reach a 175-ship fleet by 2035. Additionally, it expects two more MH-60R Seahawk helicopters from the United States soon, adding to the 13 already delivered under a 24-aircraft order. [The Indian Express]

India: Left parties urge dialogue with Maoists amid declining violence in conflict zones

(kb) Five Left parties in India have appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to initiate a dialogue with Maoist insurgents following their declaration of a unilateral ceasefire. The appeal comes amid the ongoing security operations under "Operation Kagar" in Chhattisgarh, which have allegedly led to extra-judicial killings, custodial detentions, and human rights abuses. The parties have called for the immediate cessation of violence and the establishment of a judicial inquiry into these incidents, particularly criticizing the government's refusal to allow families to perform last rites for deceased Maoist leaders. [The Hindu]

Chhattisgarh remains a core stronghold of the Maoist insurgency, which draws from longstanding grievances over land, displacement, and resource exploitation affecting Adivasi (Indigenous) communities. Maoist groups, often referred to as Naxals—a term derived from the 1967 Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal—advocate armed struggle on behalf of marginalized populations and have waged a decades-long insurgency across central and eastern India.

The Left parties' appeal comes against the backdrop of a broader national decline in violence across three major internal security theatres: Jammu and Kashmir, the Maoist-affected central belt, and the northeast. Since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power in 2014, violent incidents in these areas have declined by approximately 53 percent—from more than 16,000 cases between 2004 and 2014 to around 8,000 between 2014 and 2024. Fatalities among security forces fell by 73 percent, and civilian deaths from Maoist violence dropped from 4,700 to 1,500—a 70 percent reduction.

The most recent crackdown, including “Operation Black Forest” in 2025, led to the killing of 27 high-profile Maoist operatives, neutralization of 18 leaders, and the arrest of over 1,000 cadres. Government officials attribute these results to intensified intelligence-led operations and improved inter-agency coordination. [Deccan Herald] [MENAFN]

Maldives: Judicial independence questioned as Supreme Court reshuffle draws international concern

(lm) A growing number of international legal associations have voiced serious concern over the recent dismissal of two sitting justices of the Maldives’ Supreme Court, amid allegations of procedural violations, political interference, and the erosion of judicial independence. The controversy centers around the May 14 parliamentary vote to remove justices Dr. Azmiralda Zahir and Mahaz Ali Zahir, following their suspension alongside a third judge, Husnu Al-Suood, in late February by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC). The suspensions came just before the Supreme Court was due to hear a politically sensitive case on anti-defection clauses introduced by the ruling People’s National Congress (PNC), which holds a parliamentary supermajority.

All three suspended justices were under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) at the time, although no official case details have been made public. Suood resigned in protest, while misconduct investigations were opened against Azmiralda and Mahaz, centering on accusations that they attempted to influence a lower court to secure the release of Azmiralda’s husband. However, available testimony suggests the alleged interference occurred after his release. The JSC requested their dismissal in early May, and the parliamentary Judiciary Committee approved the motion in a closed-door session that denied the accused judges a chance to defend themselves. The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) boycotted the meeting, and the Parliament’s legal adviser had warned that due process had not been followed—advice dismissed by the committee’s PNC-led leadership.

Critics argue the removals and swift replacements form part of a wider pattern by the PNC-led government to consolidate control over the judiciary, including a recent—but later withdrawn—attempt to reduce the size of the Supreme Court bench. While President Muizzu has dismissed allegations of political orchestration as “coincidences,” the broader sequence

of events has triggered alarm over the Maldives' commitment to upholding judicial independence under its constitutional framework.

On June 4, four international legal bodies—the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific, the Bar Association of India, and the Nepal Bar Association—issued an open letter to President Mohamed Muizzu. They urged the suspension of the impeachment and called for transparent and impartial procedures aligned with international judicial norms. They emphasized that arbitrary dismissals undermine the rule of law and public trust in the judiciary. Local criticism has also come from the Bar Council of Maldives and international observers such as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Judicial Independence and Human Rights Watch. [The Sun 1]

Despite mounting concern, President Muizzu has moved swiftly to fill the vacancies. His two nominees—High Court judge Mohamed Saleem and former judge Abdulla Hameed—have received backing from the Judiciary Committee and now await full parliamentary approval. Questions remain about whether Saleem meets the constitutional criteria for Supreme Court appointments, given that much of his prior experience was as a legal officer rather than a judge or practicing lawyer. Nevertheless, the committee ruled in his favor based on a broad interpretation of legal qualifications. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Former president Nasheed signals 2028 comeback amid fractured opposition landscape

Former Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed has privately indicated his intention to run for office in the 2028 presidential election, citing the current domestic situation as a motivating factor for his potential return. However, he has not disclosed whether he would run as an independent or under a party banner.

Nasheed, who led the Maldives from 2008 to 2012, was ousted under contested circumstances and later sentenced to 13 years in prison on terrorism charges—since overturned. After receiving asylum in the United Kingdom in 2016, he returned to Maldivian politics in 2018, securing a parliamentary seat and serving as speaker until 2023. He narrowly survived an assassination attempt in 2021 and stepped back from active politics in late 2023 to take up the role of Secretary General of the Climate Vulnerable Forum.

Nasheed's departure from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) in 2023 and the formation of his new party, the Democrats, deepened the fragmentation of the opposition—a factor widely seen as contributing to the MDP's electoral defeat that year. His re-entry into the political arena in 2028 could reshape the opposition landscape, but success may hinge on bridging the divide between the MDP and the Democrats. [The Sun]

Maldives: Supreme Court reopens corruption appeal of ex-Immigration chief amid political allegations

(lm) The Maldives' Supreme Court has overruled a registrar's decision and agreed to hear the appeal of former Controller General of Immigration Mohamed Shamman Waheed, who is facing serious corruption charges and remains in pre-trial detention. Shamman was arrested in March 2025 for allegedly misusing his official position to profit from expatriate releases from immigration detention. Authorities claim that over MVR 500,000 (approximately USD 32,500) found in his residence had been extorted from a detainee.

The Criminal Court ordered his remand, which was upheld by the High Court in April. While the Supreme Court's registrar initially dismissed his subsequent appeal for lacking merit, the full bench has now accepted the case, signaling a rare intervention into procedural discretion.

Shamman, who was dismissed just a day before his arrest, faces charges of complicity in robbery, abuse of authority, and money laundering. Conviction could result in prison terms totaling over 20 years, with financial penalties.

In parallel, four other former immigration officials have also been charged in connection to the case. Meanwhile, Shamman's family has publicly accused Home Minister Ali Ihusan of orchestrating the arrest to prevent the release of a purportedly compromising video and to cover up separate corruption cases within the Home Ministry. These allegations were reportedly raised with President Mohamed Muizzu but allegedly received no response. The government has rejected all claims of political interference. [The Sun]

Maldives: Former housing officials face charges over alleged misuse of authority

in social housing scheme

(lm) The Maldives' Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has referred former State Minister for Housing Akram Kamaluddin and three former senior officials to the Prosecutor General's Office for prosecution over alleged abuse of authority in the controversial allocation of flats under the previous administration's 'Gedhoruveriya' housing program. The project, launched by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)-led government, aimed to provide social housing in Hulhumalé Phase II through 4,000 units developed by the state-owned Fahi Dhiriulhun Corporation (FDC).

Investigations began after allegations surfaced that government officials had manipulated the recipient list to benefit individuals who did not meet eligibility criteria. The ACC, in coordination with police, concluded that there was sufficient evidence to charge the four with misuse of official authority under Section 513(b) of the Penal Code.

The current government had initially suspended the flat allocations for review but resumed the process in February 2024 after completing a verification phase. However, only 1,820 of the 4,939 names on the original list were validated, primarily due to failures to adequately prove 15 years of residency in Malé. In a reversal announced on May 29, Housing Minister Abdulla Muthalib declared that the government will proceed with flat allocations based on the earlier list issued in November 2023, in response to public dissatisfaction. [The Sun]

Maldives: Animal Welfare Ministry spent USD 825,000 on political appointees by April 2025

New figures reveal that the Maldives' Agriculture and Animal Welfare Ministry has spent MVR 12.7 million (USD 825,500) on salaries and allowances for political appointees between November 2023 and April 2025, with MVR 5.42 million (USD 352,600) going to living allowances alone. This spending covers 48 political appointees, including state ministers, deputy ministers, and political directors, each receiving monthly basic salaries and allowances for living costs and phone usage.

The Ministry was created in late 2023 under President Mohamed Muizzu's administration, which split the agriculture and fisheries portfolio into two separate ministries to allow for more focused sectoral

development. The Agriculture and Animal Welfare Ministry was initially led by Dr. Aishath Rameela, who resigned in December 2024 for health reasons and was succeeded by Dr. Mariyam Mariya.

The Ministry's total budget surged from MVR 1 million (USD 65,000) in 2023 to MVR 65.7 million (USD 4.26 million) in 2025, with spending reaching MVR 16.2 million (USD 1.05 million) by May this year.

Despite a campaign pledge to cap political appointments at 700, estimates suggest there are now between 2,000 and 3,000 political appointees across the government. Following public criticism, President Muizzu claimed to have dismissed nearly 250 appointees as a cost-cutting measure. However, transparency issues persist. The President's Office has refused to disclose specific information about political hires, even appealing an Information Commissioner's order to release the data. While President Muizzu has publicly promised full disclosure, no list has been released as of early June. [The Sun]

Maldives: Drug rehabilitation program expands as 200 addicts placed in remand centers

(lm) The Maldives' National Drug Agency (NDA) has placed around 200 drug addicts into remand centers across the country, with the majority already enrolled in court-mandated rehabilitation programs. These remand centers, recently converted from existing detox and rehab facilities in Thinadhoo, Fuvahmulah, and Hulhudhoo, now offer basic treatment during the trial period and long-term rehabilitation for those sentenced by the Drug Court.

NDA officials report that approximately 178 individuals are currently receiving treatment. Most detainees were identified through street-level enforcement or reported by families, particularly in areas where children are present. Cases still pending in Criminal Court are expected to proceed to rehabilitation once resolved. [The Sun]

Maldives: State budget records USD 78 million surplus as spending falls and revenue rises

(lm) The Maldives has recorded a state budget surplus of MVR 1.2 billion (approximately USD 78 million) as of

May 29, 2025, driven by lower government spending and increased revenue collections.

Total government expenditure stood at MVR 15.3 billion, reflecting a 16.3 percent decline compared to the same period last year. This decrease was primarily due to a sharp 65.5 percent drop in capital expenditure and a modest 2.0 percent reduction in recurrent spending. Administrative operations comprised the bulk of recurrent expenditure, which fell by 6.8 percent year-on-year. Specific reductions were also seen in office supply procurement (down 69.6 percent), maintenance (down 24.1 percent), and transportation costs (down 14.6 percent).

Despite overall cuts, spending rose significantly in certain areas. Loan repayments surged by 151.8 percent, and deposits to the Sovereign Development Fund increased by 47.1 percent. Expenditure on Aasandha, the national health insurance scheme, also grew.

Of the MVR 12.4 billion allocated to the Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP) for development projects, only MVR 1.4 billion has been utilized so far this year.

Meanwhile, revenue and grants reached MVR 16.5 billion by the end of May—marking a 7.6 percent increase from the same period in 2024. Tax income totaled MVR 13 billion, or 78.4 percent of all revenues, with significant contributions from the General Goods and Services Tax, Tourist Goods and Services Tax, and the Green Tax, all of which saw a combined rise of 14.8 percent due to recent rate adjustments.

As of now, the government has collected 41.6 percent of its projected annual revenue while spending just 31.1 percent of its estimated yearly expenditure. [avas 1] [avas 2]

Maldives: Nationwide airport development masterplan to be released within a month

(lm) The Maldivian government will unveil an Integrated Airport Development Masterplan within the next month, outlining a comprehensive 10-year strategy to expand airport access across the country. According to the Ministry of Transport, the plan aims to ensure that every inhabited island will be within 30 minutes of an airport. [The Sun]

Nepal: Parliament deadlocked as visa scandal fuels calls for minister's resignation and probe

(lm) Nepal's federal parliament remains in deadlock amid intensifying political fallout over a visit visa scandal implicating senior government officials in alleged human trafficking. Since May 27, opposition lawmakers have obstructed legislative proceedings—delaying discussions on the national budget—while demanding the resignation of Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak and the formation of a high-level investigation committee. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

The scandal erupted after Nepal's anti-corruption watchdog, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), raided Tribhuvan International Airport and detained Immigration Chief Tirtharaj Bhattarai, a joint-secretary under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Bhattarai allegedly facilitated the illegal departure of Nepali citizens—particularly to Gulf countries—on visit visas in exchange for large payments. His transfer to the ministry just before the CIAA's raid has raised suspicions of high-level protection and political shielding.

Opposition parties—including the Rastriya Swatantra Party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)—have accused officials from Lekhak's secretariat of orchestrating the illicit network. They argue that any inquiry conducted while Lekhak remains in office would lack credibility. The protest briefly paused for the government's constitutionally mandated budget presentation on May 29, but disruptions resumed immediately afterward.

Speaker of the House Devraj Ghimire has convened multiple rounds of talks with party leaders, including the chief whips of the ruling Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist), but no consensus has been reached. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The ruling coalition has rejected opposition calls for an independent parliamentary or judicial probe, instead backing the ongoing CIAA investigation and offering to let Minister Lekhak clarify his position before the House. Government leaders argue that parallel inquiries would politicize an existing legal process. The CIAA has not directly charged Lekhak, and he continues to deny involvement, asserting that no formal complaint has been filed against him.

Despite this, opposition parties continue to press for a formal investigation mechanism. While most have

softened their demand for Lekhak's resignation, they remain firm on the need for a credible inquiry—either parliamentary or judicial. Talks between Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba are ongoing. One proposal under discussion is a broader investigation that could include all home ministers since 2006. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: Former prime minister faces landmark corruption case over land deal

(lm) Former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal has been indicted by Nepal's anti-corruption body in a high-profile case involving the illegal acquisition and resale of land by Patanjali Yogpeeth Nepal, the local branch of a prominent Indian wellness conglomerate. The case—filed by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA)—targets 93 individuals, including Nepal and several former ministers, for their roles in approving a 2010 land deal that allegedly violated legal ceilings and caused public losses exceeding NPR 185.5 million (USD 1.35 million). [Reuters]

The transaction, approved by Nepal's Cabinet during his 2009–2011 tenure, allowed Patanjali to acquire over 800 ropani (approximately 41 hectares) of land in Banepa, a municipality near Kathmandu, under exemptions normally reserved for public-interest projects. The land was later sold below market-declared prices, with the CIAA alleging tax evasion and misuse of public authority. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The case is the first of its kind in Nepal's post-1990 democratic history to charge a former head of government for actions taken through Cabinet decisions. It has reignited debate over the legal scope of "policy decisions," which are typically shielded from prosecution under Nepali law. Nepal's party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), has denounced the indictment as politically motivated, accusing Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli of targeting political rivals through the CIAA. [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Nepal's suspension from Parliament following the charges has prompted internal discussions within his party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), which currently refuses to remove him from party leadership. The party argues the case is politically motivated, suggesting that Prime Minister KP Sharma

Oli is using anti-corruption mechanisms to neutralize rivals. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

Nepal: Civil servants launch protests over federal civil service bill

(lm) Nepal's civil servants have launched nationwide protests against a draft Federal Civil Service Act, claiming it threatens career progression, weakens administrative clarity under federalism, and reflects a top-down legislative process. The bill, finalized by a parliamentary committee in May but not yet tabled in the full House, is facing strong resistance from both mid-level staff and senior bureaucrats.

Key objections include provisions that allow prolonged delays in promotions—up to 20 years for lower-level staff—and the absence of fixed tenure for high-ranking posts such as additional secretaries. Unions also oppose the lack of guaranteed transfers for employees posted to provincial and local governments, which they argue undermines federal decentralization.

Separately, senior officials have pushed back against new provisions extending the retirement age from 58 to 60 and imposing a two-year "cooling-off" period before retired bureaucrats can take political appointments.

The protests, coordinated by a cross-party coalition of civil service unions, underscore institutional tensions over how Nepal's federal structure should function. The law's current form is seen as both financially and structurally misaligned with the goals of administrative devolution set out in the 2015 Constitution. Unless revised, union leaders warn, the legislation risks deepening operational gridlock and disincentivizing public sector careers. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Royalist movement faces legal pressure and internal fragmentation following deadly protest

(lm) Nepal's pro-monarchy movement is confronting growing legal and political strain following a violent protest on March 28 in Kathmandu that left two people dead, including a journalist. The protest, organized by the Joint People's Movement Committee—a coalition of over 40 royalist groups advocating for the restoration of Nepal's Hindu monarchy—has triggered a sedition

case and exposed widening divisions among monarchist factions.

Two senior leaders of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Nepal's main royalist party, have been declared absconding by the courts for failing to appear in connection with the protest. Rabindra Mishra, the party's senior vice-chair, and Dhawal Shamsher Rana, its general secretary, face charges of sedition, criminal mischief, and organized crime. Both had been released on legal surety but failed to respond to court summons. Rana, who is undergoing treatment for cancer, stated he would appear after a formal 21-day notice is issued; Mishra has not made any public appearances, and his mobile phone has been seized for forensic examination.

The charges stem from a case filed on May 25 by the District Attorney's Office against 61 individuals. Of those, 50 face sedition charges, while others are charged with related offenses. Eight individuals, including protest coordinator Durga Prasai, face multiple charges, including homicide and attempted murder. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

The legal fallout has further strained internal relations among monarchist factions. A June 5 strategy meeting of the Joint People's Movement Committee was marked by disputes over leadership and coordination. Notably, RPP chairman Rajendra Lingden did not attend, raising questions about the party's role in the movement. The RPP also opposed a nationwide strike called by the committee, citing a lack of consultation.

Tensions had been escalating since March, when senior RPP figures were appointed to key roles within the committee without formal party endorsement. Former King Gyanendra Shah's efforts to unify the monarchist front have yielded limited results, and some party insiders now accuse the royal household itself of interfering in party affairs.

While the RPP formally reiterated its support for the broader movement on June 2, recent developments indicate a fragmentation of strategy and authority. With sedition charges pending and party leaders sidelined, the royalist movement is under increasing legal scrutiny and faces diminishing cohesion—complicating its ability to sustain national mobilization or gain political traction. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Supreme Court orders criminal investigation against Maoist vice-chair for insurgency-era murder

Nepal's Supreme Court has ordered a criminal investigation into main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) Vice-chairperson and former House Speaker Agni Prasad Sapkota over an unresolved 2005 insurgency-era abduction and murder case.

The case had seen years of delay despite repeated legal efforts by the victim's family and rights activists. While other related petitions were dismissed, the Court upheld the call for justice and mandated law enforcement to proceed under the criminal justice framework. The decision comes after over 60 postponed hearings and signals renewed pressure for accountability regarding crimes committed during Nepal's civil conflict. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

The ruling has intensified scrutiny of Nepal's broader transitional justice process, which has been widely condemned by civil society organizations as lacking credibility and legitimacy. In a joint statement issued the same day, 24 rights groups—including Amnesty International Nepal and INSEC—called the recent appointments to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons politically manipulated and non-transparent. They warned that the process has lost the trust of victims and risks collapse unless it is urgently restructured through meaningful consultation and dialogue with affected communities.

The groups further urged the United Nations and international donors to suspend financial and technical support unless the government recommits to a credible, victim-centered process. They also criticized recent actions by commission officials and government bodies as insensitive, particularly concerning how complaints from survivors of rape and sexual violence have been handled. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Anti-graft body files corruption case against Nepal Telecom chief and 17 others

(lm) Nepal's anti-corruption agency, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), has filed a case at the Special Court against the current and former managing directors of Nepal Telecom and 16 others over alleged corruption in the procurement of the company's billing and maintenance system. The CIAA is seeking damages of NPR 334.8 million (USD 2.45 million), along with imprisonment and fines proportional to the losses. It also demands the recovery of an additional NPR 98.8 million (USD

723,240) in direct losses caused by the overpricing of the contract awarded to Asia Info Linkage Technologies (China) Inc.

The officials allegedly ignored a five percent discount offered under a previous contract and instead finalized inflated rates for the Convergent Real-Time Billing and Customer Support System, which is used to integrate services such as mobile, internet, leased line, and broadband. Those charged include top executives from Nepal Telecom, Chinese supplier Asia Info Yunghang Software, and its local agent Arniko International Pvt Ltd.

In a separate case, the CIAA has also filed charges against the head of the Nepal Oil Corporation's Pokhara office for allegedly causing a loss of NPR 448,525 (USD 3,274) by supplying unbilled diesel through collusion and tampering with surveillance. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: New take-and-pay policy alarms private energy producers, threatens 17,000MW in projects

Nepal's private energy sector has strongly opposed a new budget provision introducing a "take-and-pay" model for power purchase agreements, warning that it threatens the financial viability of over 17,000 megawatts (MW) of planned hydropower projects—roughly equivalent to the total installed capacity of countries like Norway or half of Pakistan's current capacity.

Under the revised framework, the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) would only pay for electricity it chooses to purchase, replacing the earlier "take-or-pay" model that guaranteed payments regardless of offtake. The Independent Power Producers' Association of Nepal (IPPAN) argues this shift blocks nearly 300 projects and jeopardizes over NPR 66.22 billion (USD 483.4 million) already invested.

IPPAN warns the change undermines financing, violates existing energy laws, and contradicts the national roadmap targeting 28,500MW by 2035. Energy Minister Dipak Khadka has admitted the provision was a serious error and committed to rectifying it. He also suggested forming a new electricity trading body if NEA proves incapable.

IPPAN has urged immediate reversal of the policy and warned of strong protests, saying the budget provision

could dismantle Nepal's energy development ambitions. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Transport strike ends after federal pressure prompts province to suspend ride-hailing rules

(lm) Nepal's two-day nationwide transport strike, which left hundreds of thousands stranded, ended late on June 3 after the Gandaki provincial government agreed to suspend its new ride-hailing regulation for one month. The suspension followed a formal request by the federal government, which had reached an earlier agreement with striking transport entrepreneurs but failed to immediately restore services.

The strike had begun in Pokhara the previous week and expanded nationwide by early last week, despite the Essential Services Operation Act prohibiting such actions. Consumer rights activists accused the government of yielding to pressure from entrenched syndicates in the transport sector, undermining legal reforms aimed at regulating private and digital mobility services. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Government violates own budget pledge by allocating funds to small-scale local projects

(lm) Despite public commitments to decentralize development and restrict federal spending to large-scale infrastructure, Nepal's federal government has allocated funds to dozens of small-scale projects—many well below the NPR 30 million (USD 219,000) threshold set out in the 2025/26 budget. Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel had declared on May 29 that projects under this limit would be excluded from federal execution to strengthen national priorities and improve efficiency.

However, the Ministry of Urban Development's budget includes numerous federally executed projects well below the NPR 30 million (USD 219,000) threshold. These include drainage upgrades, settlement programs, cultural site restorations, small roadworks, parks, and community buildings—many with allocations ranging from NPR 500,000 to NPR 3.5 million (USD 3,650 to USD 25,550).

Experts say these allocations contradict federal commitments and reflect a persistent centralized

mindset. Under Nepal's Constitution, only nationally significant projects—such as large-scale electricity or irrigation infrastructure—fall under federal jurisdiction, while smaller projects should be managed by provincial or local governments. This is not the first such inconsistency. Similar promises made by then Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in 2024 were followed by budget allocations for hundreds of projects below the declared threshold.

Critics also highlight structural obstacles to decentralization. Provinces and municipalities still lack one-third of their required civil service staff, as the Federal Civil Service Bill remains stalled in Parliament. Similarly, despite the 2019 enactment of laws enabling provincial police forces, the federal government has yet to implement personnel adjustments needed to operationalize them. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: City police chief suspended amid deepening mayor–federal government power struggle

(lm) Kathmandu Metropolitan City's police chief, Senior Superintendent Rajunath Pandey, has been suspended for six months following accusations of obstructing the city's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) from entering municipal premises. The action, grounded in the Municipal Police Act, 2023, stems from a broader political standoff between independently elected Mayor Balendra Shah and the federal government, which intensified after the return of KP Sharma Oli as prime minister.

The dispute began when Mayor Shah suspended CAO Guragain over alleged procedural and financial misconduct tied to unauthorized changes to the Kathmandu Tower project. The federal government later reinstated Guragain, prompting clashes over authority. Pandey, acting on the mayor's verbal orders, reportedly blocked Guragain's re-entry—actions now deemed as misconduct. [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: Prime minister invites opposition to consult on new election commissioner

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has formally invited opposition leader Omar Ayub for consultations on appointing a new chief election commissioner and two members of the Election

Commission of Pakistan (ECP), as required under Article 213 of the Constitution. The move comes amid continued political gridlock following the disputed 2024 general elections.

The positions became vacant after former chief election commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja and two ECP members from Sindh and Balochistan completed their five-year terms in January 2025. However, under Article 215, they remain in office until replacements are appointed. The constitution mandates the prime minister and opposition leader to jointly propose three names for each vacancy to a parliamentary committee for confirmation.

The invitation, issued by letter, seeks to restart cooperation after months of mutual distrust. Omar Ayub represents the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of jailed ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, which has accused the ECP of colluding with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) to manipulate the 2024 elections. The elections were marred by mobile network shutdowns, delayed vote counts, and allegations of rigging, all of which the ECP and the Sharif-led government have denied.

While the government urges PTI to pursue legal channels, PTI maintains that the electoral process was illegitimate and continues to call for investigations and the restoration of its "stolen mandate." Earlier rounds of talks between the two sides collapsed, with PTI withdrawing over the government's refusal to meet its demands, including the establishment of judicial commissions to probe earlier protest crackdowns in May 2023 and November 2024. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Protests continue in Gilgit-Baltistan over arrest of regional rights advocates

(za) Protests have continued across Gilgit-Baltistan—a region administered by Pakistan but claimed by India, and lacking full constitutional status—following the May 16 arrest of several leaders of the Awami Action Committee (AAC), a coalition of political and religious groups formed in 2014 to advocate for regional rights. The AAC has long mobilized against political and economic marginalization, and has campaigned for restored wheat subsidies, fairer electricity tariffs, and land rights.

The protests, which intensified after June 7, spread across the region, with demonstrators calling for the release of 13 detained leaders. They were arrested

under anti-terrorism laws for allegedly “condemning the state.” Civil society groups, trade unions, and human rights activists joined the demonstrations, claiming the arrests were an attempt to suppress a planned *jirga* (community assembly) on the ownership of Gilgit-Baltistan’s natural resources. This issue has become particularly sensitive following the passage of the controversial Land Reforms Bill, which opponents say enables large-scale land transfers and undermines traditional ownership structures.

The detained activists—many of whom had campaigned against land grabs and for protection of the region’s mineral wealth—are now facing terrorism charges, which critics argue are being misused to silence dissent. International human rights groups and left-leaning political parties abroad have criticized the arrests, while organizers in Gilgit-Baltistan plan to escalate protests after Eid-ul-Adha. The group’s 15-point charter of demands, which includes full district status for underrepresented areas such as Gupis-Yasin, remains central to the growing unrest. [HUM News]

Pakistan: Over 200,000 Afghans leave amid renewed deportation drive

(lm) Pakistan’s Interior Ministry has confirmed that more than 200,000 Afghans have left the country since the government resumed its mass deportation campaign in April 2025. The operation targets over 800,000 Afghans whose residence permits have been revoked, many of whom were born or have lived for decades in Pakistan. In total, over one million Afghans have left the country since the expulsions began in November 2023.

The renewed push follows rising tensions between Islamabad and Kabul, with Pakistan accusing Afghan nationals of involvement in terrorist activities and blaming the Taliban authorities for harboring militants. The deportation drive, which has significant domestic support, is seen as an effort to pressure Afghanistan’s de facto government to curb cross-border militancy.

The United Nations and international agencies have voiced concern, warning that the simultaneous increase in deportations from both Pakistan and Iran is straining Afghanistan’s already fragile reintegration infrastructure. Pakistan is also threatening to revoke protection for an additional 1.3 million Afghans holding refugee cards issued by the UN, potentially escalating the situation further at the end of June. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Controversy surrounds attempts to restrict Eid practices of Lahore's Ahmadiyya community

(za) A legal and human rights controversy has emerged in Punjab after the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) called on the provincial police to prevent members of the Ahmadiyya community – a religious minority that identifies as Muslim but is legally barred from describing itself as such under the country's constitutional and penal laws – from observing religious practices during Eid-ul-Adha. In a letter to the Punjab Inspector General of Police, the LHCBA argued that rituals such as Eid gatherings and animal sacrifices are exclusive to Muslims and accused the Ahmadiyya of unlawfully presenting themselves as Muslims. The letter further requested that members of the community be required to submit affidavits pledging not to engage in such rituals. [DAWN 1]

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) strongly condemned the LHCBA's move, warning that it violates the Ahmadiyya community's constitutional right to religious freedom. The HRCP cautioned that this form of institutional discrimination could embolden extremist actors and intensify persecution against the minority group. It urged the Punjab government to withdraw the letter and uphold the fundamental rights of all citizens. [DAWN 2]

Pakistan: Government advances energy market reforms

(lm) Pakistan is advancing key reforms in its energy sector to address subsidy imbalances and improve grid stability, as the country confronts the growing operational and fiscal impact of decentralized solar generation and surplus electricity capacity.

Energy Minister Awais Leghari confirmed that the government will retain but reform its net metering policy, which currently allows solar users to sell excess electricity back to the grid at a rate of PKR 21 (USD 0.075) per unit. The mechanism, introduced in 2017 to incentivize renewables, is now under review due to concerns that it disproportionately benefits higher-income households while shifting the cost burden to other consumers. A government report estimated that net metering shifted PKR 103 billion (USD 366 million) in 2024 to the broader grid.

Planned reforms will align solar purchase rates more closely with market-based procurement costs while preserving core incentives for solar investment. The government aims to maintain the typical three-year payback period for users self-consuming at least 40 percent of generated electricity. The changes, according to Leghari, are intended to improve transparency and sustainability and are not being driven by external lenders.

In parallel, Pakistan is seeking International Monetary Fund (IMF) approval to sell 7,000 megawatts of surplus power—largely developed under the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—to the industrial and agricultural sectors at an unsubsidized tariff of USD 0.07 to 0.075 per unit. The move is part of broader fiscal planning for the next budget cycle and is aimed at relieving pressure on the national grid while enhancing industrial competitiveness.

Together, the reforms reflect Pakistan's efforts to rebalance its energy system, reduce the cost burden of subsidies, and make progress toward its goal of sourcing 60 percent of electricity from renewable and low-carbon sources by 2030—an objective it remains far from achieving. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Economic survey signals fragile recovery amid rising debt and looming fiscal pressures

(za/lm) Pakistan's annual Economic Survey, released on June 9 ahead of the federal budget announcement, paints a mixed picture of modest economic recovery overshadowed by mounting debt and structural vulnerabilities. Gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to grow by 2.7 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2025, up slightly from 2.5 percent the previous year, but below the original target of 3.6 percent. This follows a contraction of 0.2 percent in fiscal 2023. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects 2.6 percent growth for the current year and 3.6 percent for the next.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's administration aims for 4.2 percent growth in fiscal 2026, balancing investment goals with fiscal consolidation under a USD 7 billion IMF program. Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal announced PKR 1 trillion (USD 3.6 billion) in development spending to promote more inclusive growth, while Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb emphasized avoiding past patterns of unsustainable consumption-led expansion. He stressed that macroeconomic stability must be built on foreign

direct investment and domestic savings, not import-driven demand surges.

The survey highlights some signs of stabilization. Exports rose by 7 percent, freelance and IT sector performance improved, and remittances reached USD 38 billion—an increase of USD 10 billion over two years. Pakistan's IT exports hit USD 3.1 billion, with freelancers contributing USD 400 million. Inflation fell to 4.6 percent, a marked improvement from previous double-digit levels, while the central bank cut its policy rate from 22 percent to 11 percent in an effort to ease liquidity and stimulate recovery.

Other macroeconomic indicators showed short-term improvement. The current account registered a surplus of USD 1.9 billion from July to April, compared to a USD 200 million deficit the previous year. Government revenue for the first three quarters rose to PKR 13.37 trillion (USD 48.1 billion), while the fiscal deficit stood at 2.6 percent of GDP. Inflation in May was recorded at 3.5 percent. [Arab News] [Reuters]

Yet these positive developments are tempered by a steep rise in public debt. Pakistan's total public debt now stands at PKR 76 trillion (USD 274 billion), including PKR 51.5 trillion in domestic debt and PKR 24.5 trillion in external debt—up from PKR 39.9 trillion in 2020–21 and nearly five times the PKR 17.4 trillion figure from 2014–15. Annual interest payments now consume over half of all federal revenues, crowding out spending on development and public services. External debt and liabilities total over USD 130 billion, or nearly 50 percent of GDP, with significant exposure to Chinese lending tied to China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects. [CNBC TV18]

Pakistan: Over 44 percent of population classified as poor under revised World Bank threshold

(lm) More than 107 million people in Pakistan—approximately 44.7 percent of the population—are now considered to be living below the poverty line under the World Bank's newly adjusted global poverty threshold of USD 4.20 per person per day for lower-middle-income countries. The updated assessment, part of the World Bank's June 2025 Global Poverty Update, incorporates revised cost-of-living estimates and globally comparable data.

According to the new classification, 16.5 percent of Pakistanis—about 39.8 million people—fall under the extreme poverty line, set at USD 3 per day, up sharply

from the earlier benchmark of USD 2.15 which had placed only 4.9 percent of the population in that category. Meanwhile, 88.4 percent of the population falls below the upper-middle-income poverty line of USD 8.30 per day.

World Bank officials emphasized that the rise in poverty statistics reflects an updated global methodology rather than a decline in actual living standards. However, the figures underscore persistent economic vulnerability in Pakistan, which continues to grapple with inflation, currency depreciation, and an ongoing balance of payments crisis. The poverty update comes amid renewed calls for social protection, resilience-building, and reforms to strengthen inclusive growth in the country. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Textile industry warns of capital flight, calls for reform of export scheme as mills shut down

(lm) The head of Pakistan's main textile body (APTMA), representing over 200 textile firms, has warned of a growing exodus of industrial capital to investor-friendly countries like the United Arab Emirates, saying the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS) introduced last year has hurt domestic input producers and triggered widespread factory closures.

The EFS allows duty- and tax-free imports of yarn and fabric, while domestically produced equivalents face heavy taxation, making local sourcing uncompetitive. APTMA is now urging the government to remove all yarn and fabric from the scheme in the upcoming budget to level the playing field and revive domestic production. Between fiscal year 2022 and 2024, textile exports fell by over 13 percent, with more than 120 spinning mills and 800 ginning factories reported closed.

This comes as Pakistan negotiates increased cotton imports from the United States, its largest export market. However, APTMA warns that without a functioning domestic spinning industry, such imports may be commercially unviable. The textile sector, which accounts for half of Pakistan's exports and employs tens of millions, is also facing reduced domestic cotton output and mounting carryover stocks, further compounding the crisis. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Bomb blast in border district kills one

(lm) A bomb explosion in Bajaur, a district in northwestern Pakistan bordering Afghanistan, killed one person on June 6. The device was planted near the home of the local District Health Officer and killed his father in the blast. Authorities confirmed the attack was carried out using an improvised explosive device, with security forces subsequently launching a search operation in the area.

While no group has claimed responsibility, suspicion falls on Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has a longstanding presence in the region and has conducted multiple attacks on civilians and officials. Bajaur was once a stronghold of TTP before a series of military operations in the late 2000s displaced many militant groups.

The incident highlights persistent security challenges in Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt, particularly since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021. Islamabad accuses Kabul of harboring TTP militants, a charge the Afghan government denies. Rising cross-border militancy continues to strain Pakistan–Afghanistan relations. [Arab News]

Seychelles: Political party objects to proposed amendments to political party funding laws

(lm) Mouvman Lavwa Seselwa (MLS), a relatively new political party in Seychelles, has formally objected to Private Member's Bill No. 2 of 2025. The bill proposes an amendment to Section 29A of the Political Parties (Registration and Regulation) Act, allowing contributions for capacity-building and training within political parties to be exempt from current funding restrictions.

MLS, which was officially registered in August 2024, is not currently represented in the National Assembly. The party has raised concerns that the proposed amendment could enable foreign entities to disguise partisan support as capacity-building, potentially undermining national sovereignty and weakening legal safeguards against external influence. Additionally, MLS argues that passing such an amendment close to the September 2025 General Elections could disrupt the electoral process, erode public trust, and contravene the consultative process required for reforms to political financing laws.

MLS has called on the Electoral Commission to publicly clarify its position on the amendment and for the National Assembly to defer or withdraw the bill until further consultation. The party also suggested that the proposed amendment could violate constitutional principles and has urged for the matter to be referred to the Constitutional Court if necessary. [Seychelles Nation]

Sri Lanka: Dual scandals on presidential pardons and container releases erode trust in government oversight

(lm) Two unfolding controversies in Sri Lanka—the misuse of presidential pardons and the uninspected release of 323 shipping containers—have raised questions about institutional integrity, executive accountability, and the broader credibility of the ruling National People's Power (NPP) government – which came to office promising a return to rule of law, transparency, and institutional reform after the collapse of public trust in previous administrations.

The first scandal involves the unauthorized release of inmates under the presidential pardon system during the 2025 Vesak amnesty. The Presidential Secretariat confirmed that at least one individual released from Anuradhapura Prison—one of the country's largest correctional facilities— had not been approved by the President. A formal complaint was filed with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which has since launched an expansive investigation. The Assistant Commissioner of Anuradhapura Prison was arrested, and Commissioner General of Prisons Thushara Upuldeniya was suspended after being questioned for over ten hours. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2] [Daily Mirror 3] [Daily Mirror 4]

The CID has uncovered evidence suggesting that the misuse of the pardon process may not be an isolated case, with similar unauthorized releases reported in previous years. This has intensified scrutiny of procedural integrity in Sri Lanka's prison system, where the Department of Prisons initially defended the release of a former finance company manager convicted of embezzling LKR 4 million (USD 13,600). However, the Presidential Media Division disputed this, stating the individual's name had not been approved, and thus his release was unlawful. [Daily Mirror 5]

Critics, including lawmakers from the main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), condemned the situation as a manipulation of the justice system, while Namal Rajapaksa – a parliamentarian from the Sri

Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa – connected it to what he described as a broader breakdown of law and order under the NPP-led administration. He cited the pardons issue alongside another brewing controversy: the release of 323 shipping containers by Sri Lanka Customs earlier this year. [Daily Mirror 6] [Daily Mirror 7]

That controversy gained momentum after Udaya Gammanpila—a former minister and leader of the nationalist Pivithuru Hela Urumaya—testified before the CID on June 9. He later published the full list of released containers and accused certain officials of attempting to flee the country, urging authorities to impose travel bans. [Daily Mirror 8] [Daily Mirror 9] [Daily Mirror 10]

The situation escalated when an MP from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA)—a party often critical of state practices concerning minority rights—alleged in Parliament that the containers included weapons linked to Velupillai Prabhakaran, the late leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE was a separatist militant group that waged a decades-long civil war until its defeat in 2009. The Ministry of Defence promptly dismissed the claim as "completely baseless," stating there was no evidence to support it. [srilankanews.lk]

However, in a key development, Sri Lanka Customs acknowledged in a June 8 press briefing that the containers were released without physical inspection, relying solely on documentation submitted by importers. While officials insisted that there was no evidence of contraband—such as weapons, narcotics, or gold—the lack of physical checks has fueled concern over institutional oversight and procedural gaps. [Daily Mirror 11]

Amid the fallout, Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara acknowledged systemic flaws in prison management. He revealed that over 20,000 of Sri Lanka's 29,353 inmates are unconvicted individuals held on suspicion. In response, the government plans to reactivate the Committee on Pardon, enforce the Release of Remand Prisoners Act No. 8 of 1991, and scale up rehabilitation programs like Ama Divi Ridma. To address overcrowding, authorities also aim to relocate major prisons—Welikada to Millewa, Horana, and Mahara to Kotawilawatte—as part of broader efforts to improve correctional infrastructure and reintegration. [Daily Mirror 12]

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court to hear petitions challenging MoUs with India on June 12

(lm) The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has scheduled a hearing for June 12 to consider two Fundamental Rights (FR) petitions challenging the legality of several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) recently signed between Sri Lanka and India. The MoUs, signed on April 5 in the presence of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cover a range of areas including defense cooperation, digital solutions, and multi-sectoral grant assistance for the Eastern Province.

The petitions were filed by a group of public figures, including the President of the Patriotic National Movement—a nationalist civic group critical of foreign influence—and the Treasurer of the Vinivida Foundation, an organization involved in public policy advocacy. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former presidents signal boycott of state events over protocol grievances

(lm) Several former Sri Lankan presidents have expressed dissatisfaction with how they were treated during a recent government event at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), citing inappropriate seating arrangements and a broader sense of disrespect. As a result, they are now reconsidering whether to accept future invitations to official state functions.

The group—including Mahinda Rajapaksa, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Maithripala Sirisena, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and Ranil Wickremesinghe—reportedly found the seating at the event inadequate for former heads of state. Traditionally, former presidents are given prominent front-row seats at official and diplomatic functions, a protocol that was reportedly not followed at the recent gathering.

According to one former president, who spoke anonymously, the group has already declined to attend the War Heroes' Commemoration as a result of the incident. In addition to the seating issue, the former presidents are said to be frustrated with the government's reduction of post-office privileges, including cuts to security, vehicle use, and allowances. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former minister appeals 20-year sentence in carom board corruption case

Former Sports Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage has filed an appeal before Sri Lanka's Supreme Court challenging a 20-year prison sentence handed down by the Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar. The conviction, issued on May 29, relates to a corruption case involving over LKR 53 million (USD 180,000) in state losses connected to the misappropriation of funds during his tenure. The appeal seeks to overturn both the conviction and the sentence.

Nalin Fernando, former chairman of state-owned retail chain Lanka Sathosa and a co-defendant in the case, was separately sentenced to 25 years of rigorous imprisonment. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Prime Minister reports missing files from former anti-corruption committee

(lm) Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya informed Parliament on June 6 that several key documents from a past anti-corruption committee operating under the Prime Minister's Office have gone missing. The missing files include complaint records and documentation related to an accident involving a committee member.

The committee was established in 2015 with cabinet approval and was chaired by then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Among its members were current President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and other prominent political and legal figures. The committee functioned during the Yahapalana era—a term used locally to refer to the period of governance under the unity government formed by the United National Party and Sri Lanka Freedom Party between 2015 and 2019, which emphasized good governance and anti-corruption reform.

Responding to a question in Parliament, Prime Minister Amarasuriya said it remains unclear whether the files were removed when Wickremesinghe assumed the presidency in 2022. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Lawmaker questioned over 323-container scandal amid political backlash

(lm) Dayasiri Jayasekara, a Member of Parliament from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), appeared before the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on June 6 to provide a statement regarding the controversial release of 323 shipping containers, allegedly cleared without proper security checks. The containers are suspected to have been released in violation of customs procedures, prompting concerns over potential smuggling or regulatory bypasses. [Daily Mirror 1]

Meanwhile, Chief Opposition Whip Gayantha Karunathilaka resigned from a parliamentary committee appointed by Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne to examine Jayasekara's conduct. Karunathilaka criticized the formation of such committees, arguing that it risks setting a dangerous precedent that could lead to frequent, politically driven investigations targeting members of Parliament. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Former minister indicted over irregular 2019 appointments, granted bail

(lm) The Colombo High Court on June 6 indicted former Minister of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development, Chandrani Bandara, over alleged irregular appointments made during her tenure in January 2019. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) filed 11 charges under Section 70 of the Bribery Act.

Bandara was granted bail and released on two sureties of LKR 1 million (USD 3,400) each. The next hearing is scheduled for June 20. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former minister indicted over unexplained assets worth USD 2.72 million

(lm) Former Minister Mervyn Silva, who served in various cabinet positions between 2004 and 2015, has been indicted before the Colombo High Court in a corruption case filed by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC). He is accused of possessing cash and assets exceeding LKR 800 million (USD 2.72 million)—an amount allegedly disproportionate to his declared legitimate income. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former state minister questioned over fertilizer import probe

(lm) Shasheendra Rajapaksa, former State Minister of Agriculture and a nephew of former Presidents Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa, appeared before the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) on June 5 to provide a statement regarding allegations linked to fertilizer importation during his tenure in office. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Three Motor Traffic officers remanded as CCTV evidence deleted in bribery probe

(lm) Three officials from the Department of Motor Traffic (DMT) have been further remanded until June 20 in connection with a LKR 4 million (USD 13,600) bribery case, following revelations that CCTV footage from the day of the raid was deleted after the suspects had already been taken into custody—suggesting a deliberate attempt to obstruct the investigation and possible involvement of additional parties.

The covert operation, conducted after weeks of surveillance, uncovered LKR 3.9 million (USD 13,260) in the Deputy Commissioner's office and LKR 200,000 (USD 680) in a clerk's bag. Investigators stressed that DMT officials are not permitted to handle cash, as all payments are to be made through banks, pointing to systemic corruption within the department. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Nationwide health workers' strike ends for most professions, continues for lab staff

(lm) A nationwide strike by Sri Lanka's Joint Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (JCPSM) ended on June 7 for most affiliated health workers, with four out of five unions calling off the action. The strike, which began on June 5, disrupted services across public hospitals.

While the decision to end the strike was attributed to concern for patient welfare, medical laboratory professionals have opted to continue their walkout. The protest was driven by longstanding grievances, including delayed promotions, unpaid allowances for weekends and holidays, inadequate recruitment of graduates, and salary disparities. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Health Ministry suspends trade unionist over election law violation

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health has suspended Ravi Kumudesh, a laboratory officer and prominent trade union activist, effective June 10, for breaching civil service regulations by contesting the 2024 General Election. The Ministry stated the action was taken under the government's Establishments Code, which prohibits public servants from engaging in partisan electoral activity. Kumudesh will not receive salary or allowances during the suspension period. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Trade Minister acknowledges salt import mafia amid price surge

(lm) Trade and Food Security Minister Wasantha Samarasinghe has admitted the existence of a trader-driven mafia profiting from Sri Lanka's current salt shortage. Speaking on June 6, the minister stated that imported salt is being sold for between LKR 120 and LKR 250 (USD 0.41–0.85) per packet, despite the actual average cost being around LKR 77 (USD 0.26). [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: President urges faster rollout of rural road and irrigation projects

(lm) President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has directed officials to accelerate the implementation of rural road development and irrigation projects during two progress review meetings held on June 6 at the Presidential Secretariat.

The first meeting reviewed infrastructure projects under the Ministry of Transport, Highways, Ports, and Civil Aviation, where the President stressed the importance of completing road and transport upgrades on schedule. The second session focused on initiatives by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation, with special emphasis on major water management efforts, including the Yan Oya, Gal Oya, and Mahaweli schemes, and the rehabilitation of minor reservoirs. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government plans to recruit 10,000 retired soldiers into police force

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Public Security has announced plans to recruit 10,000 legally retired military personnel under the age of 45 into the national police force. The proposal, intended as a five-year deployment scheme, will be submitted to the Cabinet for approval. Authorities frame the move as a way to bolster policing capacity, amid broader efforts to enhance internal security. [Daily Mirror 1]

Simultaneously, a wide-ranging police reshuffle has been approved by the National Police Commission, involving fifteen personnel, including five senior officers. Among the key changes, Senior Superintendent of Police Mohan Lal Siriwardena—formerly with the Financial Crimes Division of the Criminal Investigation Department—has been appointed Director of Investigations at the Bribery Commission. [Daily Mirror 2]

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

Brunei: Tourist arrivals surge in 2024

(ga) Brunei recorded a notable rebound in international tourist arrivals in 2024, reaching 678,037 visitors across all entry points, including 268,282 arrivals by air, marking a 100.8 percent increase compared to 2023. Arrivals by land and sea were 381,507 and 28,248 respectively. The air travel sector saw the most substantial growth, driven by increases from key markets such as Malaysia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Japan.

Domestically, visitor numbers to places of interest totaled 274,778 in 2024, a slight decrease of 4.2 percent from 2023. The Brunei Muara district recorded the highest number with 256,009 visitors, while Belait and Temburong districts saw growth. Tutong reported no visitors in 2024.

Employment in the tourism sector increased to 3,019 jobs in 2024, up 3.5 percent from 2023, with growth seen in accommodations, travel agencies, and freelance tour guiding.

Projections for the tourism sector target 424,809 air and sea arrivals in 2025, with receipts forecasted at BND 700.35 million (USD 518.26 million), continuing a growth trajectory through 2035. [Tourism Development Department Brunei] [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei: Fact-checking platform to tackle social media misinformation launched

(dql) Following the enactment of the Personal Data Protection Order in March (see AiR No. 10, March/2025, 2), which aims to enhance organizational accountability and transparent data handling, Brunei has launched a fact-checking initiative to help the public verify information and counter misinformation on social media. [Xinhua] [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia: Prime minister rejects claims of ICJ border dispute filing being done under pressure

(dql/gm) In response to claims by opposition politicians, Prime Minister Hun Manet denied that the government's decision to refer parts of the Cambodia–Thailand border dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as well as to conclude the 2004 Cambodia-Laos-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area (CLV-DTA) cooperation framework, was made under political pressure.

The Prime Minister rejected the allegations as politically motivated, accusing the opposition of exploiting complex national issues for personal gain. He criticized calls to submit the entire 800-kilometre border to the ICJ as unrealistic, emphasizing that the Court only accepts cases with clear legal grounds and after bilateral mechanisms have been exhausted. [Khmer Times 1] [CamboJA News]

Moreover, Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training has rejected claims that Cambodian workers are fleeing Thailand due to the ongoing border tensions, labelling the reports as false and socially harmful. The ministry urged social media users not to repost misleading images or narratives, particularly content depicting workers returning home during the Khmer New Year, which had been falsely reframed as an "exodus" linked to the border dispute.

Authorities in Poipet, Banteay Meanchey province, also denied rumors of planned evacuations, calling on media platforms to correct false claims and warning the public not to spread fear or unrest. [Khmer Times 2]

Meanwhile, the Phnom Penh Municipal Police Department has launched an investigation into propaganda videos produced by Em Piseth, a Thailand-based activist and head of the opposition group *Global Cambodian Youth Network*. The videos, disseminated via TikTok and Facebook, allegedly feature Piseth impersonating a Cambodian soldier and spreading false information about border tensions to undermine military morale and mislead the public.

Reacting to the incident, Senate President Hun Sen criticized the collaboration with foreign actors, calling for Thai authorities to arrest and extradite Piseth to Cambodia for legal action if they are not complicit in his activities. [Khmer Times 3]

Cambodia: Opposition party official indicted

(dql) Doeun Chhan, the deputy chief of the extra-parliamentary opposition Candlelight Party in Stung Meanchey 1 commune, has been charged by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court with forging a public document during his time as deputy commune chief. He is accused of falsifying the thumbprint of his former colleague, Leng Vandy, on an official resignation letter.

Chhan was arrested on June 3 following a complaint filed by Vandy. During police interrogation, Chhan reportedly admitted to the forgery. If convicted under Articles 626 and 629 of the Penal Code, he faces five to seven years in prison.

Phnom Penh Municipal Police stressed that the case is not politically motivated or aimed at intimidation. Leng Vandy, who left the Candlelight Party in 2024 to join the Nation Power Party, denies signing the resignation

letter and accuses Chhan of forging his thumbprint. [Khmer Times]

Officially recognized in 2022, the National Power Party seeks to represent grassroots interests and provide an alternative to Cambodia's dominant political forces. It is one of several emerging groups attempting to establish a political presence in a country where the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has maintained tight control over political space.

Cambodia: Land marking completed for second section of Funan Techo Canal

(gm/dql) Cambodia's Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) has completed land marking for the second section of the Funan Techo Canal (FTC) in Kandal province, progressing toward construction scheduled for late 2025. [Khmer Times]

The project has drawn regional attention due to its potential to reduce Cambodia's reliance on Vietnamese ports and its alignment with China's broader, geopolitically driven infrastructure initiatives in Southeast Asia.

The 151.6-kilometre FTC project—developed under a USD 1.16 billion public-private partnership with China and signed during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Cambodia in April (see AiR No. 16, April/2025, 4)—is designed to connect the Bassac River near Phnom Penh to Kep Province. The inland waterway is expected to enhance Cambodia's logistics and trade infrastructure while strengthening economic ties with China. The project is being closely monitored by Vietnam due to strategic concerns and potential environmental impacts on the Mekong Delta, including risks of long-term drought and soil salinization that could affect Vietnamese agriculture. [South China Morning Post]

Cambodia: Government allocates USD 35 million to expand modern agricultural communities

(gm) The Cambodian government has approved a USD 35 million allocation to support low-interest loans for modern agricultural communities between 2025 and 2027, aiming to strengthen agricultural quality and improve market access.

Prime Minister Hun Manet announced the initiative during the inaugural joint session of the National Assembly and Senate on June 3. It will expand support for communities cultivating high-value crops, including rice, cashew nuts, vegetables, pepper, rubber, and durian.

As of May 2025, Cambodia has 2,601 registered modern agricultural communities across seven provinces, covering 11,421 hectares and producing an estimated USD 19.77 million annually. Six communities are currently receiving government loans totaling USD 1.9 million.

The program forms part of broader efforts to enhance food security, increase rural incomes, and build resilience to climate and external shocks. Officials cited continuity with earlier agricultural policies, including irrigation expansion, mechanization, and targeted incentives. [Phnom Penh Post]

Indonesia: Ex-generals advocate for Gibran's impeachment

(th) Indonesian Vice-President Gibran Rakabuming Raka is under mounting pressure as the Forum Purnawirawan Prajurit TNI, a coalition of retired military generals, have handed over a formal petition advocating for his impeachment because of multiple constitutional and ethical violations, as well as suspicions over his qualifications.

The group criticized Gibran's rise to office, referencing the controversial ruling of the Constitutional Court in October 2023 – shortly before the February 2024 presidential election – that candidates under the required age of 40 could seek the presidency or vice presidency in the ballot, providing they have previously held elected regional office. The decision, paving the way for Gibran's candidacy, was issued under former President Joko Widodo—Gibran's father— and authored by then-chief justice Anwar Usman, Jokowi's brother-in-law, who was later dismissed for serious ethical breaches.

The group also questioned Gibran's competence, arguing that his brief tenure as mayor of Surakarta did not prepare him for national leadership. It additionally referenced a controversy involving an anonymous account, "fufufafa," allegedly used by Gibran to post slanderous content. [Malay Mail] [The Star]

While Prabowo has not yet expressed support for Gibran, he had tasked advisor Wiranto to instead send

out a response, indicating that the petition is being looked at seriously. [Malay Mail] [The Star]

Indonesia: Manpower ministry officials name suspects in work permit corruption case

(dql) The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has implicated eight officials from Indonesia's Manpower Ministry in a significant bribery scandal. These officials, including former and current directors from the Directorate General for Labor Placement and Employment Expansion (Binapenta) and the Directorate for the Control of Foreign Workers (PPTKA), allegedly extorted IDR 53.7 billion (USD 3.3 million) from companies seeking foreign worker permits between 2019 and 2024.

The KPK intends to broaden the investigation beyond extortion to include money laundering charges, aiming to recover assets from those involved. Clarifications will be sought from former ministers regarding oversight during their tenures.

This scandal exposes systemic corruption within Indonesia's bureaucracy, highlighting the challenges in governance and regulatory enforcement. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: USD 1.5 billion financial aid package launched

(dql) Indonesia has launched a USD 1.5 billion stimulus package aimed at boosting consumer activity after the economy posted its slowest growth in over three years. This comes as the country’s GDP grew 4.87 percent year-on-year in Q1 2025, a sluggish pace last seen during the Covid-19 pandemic in mid-2021.

The stimulus includes discounts on train, plane, and ferry tickets, toll subsidies to promote tourism, increased social aid, cash transfers to low-income workers, and reduced unemployment insurance premiums.

President Prabowo Subianto has faced criticism for economic policies, notably cutting USD 19 billion from the budget to fund a sovereign wealth fund.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian economy is affected by threatened 32 percent US tariffs, which triggered the

country's largest stock decline in over a decade. Jakarta is negotiating with Washington ahead of the 90-day tariff pause ending in July and has pledged to increase purchases of US goods, including wheat and liquefied natural gas, to reduce its trade surplus. [The Business Times]

Indonesia: Government revokes mining permits

(dql) The Indonesian government has revoked four nickel mining permits in Raja Ampat Regency, Southwest Papua, following public outcry over environmental concerns.

State Secretary Prasetyo Hadi announced the permit revocations on June 10, following President Prabowo Subianto's directive to halt nickel mining in Raja Ampat.

Environmental groups, including Greenpeace Indonesia and the Raja Ampat Nature Conservation Alliance, criticized mining activities on the small islands of Gag, Kawe, Manuran, Manyaifun, and Batang Pele, citing violations of Law No. 1/2014 on Coastal Areas and Small Islands. Greenpeace reported over 500 hectares of forest damage and threats to coral reefs and marine life, supported by footage showing active land clearing. [Tempo.co]

Laos: Cabinet sees major reshuffle

(dql) Laos has undertaken a major government reshuffle affecting nine ministers and the central bank governor, as part of broader structural reforms aimed at consolidating ministries and streamlining state functions. The changes, approved by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on 6 June, were proposed by Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone and confirmed by National Assembly Vice President Sounthone Sayachack.

Among the most notable appointments is Bounkham Vorachit, who has been named Governor of the Bank of the Lao PDR, replacing Acting Governor Vetthana Dalaloy. Thongsalith Mangnomek has been appointed Minister of Education and Sports, taking over from Phouth Simmalavong, who retired. Phoxay Sayasone, previously Minister of Energy and Mines, now leads the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, while his predecessor, Baykham Khattiya, has been named Minister of Health following the retirement of Bounfeng Phoummalaysith. In the agricultural sector,

Linkham Duangsavanh, former Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, now heads the newly established Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, created by merging the agriculture and environment portfolios.

The reshuffle is accompanied by significant structural reforms. The Ministry of Planning and Investment has been merged with the Ministry of Finance, which continues under the leadership of Santiphab Phomvihane. The Ministry of Home Affairs has been dissolved, with its former minister, Vilayvong Bouddakham, reassigned to the Organisation and Personnel Committee of the Party Central Committee. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Energy and Mines has been absorbed into the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, which remains under Malaythong Kommasith.

This sweeping reorganization comes as the current administration nears the end of its five-year term (2021–2025), paving the way for the next government. It also sets the stage for the 9th Ordinary Session of the 9th Legislature of the National Assembly, scheduled to begin on 9 June. During the session, lawmakers are expected to assess progress on the 2025 socio-economic development plan, identify priorities for the final year of the current term, and initiate discussions on the draft plan for 2026 to 2030. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Four-Point strategy to tackle power shortages announced

(dql) In an effort to address persistent electricity shortages, the Lao government has announced four key strategies to accelerate domestic power generation. Speaking at a National Assembly session on 9 June, Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone outlined the first priority: completing the Nam Ngum 3 Hydropower Plant. The state-owned project, led by Electricité du Laos (EDL), is over 80 percent complete and is expected to begin operations in early 2027, with domestic funding ensuring it remains on schedule.

The second strategy promotes large-scale solar power development. Twelve projects with a total capacity of 650 MW are currently underway.

The third initiative encourages the installation of small-scale solar projects under 5 MW to address localized power shortages and enhance grid stability in underserved areas.

The final measure involves monitoring and advancing existing hydropower and other energy projects with

signed power purchase agreements to ensure their timely completion.

Despite its status as the “battery of Asia” due to extensive hydropower exports, Laos continues to face domestic energy challenges. In 2024, electricity exports remained the country’s top export earner, generating nearly USD 980 million and accounting for 15.35 percent of total exports, according to the Department of Foreign Trade. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Draft five-year economic plan targets annual 5 percent economic growth 2026-2030

(dql) An annual economic growth of at least 5 percent from 2026 to 2030 is the key target set in Laos’ draft 10th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan. The plan reflects the government’s confidence in sustained economic recovery despite global and domestic challenges to support the country’s graduation from the least developed country status by 2026.

Following years of economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and global conflicts, Laos is showing signs of improvement. In May 2025, inflation dropped to 8.3 percent, the first single-digit figure since May 2022, alongside rising revenues and growth in agriculture, processing, mining, tourism, exports, and services.

To sustain recovery, the plan has identified key growth sectors: energy, agriculture, mining, logistics, tourism, industrial processing, and the digital economy. Energy diversification is a priority, including exploration of nuclear power alongside hydropower, wind, solar, and biomass, to ensure energy security and enable exports.

Infrastructure development is also central, with plans to improve transport links with China and Vietnam and build new railways to seaports in Vietnam and Cambodia to boost industry and tourism. The plan also includes enhancing digital infrastructure and public services to support the digital economy. Further priorities include investment in human resources, focusing on improving education and reducing dropout rates. [Lao News Agency] [Business Today]

Malaysia: High court rejects prime minister's bid to refer immunity questions to federal court

(tl) The High Court has dismissed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's request to refer eight constitutional questions—including whether a sitting Prime Minister enjoys immunity from lawsuits—to the Federal Court. These questions arose in connection with a lawsuit filed by Anwar's former research assistant, Muhammed Yusoff Rawther, over an alleged sexual assault that took place seven years ago.

In May, Anwar submitted an application asking the High Court, which is currently presiding over the case, to refer the constitutional questions for determination by the Federal Court.

However, Judge Roz Mawar Rozain ruled that the constitutional provisions cited by Anwar's legal team did not raise any genuine constitutional issue warranting referral to the higher court. She noted that Articles 39, 40, and 43 of the Federal Constitution address executive authority but do not confer personal immunity on the prime minister. The judge further emphasized that the Constitution does not provide, either expressly or implicitly, protection from civil liability for the head of government, thereby affirming the principle of equal legal accountability. As a result, she deemed the application speculative and unnecessary for the resolution of the case. [Malay Mail 1]

In response to the ruling, Anwar clarified that his application was not intended to seek personal immunity or evade legal scrutiny. Rather, he stressed that the move was aimed at safeguarding the integrity of the constitutional system by preventing litigation that could be politically motivated or strategically timed to disrupt the functioning of government. [Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia: New cooperative law to be tabled in parliament by December 2025

(ga) A new law to replace Malaysia's Cooperative Act 1993 (Act 502) is scheduled to be tabled in Parliament this December, with enforcement targeted by July 2026. The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives is introducing the new act to enhance the effectiveness of cooperatives as business entities and their role in driving the national economy.

According to Secretary-General Khairul Dzaimee Daud, the proposed legislation aims to liberalize the cooperative sector by reducing regulatory oversight and providing greater operational flexibility. The second reading of the bill is expected during the 2026 parliamentary session in March or April. The Cabinet approved the draft in principle on January 8. Stakeholder engagement with state governments is ongoing to ensure smooth implementation.

The act is designed to promote dynamic cooperative governance, improve community welfare, and facilitate business operations. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Minister Tengku Zafrul denies by-election plans

(tl) Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz has dismissed speculation that his departure from the conservative, center-right United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and application to join the center-left People Justice Party (PKR) is linked to plans for a by-election

He affirmed his commitment to serving in the Dewan Negara (Senate) until December 2025. He also said that any decision degrading the ministerial post rests with Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. [Malay Mail]

UMNO is one of Malaysia's oldest and most influential political parties, established in 1946 and it was the leading party in the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition. PKR is one of the leading parties of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition.

Malaysia: Sarawak court rejects Petronas's bid to delay hearing in legal dispute with Petros

(tl) The Sarawak High Court has dismissed two applications by Petronas (the national gas company) seeking to delay the upcoming trial in a lawsuit filed by Petroleum Sarawak Berhad (Petros), the state's gas aggregator. Judicial Commissioner Faridz Gohim Abdullah ruled there were no special grounds to justify a stay or postponement and confirmed that the case will proceed on June 11.

Petros is challenging Petronas's use of MYR7.95 million (USD 1.67 million) from a bank guarantee, claiming the demand was unlawful and unjust. The dispute

originated from Petronas' demand in October 2024 for over MYR 28 million (approximately USD 5.9 million) in gas supply payments. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Petronas cuts over 10 percent of workforce

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has responded to concerns over Petronas' recent decision to cut approximately 5,000 jobs, clarifying that many of the affected positions were held by contract staff rather than permanent employees.

The move follows a Bloomberg report stating Petronas, Malaysia's state-owned oil and gas company, will slash around 10 percent of its workforce due to falling oil prices. Petronas announced that the company will also freeze hiring and promotions until the end of 2026. [Malay Mail]

Later, Deputy Prime Minister Fadillah Yusof clarified that the decision to cut over jobs and promotions is due to the global oil prices, not the appointment of Petros as Sarawak's sole gas aggregator. [The Borneo Post]

On the other hand, former law minister Zaid Ibrahim has criticized Umno Youth's call for a full audit of Petronas, saying the focus should instead be on broader issues affecting the national oil company and Malaysia's long-term energy strategy.

Umno Youth had earlier demanded a public audit of Petronas following its announcement to cut around 5,000 jobs due to the falling crude oil prices, citing the need for transparency in light of such a major decision. [Free Malaysia Today]

Umno Youth (Pergerakan Pemuda UMNO) is the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), one of Malaysia's oldest and most influential political parties.

Malaysia: Major drug syndicate busted

(tl) Selangor police successfully dismantled the Alstonia Gang, a drug trafficking syndicate operating around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, arresting nine suspects and seizing drugs worth over USD 1.08 million in a series of five raids on June 3.

The gang, active for the past eight months, was led by a local e-hailing driver and his foreign partner. The group targeted entertainment centers around Klang valley to sell drugs in person as well as online platforms.

Police uncovered significant quantities of MDMA, ecstasy, ketamine, Erimin 5 pills, and drug-laced vape juice across multiple raid locations in Bukit Jalil, Semenyih, Puchong, and Kajang. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Kelantan state police increase undercover units to tackle cross-border crime

(ga) The Kelantan police will increase the deployment of undercover intelligence officers along the Malaysia-Thailand border to address ongoing cross-border crime, citing operational gaps despite existing security measures.

Kelantan Police Chief Mohd Yusoff Mamat announced that a strategy shift involving plainclothes intelligence personnel from both the police and General Operations Force (GOF) will be implemented to enhance surveillance and deterrence. The plan will be discussed in an upcoming meeting with GOF Southeast Brigade Commander Nik Ros Azhan.

The 136-kilometer border, including 91 kilometers under Kelantan police jurisdiction, presents monitoring challenges due to wide distances between GOF control posts, which can span two to three kilometers. [Bernama]

Myanmar: Junta plans election in up to 267 townships

(anl/nj) The Union Election Commission (UEC) has announced plans to hold elections in 267 of the country's 330 townships, scheduled for December or January. The UEC stated that both first-past-the-post and proportional representation systems will be used, alongside electronic voting.

So far, 54 political parties have been approved to contest the election. However, only a few—including the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the National Unity Party, the Shan and Nationalities Democratic Party, and the People's Pioneer Party—are fielding candidates nationwide.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has reiterated his commitment to holding elections but has yet to confirm an exact date. Meanwhile, the civilian National Unity Government (NUG) claims that anti-regime groups control approximately 144 townships, with ongoing conflict in another 79, raising doubts about the feasibility of conducting a nationwide vote. [Irrawaddy]

Meanwhile, according to *BBC*, military insiders have leaked that Min Aung Hlaing is beginning to select senior officers to run in the upcoming elections while preparing younger officers to assume military leadership. The article suggests that if enough senior military officers loyal to him are elected to parliament, he will have a clear path to the presidency.

According to the Constitution, three vice-presidential candidates are nominated by the Lower House (*Pyithu Hluttaw*), the Upper House (*Amyotha Hluttaw*), and the military-appointed bloc. One of them is then elected President. If General Min Aung Hlaing controls enough parliamentary seats, his appointees could facilitate his path to the presidency.

Reportedly, a list of potential successors as Commander-in-Chief already exists, along with a general idea of who will be hand-picked to enter the parliamentary race. [BBC]

However, some critics argue that the junta's election plans are logistically unfeasible due to sustained armed resistance, loss of territorial control, and lack of control over border areas. They suggest that the election is merely an empty promise by the military regime. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Economist Zaw Oo appointed as director of Central Bank

(anl) The military regime has appointed economist Dr. Zaw Oo as director of the Central Bank. Zaw Oo is a member of the Myanmar Narrative Think Tank, which has organized economic forums in Naypyitaw, including discussions on post-earthquake recovery and the Myanmar Beyond 2025 event.

These gatherings, attended by foreign diplomats and international advisers, have provided junta chief Min Aung Hlaing with a platform to present himself as a civilian leader and promote the regime's policy narratives.

Zaw Oo also serves on an advisory board tasked with reforming the defunct Myanmar Development Institute, which was originally established by the ousted National League for Democracy government and previously led by jailed economist Sean Turnell.

Additionally, he heads the Center for Economic and Social Development and is the managing director of Bower Group Asia's Myanmar office. A former student activist and member of the exiled National Coalition Government, Zaw Oo later advised the Thein Sein administration from 2012 to 2016. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: NUG warns junta's Russia-backed nuclear project poses regional security threat

(nf) The National Unity Government (NUG) has strongly warned against the Myanmar junta-supported nuclear power plant, saying it is a serious threat not just to Myanmar's stability and security in the long run but also to the wider Southeast Asian region.

In a recent press conference, the NUG condemned the junta's deal with Russia to build a small modular nuclear reactor as a reckless and selfish attempt by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to hold onto power. The proposed reactor, set at 110 megawatts initially and expandable to 330 megawatts, could be built in central Bago Region or the Dawei Special Economic Zone in Tanintharyi Region—both close to conflict areas.

The Karen National Union (KNU), which is itself currently battling junta troops in Tanintharyi, also joined the debate with a statement, saying that a nuclear facility close to the Thai border would put civilians on both sides at risk. [Burmese News International]

Myanmar: Brotherhood Alliance extends ceasefire for earthquake relief amid ongoing military strikes

(anl) Myanmar's Three Brotherhood Alliance, consisting of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Arakan Army (AA), announced on June 2 the third extension of its unilateral ceasefire, lasting until the end of June, to support post-earthquake humanitarian relief efforts in affected regions.

The statement emphasized that the extension was necessary to provide more time for ongoing relief activities, as the region has faced significant challenges following the earthquake and heavy rains, which exacerbated the damage and delayed relief operations. The ceasefire, initially declared for April and May, was extended due to the scale of devastation. This extension followed a similar move by Myanmar's military junta, which also announced a one-month ceasefire from 1 to 30 June.

Despite these ceasefires, tensions remain high. The day after the junta's announcement, June 1, the military conducted airstrikes in Singu Township, Mandalay Region, and hit a school in Thabeikkyin Township. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta seeks retake of strategic base and town

(nf/nj) Myanmar's regime is mobilizing for a new attack to retake the Thingannyinaung operations base and three surrounding battalions protecting the key border trade town of Myawaddy in Karen State. Around 700 troops, including soldiers from the 44th Light Infantry Division and those who previously fled to Thailand during recent assaults by the resistance forces, are regrouping at Infantry Battalion 275, just 8 kilometers from the target.

The base, taken by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied forces in March and April, has been a priority since the junta's last Operation Aung Zeya was unable to recapture it.

The recent junta actions include a three-day artillery bombardment and increased air patrols over Myawaddy, though resistance shelling has stalled attacks. Junta troops can only advance along the main highway, which remains open to civilians, according to local resistance fighters, as secondary roads have been cut. Morale is reported to be low, and any advance may be met with fierce resistance and the threat of ambushes. [Irrawaddy News]

Junta pushes to retake northern Shan State despite ceasefire

In a separate move, the military junta is advancing into Nawnghkio Township in northern Shan State. The area is controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), an anti-regime ethnic armed organization (EAO) and member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, which

has also declared a unilateral ceasefire this month to facilitate humanitarian aid.

The TNLA took control of the area in October 2023, in which a series of surprise attacks by revolutionary groups seized vast amounts of territory from the regime. Most of northern Shan State remains under the control of anti-junta EAOs.

Nawnghkio is strategically located along the Mandalay–Lashio–Muse trade route, a key corridor for cross-border trade with China. Junta forces are advancing along this route and the Lawksawk–Kyawkku–Nawnghkio road, engaging the TNLA in clashes across 13 villages along the way. According to a spokesperson from the TNLA, China has applied significant pressure to the group to stop fighting the regime, which has allowed the junta to make gains in its counteroffensive.

China has closed off cross-border flows to areas controlled by EAOs in the northern Shan State, which has negatively impacted the region. Residents have began to flee the area in preparation for the ensuing attack, taking refuge in Hsipaw, Mongyai, and Lashio.

The TNLA plans to attend China-brokered peace talks with the regime in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China in August in hopes to alleviate the burden on the civilian population. [The Irrawaddy] [The Irrawaddy 2]

Myanmar: Arakan Army forces close in on junta's last stronghold at Nat Yay Kan Base

(anl) Local sources report that the Arakan Army (AA) and allied forces are closing in on the last remaining junta stronghold along the Ann–Padan road, which links Rakhine State with Myanmar's Magwe Region. The strategic military base on Nat Yay Kan Mountain, rising to 1,587 meters, serves as a key artillery and air defense hub for the regime. Its elevated position provides a commanding view over Padan Town in Magwe's Ngape Township, making it a crucial military asset.

On June 3, resistance forces seized the final junta outpost guarding the base—an MPT telecom tower. According to locals and resistance sources, around 500 junta troops, including those who fled the tower, have regrouped at the main base.

The Nat Yay Kan base is the junta's last major stronghold in the area; if it falls, AA-led forces would gain strategic control over Padan, which hosts Artillery

Battalion Headquarters 905 and three artillery battalions.

AA-led forces began advancing along the Ann–Padan road in January, following their capture of Ann town and the Western Command headquarters in December. Since then, they have overrun several junta outposts defending Nat Yay Kan base. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta troops suffer casualties and lose territory against Karenni Army

(nj) According to the Karenni Army adjutant-general Colonel Phone Naing, resistance forces are preparing to "liberate" Bawlakhe Township in Kayah State from junta control. They have already captured two junta outposts on the outskirts of the town. Colonel Phone Naing reported that the operation killed 20 junta soldiers and resulted in the seizure of weapons, ammunition, and artillery; five resistance fighters were also killed. Near the Kayah-Shan border, an hour and a half north of Bawlakhe Township, Karenni forces attacked junta troops and seized 10 weapons.

Three junta Light Infantry Batallions are based inside Bawlakhe Township with additional troops deployed along the Bawlakhe-Ywathit road. The Myanmar military and the Pa-O National Army, a state-sponsored militia, have clashed multiple times with the Karenni Army near the southern Shan State border, as the regime attempts to retake Moebye. Over 60 junta soldiers were reportedly killed in clashes with Karenni resistance groups in March alone. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta airstrikes hit schools and public buildings

(nj/anl) Several reports indicate that the military junta has targeted schools and public buildings across the country in its air strike campaign, despite having declared a ceasefire for the month of June.

On June 5, a monastery was struck in Kyet Yoe Pin Village, Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Region, killing one monk. That same day in Magway Region, the junta bombed Nyaung Kan Village in Saw Township, killing three civilians. In both instances, no prior clashes had occurred leading up to the airstrikes.

On June 6 in Sagaing Region, a school in Min Taing Pin Village, Pale Township, was hit by an aerial bomb, killing one civilian and injuring six.

On June 7 in Rakhine State, schools used as shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kyauk Gyi and Pu Zun Hpay Villages, Thandwe Township, were bombed. Four IDPs were killed, 10 injured, and the school was damaged. The same day, an airstrike on Kyauk Aing Village, Thayetchaung Township, Tamintharyia Region, killed two civilians, a father and son. [AAPP 1]

On June 9 in Kayin State, air strikes in Paing Yat Village, Kawkareik Township, hit a house used as a classroom. A teacher, three children, and an elderly man were killed; 10 others were injured. In Kyaikmaraw Township, Mon State, that same day, a school was reportedly hit by an airstrike, resulting in seven casualties, including children; the exact number of killed and injured has yet to be confirmed. According to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, between June 1–10, 19 citizens have been verifiably killed by the junta, including five children. [AAPP 2] [Chindwin News Agency]

Myanmar: Junta forces accused of detaining and killing displaced civilians in Kyondoe, Kayin State

(anl) Local sources report that junta forces in Kyondoe town, Kawkareik District, Kayin State, have been detaining, and in some cases killing displaced civilians who briefly returned to check on their homes. Between April and May, at least 30 people were reportedly arrested, with some allegedly dying in custody.

A source close to the junta stated that several detainees never returned. On 28 May, a man was arrested upon returning home and was later killed, according to local reports.

Junta troops have conducted strict inspections, searched phones, and prevented some returnees from leaving the town. One resident said people returned only to collect belongings during a lull in fighting but were interrogated and sometimes arrested if they encountered troops.

Residents began fleeing Kyondoe in April due to escalating clashes between junta forces and a coalition of resistance groups, including the Karen National Union (KNU), the People's Defence Force (PDF), and other revolutionary forces.

Since then, the junta has fortified its presence by occupying schools and monasteries, setting up checkpoints, and patrolling in civilian vehicles, often

using plainclothes personnel from the military, police, and Border Guard Force (BGF). [Mizzima]

Philippines: Impeachment trial of Vice President Duterte stalled amid legal and political standoff

(dnb/lm) The Philippine Senate has delayed formally convening as an impeachment court in the case against Vice President Sara Duterte, despite growing pressure to act before the 19th Congress ends on June 30. Duterte was impeached by the House of Representatives—controlled by allies of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.—in February on seven charges, including graft, sedition, and an alleged conspiracy to assassinate the president, first lady, and House Speaker. She has denied all allegations.

Since the House transmitted the articles of impeachment on February 5, two camps have emerged in the Senate. The opposition, led by Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III and Senator Risa Hontiveros, argues the Constitution mandates the Senate to "forthwith proceed" with trial. They claim the four-month delay undermines public trust and risks institutional credibility. On June 9, their motion to immediately convene the chamber as an impeachment court was blocked. [Rappler]

Instead, the Senate took symbolic steps: it referred the charges to the Committee on Rules and administered the oath of Senate President Francis Escudero as presiding officer. Senators are scheduled to take their oaths as senator-judges on June 10. [PhilStar]

Vice President Duterte's allies in the Senate—including former national police chief Senator Ronald dela Rosa and Senate Majority Leader Francis Tolentino—oppose continuing the trial under the current Congress. Dela Rosa, a longtime Duterte loyalist and key figure in former President Rodrigo Duterte's controversial drug war, has drafted a resolution arguing that the Senate breached a 100-day deadline to act and that the case should be considered lapsed with the close of the 19th Congress. Similarly, Tolentino, a former legal adviser to Duterte and one of his political allies, has filed a resolution proposing a 19-day trial schedule from June 11 to June 30, aimed at resolving the case before the congressional term ends. [Reuters] [The Inquirer] [The Manila Times]

Critics—including incoming lawmaker and House prosecutor Leila de Lima—say the timeline is both unrealistic and likely to violate due process.

The impeachment proceedings come amid escalating tensions between the Marcos and Duterte camps following a breakdown of their 2022 electoral alliance. Recent polling shows 78 percent of Filipinos support Duterte participating in a trial to defend herself, suggesting the issue has significant political resonance. [The Manila Times 1]

Whether the impeachment court will be convened in time to hold a trial remains uncertain. If the Senate fails to proceed before Congress adjourns sine die on June 13, or conclude a trial before June 30, the issue may provoke a constitutional challenge regarding carryover into the 20th Congress.

Philippines: Senate ban formalizes crackdown on offshore gaming industry linked to state abuse and organized crime

(lm) The Philippine Senate has passed the Anti-POGO Act of 2025, enacting a nationwide ban on all forms of offshore gaming and reinforcing an institutional campaign against Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs). The law outlaws offshore gambling, strips the state gaming regulator of licensing powers, mandates asset forfeiture, and imposes fines of up to PHP 50 million (USD 896,000) and prison terms of up to twelve years. Foreign offenders face deportation, and all seized equipment is to be destroyed. The measure codifies a 2024 executive order issued by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and reflects the administration's effort to dismantle politically protected criminal infrastructures tied to the previous government. [Asia Gaming Brief]

This legislative move is part of a wider campaign against criminal activities linked to POGOs. A powerful quad committee of the House of Representatives—comprising the public order, human rights, dangerous drugs, and public accounts committees—concluded a months-long investigation in June, presenting findings it described as "systematic, documented, and damning." Lawmakers alleged that POGOs, originally legitimized under former President Rodrigo Duterte in 2017, had evolved into platforms for money laundering, crypto fraud, identity theft, torture, and murder. These operations reportedly relied on corporate fronts, nominee shareholders, and corrupt protections from within state institutions.

The committee also found that the Duterte-era drug war fostered extrajudicial killings (EJKs), incentivized through an informal system of rewards and promotions for police officers who killed alleged drug

offenders. While official Philippine National Police records cite 7,640 deaths from 2016 to 2022, human rights groups estimate as many as 30,000. Lawmakers stressed that the pattern of state-sponsored abuse was corroborated by sworn testimonies, government documents, and financial records.

To address the fallout, lawmakers proposed five bills: one criminalizing extrajudicial killings as heinous crimes; a second enforcing the POGO ban; a third enabling the civil forfeiture of land unlawfully owned by foreign nationals; a fourth allowing the cancellation of fraudulently obtained birth certificates; and a fifth criminalizing conspiracies to commit espionage. [The Inquirer]

Amid the proceedings, lawmakers lifted contempt and detention orders against five individuals—including former presidential spokesperson Harry Roque, who also served as legal adviser to a POGO operator; his spouse; a former police chief; and a Chinese national who served as Duterte's economic adviser. Several individuals, however, remain under criminal investigation. Roque is wanted on non-bailable human trafficking charges and is reportedly seeking asylum in the Netherlands. Lawmakers also cited his failure to comply with subpoenas and questioned the rapid growth of his company's assets, which were allegedly tied to illegal gaming activity. His wife was also implicated for leasing properties used in offshore operations. [PhilStar 1]

Parallel to these legislative and investigatory efforts, Immigration Commissioner Joel Anthony Viado has come under scrutiny following allegations from anonymous whistleblowers within the Bureau of Immigration. The whistleblowers accused Viado of obstructing deportations, issuing expedited release orders for detained POGO executives, and selling quota visas to Chinese nationals. A letter reportedly sent directly to President Marcos accused Viado of compromising deportation operations, including a February 2025 case in which ten Vietnamese nationals escaped custody during a mismanaged repatriation process.

Viado, who replaced former Commissioner Norman Tansingco in October 2024, has denied all charges, calling them part of an "orchestrated and well-funded campaign" to derail reforms. He suggested that the smear campaign may have been triggered by his refusal to release a Chinese national with ties to a politically influential figure from the previous administration. The Department of Justice has declined to investigate the matter, citing the lack of verifiable evidence. [PhilStar 2] [Rappler]

At the operational level, authorities remain overwhelmed by the aftermath of the POGO ban. According to the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission, approximately 9,000 undocumented former POGO workers—many stripped of their passports—remain unaccounted for. With overcrowded detention centers, weak inter-agency coordination, and slow foreign embassy responses, enforcement actions have largely stalled. Officials warn that the failure to address this situation could escalate into a national security concern. [PhilStar 3]

Philippines: ICC hands over new evidence in Duterte case as U.S. sanctions judges handling proceedings

(lm/dnb) The International Criminal Court (ICC) has submitted 219 new items of evidence to the defense team of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte in its case concerning alleged crimes against humanity committed during his 2016–2022 anti-drug campaign. The newly disclosed materials—90 items on May 23 and 129 on May 30—include both directly incriminating evidence and contextual records grouped thematically. Prosecutors aim to demonstrate that extrajudicial killings carried out during so-called Barangay Clearance Operations—in which village-level (barangay) officials collaborated with police to identify suspected drug offenders—were not only widespread and systematic but also directed or tolerated by Duterte under doctrines of command responsibility and state policy coordination.

The upcoming confirmation of charges hearing on September 23 will determine whether the case proceeds to trial. Duterte, who was arrested on March 12, 2025, remains in ICC custody in The Hague. [The Inquirer 1] [The Manila Times]

Meanwhile, an assistant to counsel representing victims' families, dismissed claims by Duterte's supporters that the ICC's ongoing call for victim participation reflects weak evidence. She clarified that the invitation—open until August 3, 2025—is part of the ICC's distinct procedural framework and not linked to the prosecutor's evidentiary process. Victims participating in ICC proceedings may submit views, express concerns, and seek reparations if a conviction is reached, though this is separate from appearing as witnesses. [PhilStar]

In a related development, the United States has imposed sanctions on four ICC judges in response to the Court's issuance of an arrest warrant for Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Among the targeted judges is Reine Alapini-Gansou, who serves on the pre-trial panel in Duterte's case. The ICC condemned the U.S. measures as a direct assault on judicial independence and an attempt to undermine its mandate. [The Inquirer 2]

Philippines: House approves term extension for local leaders and postpones 2025 elections

(lm) The Philippine House of Representatives has approved House Bill No. 11287, which proposes to amend the Local Government Code to extend the term of elected barangay officials—the heads of the country's smallest administrative units—and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials, who represent youth in local governance—from three to six years. The bill also calls for the postponement of the 2025 barangay and SK elections to May 2029.

Under the proposed law, these officials would be eligible for one reelection, allowing them to remain in office for up to 12 consecutive years if re-elected in 2029. Supporters argue the measure will enhance leadership continuity, provide more time to implement community programs effectively, and minimize political disruptions at the grassroots level.

However, the proposal has drawn criticism from political observers and some lawmakers, who argue that extending terms could weaken electoral accountability and potentially entrench local political dynasties. Critics also note that national lawmakers are bound to three-year terms, questioning the justification for longer terms at the local level.

A parallel bill passed in the Senate earlier this year proposes a four-year term, with elections held every four years starting in 2027. The two chambers must now reconcile these differences in a bicameral conference. [The Inquirer] [Rappler]

Philippines: President Marcos retains majority of Cabinet following midterm election call for resignations

(dnb) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has retained the majority of his Cabinet members following his earlier call for a "bold reset" in the wake of his camp's underperformance in the 2025 midterm

elections. The President had requested the courtesy resignations of all Cabinet secretaries and agency heads, but ultimately accepted only a limited number.

According to Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, a total of 21 Cabinet officials and senior agency heads were retained. These include the Secretaries of Agriculture, Agrarian Reform, Education, Labor, Social Welfare, Health, Migrant Workers, Science and Technology, Tourism, Information and Communications Technology, Transport, and Public Works and Highways. The heads of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, Bureau of Customs, and the Treasury were also among those confirmed to remain in office.

Six resignations or replacements were confirmed, including Chair Meynardo Sabili of the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor, Presidential Assistant for the Visayas Terence Calatrava, Presidential Assistant on Muslim Affairs Almarim Tillah, and Presidential Adviser for Special Concerns Menandro Espinelli.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo will remain in his post until Congress confirms his appointment as the Philippines' permanent representative to the United Nations. Performance reviews for undersecretaries and other senior officials are ongoing, and further changes have not been ruled out. [Reuters] [The Star] [Presidential Communications Office]

Philippines: Marcos appoints Court Administrator Villanueva as new Supreme Court justice

(dnb/lm) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has appointed Court Administrator Raul Villanueva as the newest Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, marking his first appointment to the 15-member High Court. Villanueva replaces Justice Mario Lopez, who retired on June 4 after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70.

Villanueva was selected from a shortlist of eleven candidates forwarded by the Judicial and Bar Council, which included senior Court of Appeals justices and high-ranking legal academics. His appointment adds a career jurist with technocratic experience to a bench largely composed of Duterte-era appointees—12 of the 15 sitting justices, including Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, were named by former President Rodrigo Duterte. [The Inquirer] [Rappler]

Philippines: Court clears abducted environmental activists of defamation charges

(lm) A local court in Bulacan—a province north of Metro Manila—has dismissed defamation charges against two environmental activists who were abducted in September 2023 while opposing a reclamation project in Bataan, a coastal province west of Manila known for its ecological zones and World War II history. The charges were filed by a Philippine Army officer after the activists publicly accused the military of detaining them.

The court ruling followed the Philippine Supreme Court's earlier grant of writs of amparo and a temporary protection order, which found credible indications of enforced disappearance. During a military-arranged press conference, the activists diverged from an agreed narrative and accused the armed forces of abduction—statements that formed the basis of the defamation case filed by the commander of the 70th Infantry Battalion.

The court found no malice in the statements, citing findings by both the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals that were not contested by the Department of Justice. The court concluded that the facts alleged in the criminal charges did not constitute an offense.

The case has drawn attention to a broader pattern of "red-tagging"—labeling activists as communist insurgents—and military pressure on civil society actors. It has also led United Nations special rapporteurs to call for the abolition of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), a government body criticized for suppressing dissent. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has not yet responded to these recommendations. [Rappler]

Philippines: Drug war probe stalled despite police chief's outreach to human rights commission

(jm) Despite a high-profile visit by the new Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in early June—framed as a gesture to strengthen cooperation—CHR officials say police authorities continue to obstruct their investigations

into thousands of drug-related killings under former President Rodrigo Duterte's administration.

On June 9, CHR Chairperson Richard Palpal-latoc told lawmakers that the PNP is still refusing to share information in more than 4,000 cases the CHR has investigated on its own initiative. He cited a pattern of non-cooperation ranging from lack of clearance to outright refusal, undermining the CHR's capacity to investigate extrajudicial killings and assess accountability.

The Commission's probe is widely regarded as the most independent and credible domestic investigation into abuses linked to Duterte's anti-drug campaign, which remains under scrutiny by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The PNP has long justified its resistance by citing internal directives and legal exemptions.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) also raised similar concerns during the same hearing, reporting that 32 of 52 showcase cases were closed without prosecution due to lack of evidence and limited access to crime scenes. NBI officials said they were denied forensic reports and data on weapons used, and that victims' families were reluctant to cooperate due to fear and disillusionment. [Rappler]

The PNP, however, is now attempting to reframe its engagement with oversight bodies. The new police chief's visit to the CHR headquarters—the first by a sitting chief—was meant to promote transparency and mend what has long been seen as a strained institutional relationship. The meeting came in response to CHR criticism of a recent directive by Chief Nicolas Torre III to include drug-related arrests as a performance metric—raising fears of a return to quota-like incentives reminiscent of the Duterte-era campaign.

To ease those concerns, the PNP invited CHR representatives to join patrols and observe arrest procedures. Both sides emphasized the need for better information-sharing and formalized protocols for cooperation. However, human rights advocates remain skeptical, noting that the persistent obstruction of investigations suggests that systemic resistance inside the police institution remains unaddressed. [The Inquirer] [PhilStar] [Philippine News Agency]

Philippines: Recent efforts to step up fair and safe work in the blue economy

(dnb) The Philippines has launched a new phase of the 'Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia: Safe Migration for Decent Work in the Blue Economy Program,' a regional initiative aimed at promoting safe migration practices and decent work within Southeast Asia's fish and seafood supply chain. The program is funded by the EU and implemented with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It seeks to address human and labor rights violations affecting migrants within the sector.

On June 4, key stakeholders gathered in Manila to approve the national work plan for 2025-2028 and outline the next steps for project implementation. In the Philippines, the program will provide technical assistance to manning agencies, including the development of fair recruitment guidelines and support for due diligence measures. This will be done in collaboration with the Licensed Manning Agencies for Fishers, an industry association representing recruitment agencies deploying Filipino fishers overseas.

The 2025-2028 work plan focuses on four strategic objectives: strengthening cooperation on labor migration, developing ASEAN-level labor inspection guidance, reinforcing national legal and policy frameworks, and promoting responsible business practices. It also aims to empower migrant workers and their communities through legal aid, financial literacy, reintegration support, and collective bargaining. [ILO] [Human Resources Online]

Philippines: OpenAI bans local accounts behind pro-Marcos, anti-Duterte AI campaign

(lm) OpenAI has banned several ChatGPT accounts in the Philippines found to be part of a coordinated influence operation promoting President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and attacking Vice President Sara Duterte. The comments—typically short, partisan, and written in English or Taglish—were posted to Facebook and TikTok by inauthentic accounts with little to no following.

According to OpenAI's June 5 report, a Makati-based public relations firm was behind the campaign, which it dubbed "Operation High Five." ChatGPT was reportedly used to analyze political content, generate hundreds of comments aligned with pro-Marcos themes, and produce PR materials and data summaries. The

operation centered on five TikTok channels created to amplify the administration's agenda.

Although OpenAI assessed the operation as low-impact, it noted deliberate attempts to flood comment sections and artificially boost engagement. It emphasized that most of the AI-generated content received little interaction, and platforms like Facebook and TikTok prohibit such coordinated inauthentic behavior. [The Inquirer]

Philippines: UN flags climate action setbacks despite progress toward upper middle-income status

(lm) The Philippines is nearing upper middle-income classification, according to a new progress report by the United Nations and the Philippine government, but continues to fall behind on key climate action targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the country has made advances in many SDG areas, climate action (SDG 13) has regressed by 3.8 percent since 2015. Additional setbacks were recorded in sustainable communities and public health—two sectors closely linked to climate vulnerability.

The regression in climate action is partly attributed to limited data indicators, with current measurements largely tied to disaster-related deaths and disaster risk reduction strategies. According to UN officials, these metrics are highly sensitive to external shocks, such as the increasing frequency and intensity of typhoons.

The Philippines spent USD 10.7 million of its USD 14.5 million climate budget in 2024 and allocated USD 25.7 million out of a USD 39.4 million fund for broader environmental protection. Nonetheless, funding remains inadequate for a country regularly hit by extreme weather events. The UN and local analysts warn that climate change could undermine recent economic progress and exacerbate inequality, particularly in urban areas such as Luzon, which, despite lower poverty levels, remain highly exposed to flooding and other environmental risks. [Rappler]

Philippines: PHP 200 wage hike bill advances amid legislative friction and economic caution

(dnb) The Philippine House of Representatives has approved a bill raising the private sector's daily

minimum wage by PHP 200 (USD 3.40), amounting to a 25 to 50 percent increase depending on the region. The proposal must now be reconciled with a Senate version passed earlier that suggests a more moderate PHP 100 (USD 1.79) increase. A bicameral conference is required before Congress adjourns sine die on June 13. [The Manila Times 1] [The Manila Times 2]

The measure has drawn firm opposition from major business groups, including the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP), which warned of inflationary pressure and the potential impact on small and medium-sized enterprises. Instead of across-the-board wage hikes, MAP proposed alternatives such as employer assumption of workers' contributions to state benefit systems and profit-sharing arrangements. [Rappler]

Labor groups have backed the House version, arguing that existing regional wage boards have failed to deliver meaningful improvements. However, informal sector workers remain excluded from the bill, a point raised by critics concerned about equitable impact. [Manila Bulletin]

The Marcos administration has not yet indicated whether it will certify or sign the bill, though senators have warned that the larger wage hike risks a presidential veto. They argue that the Senate's version better balances labor demands with the economic concerns of employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

House Deputy Speaker Raymond Mendoza, however, defended the PHP 200 increase as a product of years of consultation and public hearings. He criticized what he described as "lazy economics" that relies on low labor costs to attract investment, and called on the Senate not to deny workers "this much-needed reprieve." Mendoza emphasized that business doomsday scenarios had been consistently refuted in the legislative process. [The Inquirer]

Philippines: Inflation eases further, but food prices remain volatile

(dnb) The Philippines' inflation rate eased to 1.3 percent in May 2025, down from 1.4 percent in April, in line with the central bank's projected range of 0.9 to 1.7 percent. This downward movement brings the year-to-date inflation marginally below the government's official target range of 2 to 4 percent.

According to authorities, the decline is primarily driven by a slower increase in the costs of housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels. However, the overall improvement was offset by renewed volatility in food prices. Food inflation, which had held steady at 0.7 percent in April, surged to 6.1 percent in May. The main drivers of this spike were increases in the prices of meat, fish, and dairy products—key staples in the average Filipino household's consumption basket. [GMA News Online] [The Inquirer]

Philippines: Environment department to allow private firms to develop and reforest government land

(lm) The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of the Philippines is set to launch a new reforestation initiative that will allow private companies to develop and reforest 1.2 million hectares of public land—an area nearly twice the size of Switzerland.

Under the program, participating agriculture, timber, energy, and eco-tourism companies will be required to reforest at least half of the land they use. DENR officials argue that state-led reforestation alone cannot meet the country's targets, and that private investment will help accelerate progress while generating sustainable economic activity.

The initiative is part of the National Greening Program, the country's flagship reforestation campaign, which aims to rehabilitate 7.1 million hectares of degraded land by 2028. [Rappler]

Philippines: Government places follow-up order for 12 additional light combat aircraft

(dnb) The Philippine government has placed a follow-on order for 12 additional FA-50PH light combat aircraft from Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), valued at USD 700 million, with deliveries expected by 2030.

The Philippine Air Force currently operates 11 FA-50 aircraft, following the loss of one unit in a crash earlier this year. The newly ordered aircraft are upgraded variants and will feature significant capability enhancements, including air-to-air refueling systems, advanced electronically scanned array (AESA) radar in place of mechanical radar, and compatibility with

modern air-to-air and air-to-ground precision munitions.[Alarabiya English] [Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter] [Flight Global]

Singapore: Government targets abusive debt consultants with proposed law reforms

(lm) Singapore's Ministry of Law announced plans to criminalize the solicitation of bankruptcy applications by debt consultancy firms accused of exploiting the Debt Repayment Scheme (DRS). The move follows a rising trend of firms encouraging individuals to self-petition for bankruptcy—not to be declared bankrupt, but to access debt discounts under the DRS. These firms reportedly charge high fees and push clients to borrow further to afford their services.

In 2024, 2,928 debtor-filed bankruptcy applications were recorded—59 percent of total cases—marking the fifth consecutive year debtor-initiated filings outnumbered creditor-initiated ones. The DRS, introduced in 2009 and updated in 2020 to raise the eligible unsecured debt ceiling to SGD 150,000 (USD 111,000), is designed to help wage-earning debtors avoid bankruptcy through a supervised repayment plan.

To curb abuse, the ministry proposes making it a criminal offense—with penalties of up to SGD 10,000 (USD 7,400) or three years' jail—for unregulated businesses to encourage bankruptcy applications. Regulated professionals and registered charities would be exempt. Further proposed reforms include introducing new disqualification criteria for the DRS and tightening deadlines for creditor submissions. Public feedback is open until June 27. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Former transport minister released from prison custody under home detention scheme

(lm) Singapore's former transport minister S Iswaran has been released from prison custody after completing his placement under the Home Detention Scheme. Iswaran, who was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment in October 2024, had begun serving his term on October 7 and was transferred to home detention in February 2025. This form of supervised release is granted to inmates who demonstrate good

conduct, typically after serving two-thirds of their sentence.

Iswaran pleaded guilty to four charges under Section 165 of the Penal Code, which prohibits public servants from receiving valuables from individuals with whom they have official dealings. These included gifts from Singapore GP majority shareholder Ong Beng Seng and construction executive Lum Kok Seng. He also admitted to obstructing justice by belatedly reimbursing the cost of a flight. Thirty additional charges were taken into consideration during sentencing. Channel NewsAsia 1]] [The Straits Times]

Meanwhile, property tycoon Ong Beng Seng is set to plead guilty on July 3 in Singapore's State Courts. Ong was charged on October 4, 2024, under Section 165 for abetting a public servant in obtaining gifts and Section 204A for abetting obstruction of justice. His charges stem from facilitating valuable gifts to Iswaran and later aiding in obscuring payment for a SGD 5,700 (USD 4,446) flight during the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau's probe in May 2023.

Ong's initial plea hearing was scheduled for April 2 but was postponed due to his ongoing chemotherapy treatment for bone marrow cancer. His company, Hotel Properties Ltd, confirmed his intention to plead guilty to one charge, while consenting to the other being considered during sentencing. [Channel NewsAsia 2]

Singapore: Former senior minister to become chairman of state-owned investment company

(lm) Singapore's former senior minister Teo Chee Hean will become the next chairman of Temasek Holdings, the state-owned investment company with a global portfolio valued at SGD 389 billion (USD 288 billion) as of March 2024. He will assume the chairmanship on October 9, 2025, following a transitional role as deputy chairman beginning July 1.

Teo, a central figure in Singapore's third-generation political leadership and former deputy prime minister and coordinating minister for national security, is expected to bring strategic insight amid rising geopolitical and economic uncertainty. He will succeed Lim Boon Heng, who has led Temasek for twelve years and is credited with expanding its international reach, strengthening governance practices, and embedding sustainability principles into its operations. Temasek also announced the upcoming retirement of three

long-serving board members as part of broader leadership renewal.

Temasek is a major contributor to the Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC), which funds a significant portion of Singapore's annual budget alongside sovereign wealth fund GIC and the Monetary Authority of Singapore. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: China-linked firm shuts down operations after US sanctions over Iranian oil shipments

(br) A China-linked cargo inspection firm in Singapore has ceased operations and laid off hundreds of employees after US sanctions imposed in May 2025 had a greater-than-expected impact. The firm was among 15 companies blacklisted for helping to obscure the origins of Iranian oil shipped to China.

The sanctions froze the company's bank accounts, preventing it from repatriating revenue or covering expenses, leading to cash flow breakdown, client losses, and operational disruptions. The firm has initiated liquidation, stating that banks have ceased providing services, making it impossible to pay salaries and operational costs.

The firm is a wholly owned subsidiary of a Chinese state-owned enterprise. The US Treasury Department accused it of providing falsified documents to disguise Iranian oil as Malaysian crude and conducting cargo inspections for Sepehr Energy, a front company linked to Iran's military. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore: Record goods and services tax intake in 2024 as customs offences spike

(lm) Singapore Customs collected a record SGD 8.5 billion (USD 6.3 billion) in goods and services tax (GST) in 2024, largely driven by the rise in the GST rate to 9 percent and strong private consumption. This figure, nearly all from imported goods, marks an increase of over SGD 1 billion (USD 740 million) from 2023 and is the highest since tracking began in 2013. Total national GST collection reached SGD 20.6 billion (USD 15.2 billion) for the year.

Alongside revenue growth, enforcement data showed sharp increases in customs offences. Tobacco-related cases surged by nearly 40 percent to over 20,000, while

liquor offences rose more than 80 percent. GST-related violations also climbed modestly to 5,447 cases. [The Straits Times]

Thailand: Government under fire for perceived weak leadership in border dispute with Cambodia

(lm) A border standoff between Thailand and Cambodia has de-escalated following the withdrawal of Cambodian troops from the contested Chong Bok area in Ubon Ratchathani province, where a fatal clash on May 28 had raised fears of military confrontation. While the tactical situation has calmed, the political fallout in Thailand continues to intensify, with the government facing sharp criticism over its perceived weak leadership and failure to assert national sovereignty.

Key accusations center on the civilian leadership's initial reluctance to authorize stronger military or administrative responses. Despite recommendations from Thailand's 2nd Army Region—a key military command responsible for the northeastern border with Cambodia—to temporarily close key border crossings, the government opted instead to emphasize diplomatic channels and negotiations under the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC). This delay in escalation control allowed Cambodian troops—who had reportedly advanced 200 meters into Thai territory—to remain on-site for over a week, digging trenches and triggering nationalist backlash at home.

Amid growing public discontent, rumors of a potential military coup began circulating, prompting Defense Minister Phumtham to publicly dismiss the speculation. He called for restraint and emphasized that the government continues to prioritize diplomacy and intergovernmental cooperation over confrontation. [Bangkok Post 1]

Critics also highlight the political backdrop. Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Paetongtarn's father and the de facto figure behind the ruling Pheu Thai Party, cultivated close ties with former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen during Thaksin's self-imposed exile. Hun Sen notably appointed Thaksin as an economic adviser in 2009 and sheltered him despite outstanding Thai arrest warrants. These longstanding ties have fueled suspicions that the government's subdued posture in the recent border episode may be politically motivated. [Bangkok Post 2]

Against this backdrop, over the weekend, Thailand's National Security Council—a central government body coordinating national defense and security policy—delegated full operational control of all Thai–Cambodian border checkpoints to the Royal Thai Army. Commanders of the Burapha and Suranaree task forces were granted sweeping authority to enforce phased restrictions, including reduced border hours, a ban on gamblers and heavy trucks, and selective closures.

On June 9, the issue tentatively culminated in a formal complaint filed with the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) by political activist Srisuwan Janya. The complaint accuses Prime Minister Paetongtarn and Defense Minister Phumtham Wechayachai of dereliction of duty under Section 1 of the Constitution and Section 119 of the Criminal Code, which relate to failures to protect Thai sovereignty and national security. Srisuwan argued that by allowing foreign troops to remain on Thai territory without taking immediate action, the government may have breached constitutional and criminal provisions. [Thai PBS]

In parallel, Senate Speaker Mongkol Surasajja, joined by dozens of senators, has formally urged Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra to convene a special parliamentary session. The aim is to address the broader territorial dispute, outline the government's response, and allow MPs and senators to debate long-term solutions. Mongkol stressed that while the Cambodian troop repositioning marked a positive tactical step, it did not resolve the underlying issue. He also reaffirmed the Senate's support for peaceful resolution mechanisms but urged the government to uphold its rejection of International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisdiction in the matter.

Meanwhile, the Network of Students and People for Reform of Thailand (NSPRT)—a nationalist civil society group known for its pro-military and anti-establishment positions—has demanded that the Foreign Ministry formally protest Cambodia's actions at the upcoming JBC meeting on June 14. The group also called for a firm reaffirmation of Thai sovereignty over the disputed zones in Ubon Ratchathani and Surin provinces. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Prime Minister signals openness to cabinet reshuffle

(msz) For the first time, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has publicly acknowledged that she is considering a cabinet reshuffle, marking a departure

from earlier denials and signaling a potential shift in intra-coalition dynamics. While she emphasized that no final decisions have been made and that any changes would be discussed with coalition partners, her remarks come amid growing speculation about a reallocation of key ministerial portfolios.

The speculation surrounding a cabinet reshuffle intensified following late May comments by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—Paetongtarn's father and widely regarded as the de facto leader of the Pheu Thai Party—who suggested that the Interior Ministry should revert to Pheu Thai control. The key portfolio is currently held by coalition partner Bhumjaithai Party, led by Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. Thaksin described the ministry as "essential" for policy implementation, prompting conjecture that Digital Economy Minister Prasert Jantararuangtong might replace Anutin—though Prasert has denied receiving any such indication. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

In response, Anutin has repeatedly asserted that Bhumjaithai has not agreed to relinquish the ministry and that no cabinet reallocation has been discussed. He stated that Bhumjaithai entered the coalition by invitation and has consistently fulfilled its duties under the July 2023 agreement, which he insists remains valid. He also denied rumors of alternative political negotiations, clarifying that his recent meeting with United Thai Nation (UTN) officials pertained only to energy policy.

Tensions have been further exacerbated by recent investigations by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) into certain senators allegedly linked to Bhumjaithai. These inquiries have prompted speculation about internal strains within the coalition and even suggestions of possible party dissolution—claims that Bhumjaithai has dismissed.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Phumtham Wechayachai has sought to defuse the political climate, denying that Pheu Thai and Bhumjaithai struck any backdoor deals over cabinet positions during coalition negotiations. He reaffirmed that talks in 2023 focused solely on policy alignment. [Bangkok Post 3]

While senior Pheu Thai figures continue to downplay the immediacy of any reshuffle, Prime Minister Paetongtarn's latest remarks suggest that any eventual cabinet changes may affect not only coalition-held posts but also Pheu Thai ministers, based on internal performance reviews. [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5]

Thailand: Medical Council faces pivotal vote on disciplinary action in ex-prime minister's hospital case

(lm) Thailand's Medical Council (MCT)—the national regulatory body overseeing medical ethics and licensing—is scheduled to hold a decisive meeting on June 12 to vote on whether to uphold disciplinary sanctions against three doctors involved in the controversial hospital transfer of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. A two-thirds majority—at least 47 of the council's 70 members—is required to override a veto issued by Public Health Minister Somsak Thepsuthin, who blocked the council's original resolution.

The MCT had ruled on May 8 that the doctors exaggerated Thaksin's medical condition to justify his immediate and extended transfer from prison to a VIP ward at the Police General Hospital. Thaksin, who returned to Thailand in August 2023 after 15 years in self-imposed exile, was hospitalized just hours into his sentence and remained there for over six months—fueling widespread public suspicion of special treatment and eroding trust in judicial impartiality.

The council's resolution included a license suspension for two doctors and a formal warning for a third. However, Somsak—who is a senior figure in the ruling Pheu Thai Party, widely viewed as led by Thaksin—invoked his authority as the MCT's honorary president to block the sanctions. His veto has triggered sharp criticism from civil society and the medical community. A petition urging the MCT to uphold the original penalties has garnered over 52,000 signatures, including from healthcare professionals and former lawmakers.[Bangkok Post 1]

Somsak has defended his intent to attend the upcoming meeting, insisting he merely seeks to explain his rationale for the veto, not influence the vote. However, critics argue his involvement undermines the independence of the council and politicizes its proceedings. [Bangkok Post 2]

More recently, further controversy has emerged over a Public Health Ministry investigation into leaked group chat messages allegedly linked to MCT members. The messages, reportedly critical of Thaksin, were cited by lawyers for the sanctioned doctors as evidence of bias. However, media reports indicate the messages were not authored by actual council members, raising concerns that the inquiry may be politically motivated

and aimed at weakening the MCT's authority ahead of the vote. [Bangkok Post 3] [Thai PBS]

Thailand: Former prime minister Suchinda Kraprayoon dies at 91

(lm) Former Thai prime minister and army chief Suchinda Kraprayoon, a central figure in one of Thailand's most turbulent political chapters, died of natural causes on June 10 at age 91. Best known for leading the 1991 military coup and briefly serving as the 19th prime minister in 1992, Suchinda's legacy is inseparable from the May 1992 pro-democracy uprising, during which dozens of protesters were killed. The crisis, which ended with his resignation, remains a watershed moment in Thailand's democratic trajectory.

A career soldier, Suchinda represented a model of military interventionism that shaped Thai politics for decades. While he withdrew from public life after stepping down, he remained a respected figure within military circles. Though viewed by critics as emblematic of authoritarian resistance to democratization, supporters saw him as acting in the name of national stability. He is survived by two sons; his wife passed away in 2024. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Former prime minister and ex-finance minister voice concern over casino complex bill

(lm/msz) Thailand's proposed legalization of integrated entertainment complexes—including casinos—continues to draw public and political scrutiny. While the government promotes the project as a strategic economic growth engine, it maintains that the casino element will comprise only 10 percent of each complex. Nonetheless, the inclusion of gambling remains the most contentious aspect.

According to government projections, the initiative could raise gross domestic product (GDP) by up to 0.8 percent annually, boost tourist arrivals by 5 to 20 percent, and generate between THB 100–200 billion (USD 2.9–5.8 billion) in annual tourism revenue. Each complex is expected to require a minimum investment of THB 100 billion (USD 2.9 billion), with annual tax revenues estimated between THB 12–40 billion (USD 350–1,160 million). Officials argue that the project will diversify Thailand's tourism offerings through year-

round, man-made attractions such as stadiums, museums, hotels, malls, and cultural venues. Regulatory measures are to be modeled on frameworks in Singapore, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates, including anti-money laundering safeguards, advertising bans, and financial eligibility criteria for Thai nationals. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

However, the bill—originally scheduled for review in April—is now set to return to Parliament in July and faces growing opposition. On June 6, former prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva addressed the Senate committee reviewing the draft legislation, warning that legalizing casinos would neither eliminate the underground economy nor strengthen Thailand's tourism brand. He estimated that 80 percent of casino revenue would likely come from Thai citizens, undermining the government's focus on attracting foreign tourists, and criticized optimistic comparisons with Singapore.

Adding to the criticism, former finance minister Thirachai Phuvanatnaranubala—who served under Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, the aunt of current Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra—argued that the proposal lacks adequate safeguards against money laundering. Citing international risk assessments, he warned that the government's expectations are overly optimistic and fail to account for systemic vulnerabilities. [Bangkok Post 3]

Meanwhile, opposition Member of Parliament Parit Wacharasindhu has condemned the initiative as incoherent and lacking in both transparency and credible safeguards. He highlighted inconsistencies in the government's assumptions, such as projections that casino tax revenue would be based on 80 percent domestic participation—despite a clause limiting access to Thai nationalbanks with at least THB 50 million (USD 1.4 million) in deposits over six months, a threshold met by fewer than 10,000 people. Parit alleged that this clause was included to neutralize opposition, while the actual intent is to allow broader domestic gambling access. He also warned of insufficient protections against corruption, crime, and addiction. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Opposition seeks Constitutional Court ruling on deputy speaker over budget misuse

(msz) Thailand's main opposition People's Party (PP) is preparing to petition the Constitutional Court to remove Deputy House Speaker Pichet

Chuamuangphan, a lawmaker from the ruling Pheu Thai Party, over allegations of embezzlement and improper budget manipulation during the 2025 and 2026 fiscal planning processes.

The move follows parliamentary debate on the 2026 budget bill, during which Pichet was accused of directing staff during the 2025 budget cycle to draft four "parliamentary affairs" project proposals totaling THB 443 million (USD 13.5 million) for submission by the Secretariat of the House of Representatives. These proposals triggered warnings from the Office of Policy and Planning and the Office of Finance, which flagged the plans as non-compliant with legal and parliamentary standards.

The projects were seen as potentially violating Section 144 of the Constitution, which prohibits members of the House from manipulating budget bills in ways that result in direct or indirect misuse of public funds. In response to the concerns, Pichet reportedly replaced the original proposals with three new seminar-related projects valued at THB 350 million (USD 10.7 million).

Although the Cabinet initially cut the seminar budget to THB 83 million (USD 2.5 million), Pichet managed to raise the allocation to THB 178 million (USD 5.4 million) during the final parliamentary review. This would fund approximately 1,300 seminars in a single year, or about four per day. A significant number of these seminar requests were reportedly concentrated in Chiang Rai, Pichet's home province.

The opposition also claims that more than THB 50 million (USD 1.5 million) was redirected under Pichet's supervision to fund landscaping and related expenditures within the parliamentary compound. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government awaits final report on controversial office building purchase by Social Security Office

(lm) Thailand's Ministry of Labor is awaiting the final results of a high-level investigation into the Social Security Office's (SSO) contentious acquisition of an office building for THB 6.9 billion (USD 189 million). The building, known as SKYY9, was purchased through a private equity trust managed by the SSO, sparking allegations of overpricing and irregular procedures.

The investigation, led by the Interior Ministry under the directive of Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, is probing whether the purchase process lacked

adequate due diligence and caused financial damage to the Social Security Fund. A leaked summary of initial findings, shared by an opposition MP, suggests the deal was rushed and possibly inflated in value—citing concerns that the building's market appraisal may have been closer to THB 3 billion (USD 82 million).

The SSO maintains that two certified independent estimators assessed the property's value at over THB 7 billion (USD 192 million), but critics argue that these valuations are questionable. Of the total THB 9.4 billion (USD 257 million) allocated by the SSO's trust, THB 6.9 billion (USD 189 million) was directed to this domestic investment, with the remainder earmarked for overseas ventures.

Any disciplinary or legal action will be determined following the official conclusion of the 90-day probe, and the matter may be referred to Thailand's anti-corruption agency for further investigation. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Constitutional Court dismisses petitions on military procurement and cabinet appointment controversies

(msz) Thailand's Constitutional Court on June 5 dismissed two prominent petitions, one concerning the GT200 bomb detector scandal and the other targeting a controversial cabinet appointment made by former prime minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha.

In the first case, the court rejected a petition which asked the court to reconsider its earlier ruling on the procurement of GT200 bomb detectors—devices widely exposed as ineffective and fraudulently marketed. The petitioner had argued that military officers involved in the purchases were themselves victims of deception by the supplier and should not face criminal prosecution. The Constitutional Court had already ruled on February 5, 2025, that pursuing legal action against those officers was not unconstitutional. The court concluded there was no new evidence or legal basis to justify reopening the case.

The second petition sought to retroactively disqualify former prime minister Prayut from office on the grounds of his appointment of Thamanat Prompow as a cabinet minister. Thamanat—convicted of heroin trafficking in Australia in the 1990s and deported after serving a four-year prison sentence—was appointed deputy agriculture minister in 2019 under Prayut's administration. His appointment drew widespread

criticism for undermining ethical standards in public office.

Thamanat is currently a senior adviser and widely regarded as the de facto power behind the Kla Tham Party, a junior coalition – but increasingly influential – partner in Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra's government. The court dismissed the petition as inadmissible, stating that it failed to meet the constitutional thresholds required for retroactive removal from office. [The Nation]

Thailand: Former ombudsman adviser and son denied bail in high-profile fraud case

(lm) A former adviser to Thailand's Ombudsman, Nathaporn Toprayoon, and his son have been formally indicted and denied bail on charges related to the Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative (KCUC) fraud scandal, one of the country's most prominent financial crimes.

The Criminal Court accepted the indictment submitted by the Office of the Attorney General on charges of money laundering and conspiracy to launder funds. Prosecutors allege the two helped conceal the origins of illicit money funneled through their accounts in 2010 by Supachai Srisupa-aksorn, the former KCUC chairman who was convicted of fraud in 2019. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Discovery of USD 366,000 in cash sparks scrutiny ahead of telecom auction

(bk) Thai authorities are investigating the mysterious discovery of THB 12 million (USD 366,000) in cash found near a garbage area in a condominium complex on June 5, amid growing scrutiny over its potential connection to Thailand's forthcoming telecom spectrum auction scheduled for June 29.

The money—bundled banknotes inside a plastic box—was found alongside documents such as withholding tax certificates and official letters bearing the name of Taweewat Sengkaew, a legal adviser to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). Although not a formal NBTC employee, Taweewat has served on three of its subcommittees.

Taweewat told police that the money came from his private legal practice and had been discarded unintentionally during cleanup efforts following a burst

water pipe in his condo. He denied any link between the cash and NBTC-related activities.

Opposition lawmakers have called on the Revenue Department to trace the money's origins, including through serial numbers on the banknotes. The Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) and the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) are also investigating. Attention has turned to Taweewat's wife, a senior NACC official, over whether the funds should have been declared as part of their joint assets.

The case has drawn heightened attention because of the NBTC's upcoming auction of four telecom frequency bands—850 MHz, 1500 MHz, 2100 MHz, and 2300 MHz. Critics warn that the proposed floor prices, based on outdated 2012 valuations, could benefit large telecom operators, reduce competition, and lead to underpricing of public assets. The discovery of the money has intensified suspicions about transparency in the auction process. [Thai Enquirer] [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: New anti-SLAPP law enters into force to protect whistleblowers

(bk) Thailand's Organic Act on Anti-Corruption (No. 2), B.E. 2568 (2025) came into effect on June 5, introducing legal provisions to protect whistleblowers from Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) —lawsuits intended to intimidate or silence individuals for speaking out on matters of public interest.

The law authorizes the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) to issue protection resolutions and provide legal assistance to individuals who report corruption, submit evidence, or express relevant opinions in good faith. Support measures include legal representation in criminal and civil proceedings, coverage of litigation costs, and intervention in disciplinary actions viewed as retaliatory.

The amendment is part of Thailand's "Big Rock" strategy, a national reform framework prioritizing high-impact governance reforms, including transparency, public participation, and anti-corruption mechanisms. The strategy seeks to strengthen institutional safeguards and promote access to information. The updated law is aligned with constitutional obligations requiring the state to protect those engaged in anti-corruption activities. [Bangkok Post] [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: New Community Liquor Act legalizes local production and simplifies licensing

(bk) The Community Liquor Act, an amendment to the Excise Tax Act, has been officially published in the Royal Gazette, marking a significant step toward legalizing local liquor production. The new law simplifies the licensing process for farmers, community enterprises, and small producers, allowing them to legally produce all types of liquor -- including colored and scented spirits. It also permits the legal canning and sale of beer, creating new opportunities for local brewers. The legislation ensures fair licensing without discrimination or excessive burdens, with exceptions for limits on foreign ownership and state enterprises. The Ministry of Finance now has 180 days to issue detailed ministerial regulations to implement the law. [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Northern protest urges government to act on toxic cross-border mining from Myanmar

(lm) Around 1,000 residents from Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai rallied on June 5—World Environment Day—demanding the Thai government take urgent action against heavy-metal pollution caused by gold mining in neighboring Myanmar's Shan State, most of which reportedly operate outside junta control.

Protesters said more than 40 mines near the border have been contaminating key rivers—including the Kok, Ruak, Sai, and Mekong—with toxic runoff, severely impacting agriculture, fisheries, drinking water, and tourism. They noted that some mining sites are located just two kilometers from the Thai border. Thai pollution control authorities have confirmed the contamination following recent water quality tests.

Protesters also urged the Thai government to undertake environmental rehabilitation measures, warning that if left unresolved, the ecological damage could affect millions across the northern region. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Renewable energy delays threaten investment competitiveness

(lm) Gunkul Engineering, a major Thai clean energy developer, has warned that delays in long-term power

supply planning and renewable energy policies are diminishing Thailand's attractiveness to foreign investors, especially compared to regional competitors like Vietnam and the Philippines.

Despite offering investment incentives, Thailand's implementation of its National Energy Plan (NEP) has been sluggish. The NEP, covering the years 2024 to 2037, targets 51 percent renewable energy in the power mix by 2037—up from 22 percent in 2024. However, Gunkul argues that this target remains insufficient to meet Thailand's 2065 net-zero emissions pledge, especially as peers like Vietnam and the Philippines are targeting net-zero by 2050.

The company also raised concerns over the delayed rollout of a pilot program for direct power purchase agreements (PPAs), which would allow energy-intensive businesses, such as data centers, to buy renewable power directly from producers. Although this initiative was approved in June 2024, it has not been implemented. By contrast, Vietnam and the Philippines have already operationalized such schemes.

Thailand's renewable power capacity currently stands at 5,000 megawatts, compared to 23,000 megawatts in Vietnam. Gunkul attributes this gap to regulatory delays and uncompetitive pricing mechanisms, such as a high utility green tariff, which disincentivize foreign investment in the sector. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Prime Minister urges economic diplomacy as growth weakens

(msz/lm) Amid growing structural pressures and an increasingly fragile economic outlook, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has called on Thai ambassadors and consuls-general to intensify economic diplomacy and prioritize the conclusion of free trade agreements (FTAs) with key partners. Speaking via video address at the annual envoys' conference, the prime minister stressed the urgency of securing new export markets, attracting investment in future-oriented sectors such as semiconductors and next-generation automotive technologies, and supporting grassroots economic resilience across Thailand's regions. [Bangkok Post 1]

Her remarks come at a time of mounting concern across Thailand's private sector. The Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking (JSCCIB) – Thailand's leading private sector body – has downgraded its 2025 gross domestic product (GDP)

growth forecast to between 1.5 and 2 percent, citing weak private investment, declining export competitiveness, and intensifying global trade headwinds. The committee warned that rising tariff pressures—especially a looming United States reciprocal import tariff of 36 percent on Thai goods, set to take effect on July 8—could trigger sharp downturns in export-linked manufacturing and industrial output.

Although Thai exports rose 14 percent year-on-year from January to April 2025, this surge was largely due to foreign stockpiling ahead of the expected U.S. tariff deadline. Industry leaders now expect a significant drop in demand and a contraction in exports by 0.3 to 0.5 percent for the year. The Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) cautioned that unless a bilateral resolution is reached to reduce Thailand's trade surplus with the United States, the industrial sector may face layoffs and shutdowns—particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises struggling with liquidity.

Adding to the pressure, the recent appreciation of the baht—now trading at 32.5 to 32.7 per U.S. dollar—is eroding price competitiveness, especially against Chinese imports. The JSCCIB is urging the government to accelerate the disbursement of at least 70 percent of its THB 157 billion (USD 4.3 billion) stimulus package and promote long-haul tourism to compensate for the shortfall in Chinese tourist arrivals. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post 2]

In response to these challenges, Thai institutions and corporate leaders are pushing for structural transformation. The FTI is spearheading its "Four Goes" campaign—focused on digital adoption, innovation, sustainability, and export readiness—to support SME adaptation. Leading companies are also investing in workforce development, promoting "M-shaped" talent with both specialized expertise and cross-functional skills, alongside leadership and AI training to foster long-term resilience. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Inflation remains negative in May as government lowers 2025 forecast

(lm) Thailand recorded negative headline inflation for the second consecutive month in May, prompting the Ministry of Commerce to revise its full-year inflation forecast downward to between 0.0 and 1.0 percent, from the previously expected 0.3 to 1.3 percent. The consumer price index (CPI) fell by 0.57 percent year-on-year in May, following a 0.22 percent drop in April, due primarily to lower energy costs and increased

agricultural output. The figure remained below the Bank of Thailand's target range of 1.0 to 3.0 percent for the third straight month.

Core inflation, which excludes energy and fresh food, rose by 1.09 percent year-on-year in May—slightly above market expectations. Over the first five months of 2025, headline inflation averaged 0.48 percent, while the core rate stood at 0.95 percent.

The inflation data come ahead of the Bank of Thailand's next policy meeting on June 25. The central bank had already cut its policy rate by 25 basis points in April to 1.75 percent, its lowest level in two years, amid mounting global economic uncertainty. The central bank has signaled it remains open to further easing if necessary but maintains that current inflation trends do not indicate domestic demand weakness or broader deflationary pressure. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Central bank leadership transition begins as new board chair is endorsed

(lm) Thailand's central bank is entering a critical leadership transition as Somchai Sujjapongse has been formally endorsed by King Maha Vajiralongkorn as the new chairman of the Bank of Thailand (BoT) board, while seven candidates compete to succeed current Governor Sethaput Suthiwartnarueput, whose five-year term ends on September 30.

Somchai's appointment was approved by the cabinet in April and took effect retroactively from June 2. A respected fiscal policy expert and former permanent secretary at the Ministry of Finance, Somchai also served as director at PTT Plc, Thailand's state-owned oil and gas company. He replaces Porametee Vimolsiri, whose acting term concluded in January. The BoT board, which meets monthly, plays a key role in overseeing monetary governance. [Bangkok Post 1]

Meanwhile, the race to appoint a new BoT governor is intensifying, against the backdrop of earlier unsuccessful efforts by the government to install a party-affiliated figure as board chair—blocked by eligibility rules. This has heightened public and institutional interest in the outcome of the governorship contest. Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has recently criticized the BoT's independence, calling it an "obstacle" to economic recovery, and is expected to favor a successor more aligned with government policy.

Candidates include former and current executives from leading banks and institutions, such as Bangkok Bank's Kobsak Pootrakool, Government Savings Bank president Vitai Ratanakorn, BoT Deputy Governor Roong Mallikamas, and economist Somprawin Manprasert. The latter has called for aggressive interest rate cuts of up to 100 basis points from the current 1.75 percent. His stance aligns with the government's push for looser monetary policy to boost growth and alleviate household debt, in contrast to outgoing Governor Sethaput's resistance to political pressure.

The selection committee will hear policy presentations on June 24 and is expected to submit a shortlist by July 2. The Finance Minister will then forward a final nominee for cabinet and royal approval. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Global rating agency affirms country's sovereign rating at BBB+

(msz) Global rating agency S&P Global Ratings has affirmed Thailand's sovereign credit rating at BBB+ with a stable outlook, citing a strong external financial position, robust foreign reserves, and consistent support for infrastructure and investment projects such as the Eastern Economic Corridor. S&P forecasts average annual GDP growth of 2.8 percent over 2025–2028, with income per capita expected to increase from USD 7,500 to USD 8,100 in 2025. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Interior Ministry issues over 53,000 new land title deeds to boost ownership access

(msz) The Ministry of Interior has issued land title deeds for 53,437 plots as part of a national campaign to improve land ownership access and support rural livelihoods. The effort targets over 562,000 remaining plots across more than 2.8 million rai (approximately 4,480 square kilometers) still lacking proper documentation. The ministry aims to complete this nationwide by 2032, based on complaints, petitions, and local land office data.

For fiscal year 2025, the Department of Lands is funded to issue 86,000 deeds in 69 provinces, excluding areas like Bangkok and Phuket, which either already have widespread documentation or fall under protected forest zones.

Between December 2024 and April 2025, title deeds were granted for 42,412 plots totaling around 109,914 rai (about 176 square kilometers). In Thailand's southernmost provinces—Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkhla—a separate campaign resulted in 11,025 plots receiving title deeds from a targeted 16,000.

Since the initiative began in 1985, more than 14.8 million plots have been documented, covering over 71 million rai (approximately 113,600 square kilometers), advancing the government's goal that every farming household should have sufficient land for subsistence. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Rising household debt, economic pressure disproportionately affect youth, vulnerable workers

(lm) Thailand is facing significant household debt challenges, which are increasingly impacting younger generations and vulnerable workers.

The National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) has called for stronger measures to restructure debt and mitigate the growing risk of non-performing loans (NPLs). As of the fourth quarter of 2024, household debt stood at THB 16.4 trillion (USD 478 billion), or 88.4 percent of GDP. While the growth of debt has slowed due to tighter lending standards, the quality of credit has been deteriorating. Special mention (SM) loans, which are overdue by 30 to 90 days, increased from 3.52 percent to 4.17 percent of household debt, now totaling THB 568 billion (USD 16.6 billion). Personal NPLs, which are overdue by more than 90 days, now account for nearly 9 percent of credit, or THB 1.22 trillion (USD 36 billion). The NESDC emphasized the importance of the Bank of Thailand's debt relief programs but urged better public outreach and more flexible terms to help those showing early signs of financial distress.

A recent Deloitte Global survey revealed that over 60 percent of Thai Generation Z (ages 18–30) and Generation Y (ages 30–42) live paycheck to paycheck, significantly above the global average of 52 percent. While only 25 percent of these younger Thais report struggling to meet monthly expenses, financial insecurity remains a persistent concern. Additionally, only 27 percent express confidence in achieving retirement security, and the majority of these generations prioritize short-term financial survival over long-term planning.

In terms of labor market challenges, Thailand's unemployment rate in early 2025 was 0.88 percent, but the number of quasi-unemployed individuals—those working fewer than 20–24 hours per week—increased by 14.6 percent, affecting over 4.3 million people. The closure of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contributed to this rise, with approximately 24,000 SMEs shutting down in 2024. Additionally, over 89 percent of Thai employers are reluctant to hire new graduates due to perceived skill deficits and a lack of professionalism. As a result, many employers prefer retirees or freelancers to fill roles.

The NESDC has recommended urgent education reform, enhanced severance protections for workers, and greater support for innovation and technology adoption among SMEs. These measures are seen as critical for addressing ongoing challenges in household debt, unemployment, and skills development, and are essential for fostering long-term economic stability in Thailand. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Government prepares emergency loan to rescue major provincial hospital

(lm) Thailand's Ministry of Public Health is preparing an emergency loan of over THB 300 million (approximately USD 8.7 million) to stabilize Khon Kaen Hospital, a key regional referral center in northeastern Thailand, which is facing an accumulated deficit exceeding THB 1.2 billion (USD 34.8 million). The intervention seeks to avert service disruptions while addressing deeper structural issues in provincial hospital financing.

Public Health Minister Somsak Thepsuthin, following a site visit on June 8, stated that the financial crisis reflects broader inefficiencies in budget allocation and hospital management. Khon Kaen Hospital, which serves as a provincial flagship facility, has been struggling with limited revenue from civil servant health programs, high wage costs, and weak internal financial controls. A seven-point recovery plan has been initiated, including a 10 percent revenue increase, a 20 percent cut in procurement costs, and expedited debt recovery from local health service units. [Bangkok Post 1]

In parallel, Thai health authorities have sought to reassure the public of the stability of the country's universal 30-baht healthcare program—known as the Gold Card Scheme—despite concerns that its reimbursement rates are lower than those of other

public health funds and may not fully cover treatment costs. Officials maintain that only a small number of hospitals—13 out of several hundred—are currently in financial distress, and attribute the problems to localized mismanagement rather than systemic flaws in the scheme itself.

To address these concerns, the National Health Security Office (NHSO) will commission international auditing firms to review the scheme's compensation model and benefit structures. A new inter-agency committee will also be formed to reassess cost structures and recommend reimbursement adjustments aimed at alleviating pressure on public hospitals. Independent audits by the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission and the State Audit Office are underway to improve transparency and spending efficiency. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: National flag carrier officially shuts down loss-ridden subsidiary

(bk) Thailand's national flag carrier, Thai Airways International (THAI), has officially dissolved its wholly owned budget airline subsidiary, Thai Smile Airways, after over 12 years of continuous financial losses. Thai Smile, launched in 2014 to serve domestic routes, accumulated losses exceeding THB 20.9 billion (USD 638 million), with negative shareholder equity of approximately THB 9.7 billion (USD 296 million).

The closure forms part of Thai Airways' broader financial restructuring plan and will not affect the parent company's ongoing operations. Thai Airways remains under court-approved rehabilitation following its 2020 bankruptcy filing. [The Nation]

Thailand: Transport and investment surge bolsters Eastern Economic Corridor as key economic hub

(bk/msz/lm) Thailand is experiencing a major uptick in infrastructure investment and foreign interest in its Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), with combined developments in transport and industry signaling renewed momentum for the country's flagship economic zone. Covering Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao provinces, the EEC is central to Thailand's strategy to attract advanced industries and promote regional integration through land, sea, and air connectivity.

As part of a broader THB 157 billion (USD 4.55 billion) stimulus package approved in May 2025, the Ministry of Transport has proposed THB 56.66 billion (USD 1.64 billion) in infrastructure upgrades. These include more than 7,700 small- to medium-scale projects by the Department of Highways and the Department of Rural Roads, focused on road safety and connectivity enhancements. If approved by the cabinet later this month, bidding and construction could begin as early as July.

A centerpiece of the initiative is the THB 2.44 billion (USD 68.74 million) extension of Motorway No. 7 to U-Tapao International Airport, funded by a loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The project, part of the Eastern Economic Corridor Road Network Development Project for Climate Resilience, includes an elevated four-lane extension and road widening in Rayong Province, reducing the travel distance to U-Tapao to under 2 kilometers and improving access to Sukhumvit Road.

These developments directly support U-Tapao's transformation into Thailand's third major international airport and are closely tied to the THB 224 billion (USD 7 billion) high-speed rail project linking Don Mueang, Suvarnabhumi, and U-Tapao airports. Delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rail project is set to resume following a revised agreement expected in July between the government and Asia Era One, a consortium led by the Charoen Pokphand Group. Under new terms, the state will retain ownership of civil works while the consortium provides THB 160 billion (USD 4.64 billion) in financial guarantees to complete construction within five years. [The Nation 1] [The Nation 2] [Bangkok Post 1]

These connectivity upgrades come amid a surge in foreign investment in the EEC. In the first four months of 2025, foreign investment in the corridor rose 40 percent year-on-year to THB 31.3 billion (USD 907 million), representing 54 percent of total foreign investment in Thailand. Japan led with 32 investors contributing THB 10 billion, followed by China, Singapore, and others.

Nationwide, 363 foreign investors gained approval under the Foreign Business Act between January and April—up 43 percent from the same period last year—totaling THB 57.8 billion (USD 1.68 billion). Key sectors include manufacturing, retail, data centers, and clean energy, with Japan again leading in value. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Air force to acquire 12 Swedish Gripen jets in multi-phase deal worth USD 1.74 billion

(lm) Thailand's Royal Air Force has confirmed a decade-long plan to acquire 12 Saab Gripen E and F fighter jets from Sweden under a government-to-government agreement valued at THB 60 billion (USD 1.74 billion). The new aircraft will gradually replace Thailand's aging fleet of F-16s, which is set to be retired between 2028 and 2035 after nearly four decades of service.

The procurement will be rolled out in three phases, with the first contract for four jets—valued at THB 19.5 billion (USD 566 million)—scheduled for signing in August and delivery expected by 2029. The remaining jets will follow over the subsequent years.

Thailand had initially sought to acquire U.S.-made F-35 stealth fighters but was denied in 2023 due to concerns over training and maintenance compatibility. The Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) then selected the Swedish-built Gripen jets after evaluating 20 potential models, citing their advanced capabilities and long-term strategic value.

A key factor in the selection was Sweden's comprehensive defense offset package, valued at over THB 100 billion (USD 2.9 billion)—154 percent of the procurement value. This package includes technology transfers, human resource development, local defense industry support, and educational partnerships. Notably, the deal also includes the Tactical Data Link (Link-T) system, a secure communication network that enables real-time information sharing between aircraft and ground units to improve situational awareness and coordination in combat operations. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Triple bombing in Pattani raises security alert across southern border provinces

(lm) Authorities in Pattani province are searching for two suspects linked to a series of bombings that occurred on the night of June 8 and the morning of June 9. Three explosive devices were discovered in downtown Pattani, with two detonating and one successfully defused.

These attacks have raised security concerns across Thailand's southern border provinces, including Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, which have long been

affected by insurgent activity. While no group has claimed responsibility, the method and targets of the bombings suggest ongoing low-intensity insurgent activity in the region. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Vietnam: Policy reforms tackle demographic crisis and gender imbalances

(cmc) Vietnam has made significant policy shifts in response to mounting concerns over its demographic challenges, including a rapidly aging population and gender imbalances at birth. On May 29, the National Assembly officially abolished the country's decades-old two-child policy with the passing of a revised Population Ordinance. This change grants families full autonomy over the number, timing, and spacing of children, signaling a move from birth control to proactive population growth management.

The move comes as Vietnam grapples with declining fertility rates, which have dropped from 1.95 children per woman in 2022 to 1.91 in 2024—well below the replacement level of 2.1. This demographic decline poses serious socioeconomic risks, including labor shortages, increased dependency ratios, and mounting pressure on pension and healthcare systems. While the two-child policy was never strictly enforced nationwide, particularly in rural areas, it had a profound influence on urban reproductive behavior, particularly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, where rising living costs discouraged larger families.

To further support population growth, the government is reportedly considering additional measures, including subsidies, extended maternity leave, and incentives for larger families. [CNBCTV18] [The Straits Times] [South China Morning Post 1]

At the same time, Vietnam is addressing another demographic issue—gender imbalances at birth. The country's male-to-female birth ratio reached 112 boys for every 100 girls in 2023, one of the highest in Southeast Asia. This imbalance, largely attributed to entrenched cultural preferences for sons and increased access to ultrasound and abortion services, has led to serious concerns about long-term social issues such as rising crime, human trafficking, and difficulties for men seeking partners.

In response, the Ministry of Health has proposed tougher penalties for sex-selective practices, including tripling fines for violations of prenatal sex selection

laws. Under the draft decree, individuals and organizations engaging in such practices could face fines as high as VND 40 million (USD 1,560), up from the current VND 10 million (USD 390). The proposed amendments aim to curb sex-selective abortion and the disclosure of fetal gender, practices that have persisted despite being banned since 2003. [Tuổi Trẻ News] [South China Morning Post 2]

Vietnam: National Assembly approves sweeping administrative reorganization for 2025

(lm) Vietnam's National Assembly Standing Committee has approved in principle a major restructuring of the country's administrative boundaries, slated to take effect in 2025. The overhaul, which was presented by the Ministry of Home Affairs during the Assembly's 46th session, will reduce the current 52 provincial-level units to just 34. These will comprise six centrally-run cities and 28 provinces.

At the sub-provincial level, the reform will slash the number of commune-level administrative units by nearly 67 percent, bringing the total to 3,321. The consolidation aims to streamline governance, reduce administrative overhead, and enhance state management efficiency across regions.

The overhaul has also prompted scrutiny from the National Assembly's Committee on Legal and Judicial Affairs, particularly in relation to how proposed developments like the Van Don Special Economic Zone in Quang Ninh Province will be integrated into the broader reorganization framework. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Government's Party Committee meets to finalize political agenda for 2025–30

(lm) Vietnam's Government Party Committee convened its second meeting on June 3 to finalize key political reports and strategic proposals for submission to the 2025–30 term Party Congress. The Committee, which oversees the Communist Party's leadership within the government apparatus, plays a central role in ensuring that executive governance aligns with Party directives. The upcoming Congress, scheduled for later this year, will define the Party's priorities, leadership structure, and policy direction for the next five-year term.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, who also serves as Secretary of the Committee, stressed the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the 2020–25 term—one shaped by extraordinary challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and shifting global trade policies. He highlighted the importance of acknowledging not only routine government work but also systemic issues such as overlapping mandates, weak decentralization, and uneven enforcement of administrative discipline.

The draft political reports set ambitious targets for the next term, including double-digit economic growth, increasing per capita income to USD 8,500, and raising performance levels across Party organizations and members. The reports are also expected to outline institutional reforms aimed at improving governance efficiency and responsiveness.

At the meeting, Prime Minister Chinh appointed Minister-Chairman of the Government Office Tran Van Son as Deputy Secretary of the Committee for the current term, reinforcing the leadership structure ahead of the Congress. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Draft decree outlines exemptions and protections in disciplining public officials

(lm) Vietnam's Ministry of Home Affairs has released a draft decree that proposes significant reforms to the disciplinary framework for state officials, civil servants, and public employees. The draft, currently open for public consultation, aligns with the upcoming 2025 Law on Officials and Civil Servants.

Key provisions include exemptions from disciplinary action for individuals who fully comply with procedures and act in good faith without self-interest, even if their decisions result in damage due to unforeseeable risks. Similar exemptions would apply to reform initiatives approved by competent authorities if they are later deemed to align with state policy and the public interest.

The decree also addresses situations where subordinates are ordered to carry out potentially unlawful instructions. If an official raises objections in writing and notifies higher management, responsibility would fall solely on the issuing superior, shielding the subordinate from disciplinary consequences.

Additional safeguards include a formal apology and full reinstatement of entitlements for any civil servant

wrongfully disciplined. The draft clarifies that Party disciplinary decisions must be followed by administrative action within thirty days, barring exemptions.

To reflect structural changes in governance, the decree proposes removing outdated penalties such as demotion for non-leadership positions and references to district-level government bodies, aligning disciplinary rules with Vietnam's two-tier local administration model. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Senior provincial and state enterprise officials expelled from Party for serious misconduct

(lm) On June 6, the Secretariat of the Communist Party of Vietnam expelled three former officials from Party membership for grave violations of Party rules and state laws. The individuals held senior positions in a major state-owned enterprise, a provincial people's committee, and a provincial people's council, respectively. The Party concluded that all three had shown signs of political, ideological, and moral degradation.

The Party's Inspection Commission found that the violations included failure to fulfill anti-corruption responsibilities, breaches of internal regulations on Party member conduct, and actions that caused serious consequences and damaged public trust. The Secretariat also directed relevant state authorities to impose aligned administrative penalties. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Top legislator urges State Audit Office to apply AI and advanced technology

(lm) National Assembly Chairman Tran Thanh Man has directed the State Audit Office of Vietnam (SAV) to adopt artificial intelligence and digital technologies to enhance the quality and impact of auditing, particularly in addressing corruption, inefficiency, and misuse of public resources.

Speaking at the SAV's 8th Party Congress in Hanoi, Man also called for increased focus on auditing areas prone to irregularities and urged further development of thematic, operational, and IT-related audits. He

emphasized that audit outcomes must more effectively inform legislative oversight.

The directive forms part of a broader push to modernize Vietnam's state audit mechanisms, align them with national development goals, and support implementation of key reform resolutions in digital transformation, legal development, international integration, and private sector growth. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Government moves to investigate critics of budget airline after airline's request

(lm) Vietnamese authorities have launched investigations into online criticism of VietJet Air, the country's largest private budget airline, following a request from the company. The move was prompted by allegations of "false information" being spread on social media about the airline and its founder.

Hanoi's mayor ordered the city's agencies to identify and deal with Facebook users accused of defaming VietJet and its prominent founder and former chief executive, a billionaire business figure closely tied to both Vietnam's aviation industry and international trade efforts. Although official announcements later removed her name, previous cases have shown that online satire and criticism of the airline have led to public interrogations and forced confessions.

The episode reflects a broader pattern in Vietnam, where major private firms increasingly rely on government enforcement to suppress critical public discourse. Other prominent companies, such as VinFast, have similarly reported individuals to police over unfavorable social media posts. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam: Accelerating SOE equitisation to enhance transparency and state revenue

(hn) Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Ho Duc Phoc has directed the swift completion of the equitisation process for State-owned enterprises (SOEs) to ensure that the proceeds are promptly allocated to the State budget. This move is part of the government's ongoing efforts to improve transparency and the efficiency of managing State assets.

While there has been progress in restructuring and privatisation, many SOEs have yet to complete the equitisation process. Additionally, several ministries and local authorities have not yet approved the necessary plans. The directive calls for ministries, agencies, and provincial authorities to speed up the process, clarify the status of State capital during conversion, and resolve legal and procedural obstacles. The State Capital Investment Corporation (SCIC) is tasked with working alongside relevant bodies to address any outstanding issues and ensure compliance. Local governments are also encouraged to finalize land use plans to support the timely equitisation of SOEs. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Proposed streamlined work permits to attract foreign experts in high-tech sectors

(hn) Vietnam's Ministry of Justice is reviewing a draft decree aimed at overhauling regulations for foreign workers, with the goal of reducing the work permit processing time from 36 days to just 10. This expedited timeline is designed to meet the growing workforce demands in high-tech sectors such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation.

The proposed decree would broaden eligibility criteria, allowing foreign experts in key fields like finance, science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation to apply with just a university degree—without requiring relevant work experience. Permits could be issued based on validation from the Ministry of Education and Training or the Ministry of Science and Technology, with special cases potentially approved under an exception clause recommended by the Ministry of Home Affairs. [Viet Nam News]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Global industry concerns rise as China tightens scrutiny over rare earths

(dql) China is said to have launched a national tracking system for its rare earth magnet sector, coinciding with newly enforced export restrictions that are already disrupting global supply chains. Effective late last month, the system mandates producers to report additional data online, including trading volumes and client identities, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The increased scrutiny signals raise concerns that export controls and the associate magnets—bolstered by China's near-monopoly on production—may become permanent and maintained as a strategic advantage. [Reuters 1]

As the world's leading supplier of rare earth magnets, China introduced export controls in April on seven medium to heavy rare earth elements and several magnets, requiring licenses for export. Due to their strong magnetic properties – up to 15 times as powerful as iron magnets of the same weight – and high energy-producing capabiliti, rare earth magnets are essential for electric vehicles, wind turbines, and various other technologies, driving economic growth and powering a wide range of applications. Delays in obtaining these licenses have caused production halts for global automakers and semiconductor firms due to dwindling reserves. [The New York Times] [Reuters 1] [Autoblog]

China offers expedited rare earth export approvals for EU companies

(na/dql) China has announced it will establish a "green channel" to accelerate rare earth export approvals for qualified European Union (EU) applications. The offer was made during discussions between Chinese

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and EU Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic on the sidelines of the Informal WTO Ministerial Meeting in Paris on June 3, as both sides seek to address supply chain disruptions that have affected global manufacturing (see article above). [Ministry of Commerce, China, in Chinese] [Maros Sefcovic, X]

Wang and Sefcovic both described the discussions as candid and focused, confirming that Beijing and Brussels greed to resume trade talks, with working teams on both sides intensifying preparations for the upcoming for a high-level summit in Beijing in late July [SCMP] [The Straits Times]

China has also approved several export license applications for rare earth-related items amid rising overseas demand for materials used in high-tech manufacturing. [Global Times]

The announcement follows China's implementation of export controls on seven types of medium and heavy rare earth elements in April, which disrupted supply chains for automakers, aerospace manufacturers, and semiconductor companies worldwide. Wang emphasized that China's export controls align with "common international practices" for dual-use materials that have both civilian and military applications. [China Daily]

The Commerce Ministry stated that China "attached great importance to the EU's concerns" and instructed working teams to maintain timely communication on rare earth export matters. European businesses have reportedly seen increased export approvals in recent weeks, with the EU Chamber of Commerce in China noting progress while seeking to eliminate supply volatility. Wang also requested that the EU "meet China halfway" by facilitating trade in high-tech products to China, highlighting the interconnected nature of technology trade between the two economies.

The rare earth discussions occurred alongside broader China-EU trade negotiations, including consultations on electric vehicle minimum pricing and China's anti-dumping investigation into European brandy imports. China announced it will deliver a final decision on EU brandy duties by July 5, while price talks on Chinese electric vehicles exported to Europe have entered their final stage. The developments reflect ongoing efforts to manage trade tensions while maintaining economic cooperation between China and the EU. [Reuters]

NATO chief warns of China's growing security challenge

(dql) NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has called for deeper Indo-Pacific partnerships in response to China's growing military capabilities and its alignment with Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Speaking at Chatham House in London on June 9, Rutte described the security challenge posed by China as global in scope and stressed that NATO must adapt accordingly. [NATO]

He highlighted China's rapid military expansion, including the world's largest navy—projected to reach 435 ships by 2030—and a growing nuclear arsenal expected to exceed 1,000 warheads by the same year. Rutte also criticized China's alleged support for Russia's war in Ukraine through the provision of dual-use technologies, despite Beijing's denials.

Emphasizing the interconnectedness of global security, Rutte urged NATO to strengthen cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, all of whom are increasingly concerned about China's regional posture. He rejected the notion that security threats are confined to the Euro-Atlantic, asserting that developments in the Pacific must also be addressed.

Rutte proposed that NATO play a greater role in securing strategic supply chains, including critical materials like ammunition and semiconductors, amid rising US-China trade tensions. [SCMP]

Russian foreign minister's call for Russia-India-China Mechanism's revitalization

(dz) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has called on China and India to cooperate in reviving the long-dormant Russia-India-China (RIC) mechanism. Speaking at a recent multilateral meeting on Eurasian security—attended by parliamentarians, public figures, and experts from Russia and other Eurasian countries—Lavrov cited recent signs of de-escalation in Sino-Indian relations as the basis for his appeal. He also condemned NATO's efforts to draw India into "anti-China schemes," pointing to the Quad's joint naval exercises as evidence of increasing U.S. pressure. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia]

The RIC format was first proposed in the 1990s by former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov as part of a broader vision to counterbalance U.S.

dominance in global affairs. Since 2002, the grouping held more than 20 meetings, with the last leader-level interaction taking place on the sidelines of the 2019 G20 Summit. The initiative effectively went into deep freeze following the deadly Sino-Indian border clash in 2020. In the aftermath, Moscow facilitated two rounds of China-India ministerial talks and unsuccessfully pushed for a trilateral summit.

Analysts have cautioned about the prospect of reviving the RIC trilateral format, as India's diverging strategic interests hinder progress. New Delhi has drawn closer to the United States under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and joined in U.S.-led frameworks, such as the Quad, making it less inclined to participate in a strategic format perceived as counterbalancing U.S. influence. [South China Morning Post]

In addition, mistrust between China and India persists, intensified by recent clashes involving Chinese-made Pakistani fighter jets and continued military buildups along their disputed border. This is further proven in India's response to Lavrov's RIC revitalization call, whereby Indian officials stress that "strategic autonomy comes first." Meanwhile, Chinese officials have not published a response. [Times of India]

Japan, European Union prepare to launch competitive alliance framework to boost trade

(ja) Japan and the European Union (EU) are preparing to launch an alliance framework to enhance the competitiveness of their companies through the promotion of trade and economic security cooperation, according to diplomatic sources.

The framework, known as the "Japan-EU Competitiveness Alliance," is expected to be announced at a regular summit meeting being arranged between Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, European Council President Antonio Costa, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and slated to take place in July.

Under the framework, Japan and the EU plan to diversify rare earth supply chains in face of China's export restrictions, while also aligning subsidy conditions for environmental technology, such as the production of electric vehicles and hydrogen production, to promote level competition for manufacturers and reduce cost of development.

The two sides also plan to seek reform to the World Trade Organization, particularly in response to the U.S.'s dissatisfaction with the way the organization addressed Chinese trade practices and other issues. The two sides also plan to cooperate with developing economies in the Global South as economic partners.

The EU also expressed interest in cooperating with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a vast trans-Pacific free trade agreement involving Japan and 11 other nations. Some within the EU are calling for joined efforts in rulemaking, especially as some members of the CPTPP are beginning to look for better business environments for digital trade and climate change countermeasures. [Kyodo News]

Japan urged to strengthen bilateral relations with China and to stand against U.S. tariffs

(ja) The Japanese Association for the Promotion of International Trade (JAPIT), which comprises mainly of Japanese business leaders wishing to do business with China, met with several Chinese officials in Beijing to enhance bilateral relations.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with the JAPIT on June 3 in Beijing, during which Japan was urged to stand alongside China against U.S. tariffs. According to sources that were able to obtain access to what was discussed at the meeting, China expressed its hope for Japanese companies to expand their investments in China, and that the recent agreement between the United States and China to lower their tariffs was due primarily to China's input.

China also stressed that it is ready to actively work with all sectors in Japan to implement the political consensus that the two countries are cooperative partners, not threats to one another, and to promote the healthy and steady development of bilateral relations. [State Council, China]

Former House of Representatives Speaker Yohei Kono, who headed the delegation, said that he is worried that Japan-China relations may be shifted by outside influences. However, he also praised the recent bilateral agreement made between Japan and China to eventually resume imports of Japanese fishery products into China. He also urged China to lessen restrictions on rare earth mineral exports.

This was the first time for a delegation of this nature to hold a meeting with the Chinese Premier in two years. [The Japan Times]

China's Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi also met with the JAPIT on June 4.

During this meeting, China valued Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's recent statement that Japan should draw profound lessons from history and refrain from being an aggressive country, in relation to this year marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the second world war. Kono stated during the meeting that history should not be forgotten, nor should it be denied, and reaffirmed the JAPIT's willingness to continue promoting friendly cooperation between Japan and China.

The two sides also agreed to strengthen trilateral cooperation as well as people-to-people and cultural exchanges among China, Japan, and South Korea, emphasizing the necessity of promoting the integration of industrial and supply chains to jointly respond to the challenge of de-globalization. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Mongolia, International Finance Corporation renew partnership to advance sustainable finance

(fs) The International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Mongolia's Financial Regulatory Commission (FRC) have signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to strengthen sustainable finance efforts in Mongolia.

Under the renewed MOU, the focus will be on developing innovative financial instruments like blue bonds and sustainability-linked bonds and aligning Mongolia's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework with international reporting standards.

This partnership marks the launch of the second phase of the IFC Green Finance Market Development Project. The first phase was launched in 2018 and aimed to support the development of a green finance market in the country.

Mongolia has made notable progress in green finance in the last years, with IFC's assistance in 2021 contributing to the creation of Mongolia's Green Bond

Regulation. Seven corporate green and social bond transactions totaling USD 338 million have been issued since then. [IFC]

Mongolia, International Red Cross hold official talks

(fs) Mongolian Minister of Foreign Affairs Batmunkh Battsetseg met with Asia-Pacific Regional Director of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Regis Saviot on June 6.

The meeting focused on discussions regarding global security, armed conflicts, humanitarian aid, and international law. They also exchanged views on Mongolia's involvement in these areas and future cooperation.

Battsetseg reaffirmed Mongolia's commitment to enhancing cooperation between the IFRC and the Mongolian Red Cross Society. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia]

Mongolian President meets Ban Ki-moon to advance climate action and sustainable development

(fs) President of Mongolia Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh received former Secretary-General of the United Nations and founder of the Ban Ki-moon Foundation for a Better Future Ban Ki-moon on June 6 in Ulaanbaatar.

The meeting took place during the Sustainability Dialogue 2025 - Climate Action: Billions of Trees international forum, which brings together global policymakers, experts and researchers to address shared environmental challenges.

Ki-Moon confirmed that his foundation will continue working with Mongolia on sustainable development, public health, women's leadership, and youth support.

He also announced a donation of USD 50,000 to Mongolia's One Billion Trees national movement and proposed expanding the initiative into a regional effort. [Montsame]

Mongolia, UNCCD to deepen cooperation on land restoration and desertification efforts

(fs) Officials from Mongolia's Ministry of Environment and Climate Change met with Director of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification's Coordination Office and the G20 Global Land Initiative Muralee Thummarukudy on June 5.

The meeting focused on strengthening collaboration in reforestation and combating land degradation through sustainable land management.

Both parties agreed to initiate several joint activities, including establishing a national training center for land restoration, integrating land rehabilitation into university curricula, and launching pilot projects in Khentii and Gobi-Altai aimags.

They also plan to support land restoration start-ups by linking them with international investment and expertise, and to co-organize events such as Model UN and a photography competition. [Montsame]

Kim Jong-un pledges support for Russia amid deepening military alliance and international criticism

(fw) North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has reaffirmed Pyongyang's "unconditional support" for Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, underscoring a rapidly deepening strategic partnership between the two countries. This commitment was made during a meeting with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu in Pyongyang on June 4.

Kim expressed confidence that Russia would "surely win victory in the sacred cause of justice" and pledged to back Moscow's foreign policies on key international issues, including the Ukraine conflict. The two leaders agreed to expand their relations into a "powerful and comprehensive strategic partnership," reflecting growing military and political cooperation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, North Korea] [France 24]

This alliance has manifested in concrete terms: North Korea has deployed thousands of troops to assist Russian forces, particularly in the contested Kursk border region. Pyongyang confirmed its troop presence in Russia for the first time in April 2025, acknowledging casualties and combat experience gained in the conflict. South Korean and U.S.

intelligence estimate that North Korea has sent between 10,000 and 15,000 soldiers to support Moscow, alongside significant shipments of conventional weapons, including missiles. [The Associated Press]

The strategic military cooperation is underpinned by a mutual defense treaty signed in June 2024 during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Pyongyang. Russian officials, including Shoigu, have visited North Korea multiple times this year to coordinate military collaboration and discuss reconstruction efforts in the Kursk region. Recent meetings also focused on commemorating North Korean soldiers' contributions to the war effort. [Yonhap News Agency]

Amid this growing partnership, North Korea faces increasing international scrutiny. A multilateral sanctions monitoring group comprising South Korea, the United States, Japan, and other nations condemned the Russia-North Korea ties as "unlawful," citing shipments of millions of artillery rounds from North Korea to Russia and reciprocal transfers of advanced air defense systems. [France 24]

The timing of Shoigu's visit coincided with the inauguration of South Korea's new president, Lee Jae-myung, who has expressed willingness to engage with North Korea and reduce tensions on the peninsula. However, Pyongyang has not responded to Lee's overtures, maintaining a firm alignment with Moscow and a hardened stance toward Seoul.

South Korean Marines strengthen multinational ties through participation in Philippines' KAMANDAG exercise

(fw) South Korea's Marine Corps recently took part in the annual KAMANDAG multinational military exercise held in the Philippines, aiming to bolster operational interoperability and cooperation with allied forces. [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command]

The two-week exercise, conducted jointly by the Philippine and U.S. Marine Corps and concluding on June 6, included participation from Australia, France, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, United Kingdom, and the United States. During the drills, Korean Marines engaged in various training activities such as urban warfare tactics and reconnaissance operations. Additionally, they provided maintenance support for the Philippine Marine Corps' KAAV amphibious assault vehicles, which were procured from South Korea. [The Korea Times]

Since 2022, South Korea's Marine Corps has consistently participated in KAMANDAG and plan to expand their involvement in international exercises this year, including the Talisman Sabre exercise in Australia and Super Garuda Shield in Indonesia. [Yonhap News Agency]

UN denies involvement in talks on proposed humanitarian corridor to Myanmar

(lm) The United Nations has clarified that it is not engaged in any discussions regarding the establishment of a humanitarian corridor from Bangladesh into Myanmar's Rakhine State. Speaking at a press event on June 6, UN Resident Coordinator Gwyn Lewis emphasized that such a corridor would require sovereign agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, and that the UN's role would only begin after such an agreement is in place.

Her remarks follow recent statements by Bangladesh's interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, who publicly rejected speculation about the existence of such a corridor, calling the claims "entirely false." While UN Secretary-General António Guterres had mentioned the idea of humanitarian access during a March 2025 visit to Dhaka, Lewis stressed that the concept remains a proposal without legal or political consensus.

Addressing election-related matters, Lewis underscored the importance of inclusive electoral participation to avoid political polarization. However, she avoided commenting on the ban of the former ruling Awami League, which was outlawed following the July–August 2024 uprising. While last year's UN fact-finding report advised against banning political parties, Lewis stated that decisions on party inclusion rest solely with the national authorities.

She also expressed support for the ongoing dialogue led by Bangladesh's consensus commission and noted that the UN continues to provide technical assistance to the Election Commission but will not be involved in setting the election timeline.

In a separate development, Lewis confirmed that the UN Human Rights Office is preparing to open a small office in Bangladesh, pending the signing of a finalized memorandum of understanding with the government. [The Daily Star]

India’s Foreign Minister launches European tour amid trade talks and post-conflict diplomacy

(lm) (lm) Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is on a week-long visit to Europe from June 8 to 14, engaging in high-level meetings in France, Belgium, and with the European Union (EU). The trip combines diplomatic outreach on security and regional stability with efforts to accelerate negotiations on a long-awaited India–EU free trade agreement (FTA), now targeted for conclusion by December 2025.

In France, Jaishankar met with Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot and other senior officials to mark 25 years of strategic partnership between the two countries. He also participated in the inaugural Mediterranean edition of the Raisina Dialogue in Marseille, an Indian-led forum now expanding its footprint to Europe. The initiative aims to deepen regional conversations on Mediterranean security and economic cooperation involving both state and non-state actors.

During the second leg in Brussels, Jaishankar is holding a strategic dialogue with EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and meeting senior leadership from the European Commission and European Parliament. He is also conducting bilateral consultations with Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot. The Ministry of External Affairs stated the visit is intended to strengthen strategic and economic partnerships, while also engaging the Indian diaspora in Europe.

A key priority is progress on the India–EU FTA. Recent technical-level talks in Paris reportedly reached consensus on chapters including customs, rules of origin, trade facilitation, and intellectual property.

The visit takes place against the backdrop of heightened regional tensions following a major flare-up between India and Pakistan. In early May 2025, a militant attack in Indian-administered Kashmir killed 26 tourists, prompting Indian cross-border strikes against alleged militant infrastructure in Pakistan. Pakistan responded with retaliatory airstrikes, and both sides reached a U.S.-brokered ceasefire on May 10. Pakistan has claimed to have downed six Indian fighter aircraft, including Rafale and Mirage 2000 jets.

In this context, Jaishankar is expected to reiterate India’s counterterrorism stance, especially in meetings with European counterparts. In a prior meeting with the UK Foreign Secretary, he emphasized India’s policy of zero tolerance for terrorism and its rejection of any equivalence between victims and perpetrators. That

message is expected to be carried through his discussions in France, Belgium, and at the EU level. [Arab News] [The Indian Express]

India's Prime Minister to attend G7 summit in Canada with strategic stopovers in Cyprus and Croatia

(lm) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accepted an invitation from Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to attend the upcoming G7 summit in Kananaskis, Alberta. This will be Modi's first overseas trip since India's May 2025 cross-border military operation, known as Operation Sindoor, against terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan. The visit marks a potential thaw in strained India–Canada ties following last year's diplomatic standoff over the killing of Canadian national and pro-Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

The official invitation, extended during a phone call from Carney, comes after speculation surrounding India's participation due to an initial delay. Modi confirmed his attendance in a public post, framing the visit as a step toward renewed cooperation based on mutual respect and shared democratic values. Both leaders also reportedly agreed to continue dialogue on law enforcement and national security, though details remain limited.

For India, the summit provides a platform to reinforce its narrative on counterterrorism, especially vis-à-vis Pakistan, and to call for international accountability. New Delhi is expected to emphasize the security dimension of its relationship with Canada, particularly its longstanding concern over the presence and activities of Sikh separatist networks operating on Canadian soil.

This will also be Modi's first face-to-face interaction with U.S. President Donald Trump since their last meeting in Washington earlier this year. [The Times of India]

As part of his itinerary, Modi will stop in Cyprus en route to Canada and in Croatia on his return. The Cyprus visit—the first by an Indian Prime Minister in over two decades—reaffirms India's diplomatic alignment with Cyprus on Kashmir, cross-border terrorism, and multilateral cooperation. Cyprus has backed India's bids for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council and other international forums, and is set to assume the

Presidency of the Council of the European Union in early 2026.

The visit also carries geopolitical weight following Türkiye's support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. India has consistently supported Cyprus in its territorial dispute with Türkiye, in line with UN resolutions and EU law.

Modi's stop in Croatia will be the first by an Indian head of government since the country's independence in 1991. It highlights expanding defense and technological ties as well as longstanding cultural relations, including academic Indology and ISKCON-linked religious networks. Croatia is also seen as a key logistical partner in the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), launched at the 2023 G-20 summit in New Delhi. Both Cyprus and Croatia are viewed as potential IMEC participants and infrastructure investors, with Croatia's Adriatic ports offering strategic maritime access. [The Hindu]

Foreign policy heavyweight leads Pakistan's international campaign following military escalation with India

(za/lm) In the wake of May's four-day military escalation with India, Pakistan has launched a high-profile diplomatic campaign to frame the crisis and seek international support for renewed dialogue. Led by former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Pakistani delegation has engaged U.S. lawmakers, British officials, and European interlocutors to argue that India's actions—both during and after the conflict—pose growing risks to regional and global stability. [DAWN 1]

The latest four-day military flare-up in May—sparked by a militant attack in Indian-administered Kashmir, which New Delhi attributed to Pakistan—escalated rapidly into drone, missile, and air strikes before a U.S.-brokered ceasefire was reached on May 10. Pakistan's leadership has consistently portrayed the escalation as a consequence of Indian provocation, rejecting the allegations and calling for a neutral international investigation into the incident. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif described the attack as a "false flag operation," accusing India of manufacturing a pretext for military aggression.

Against this backdrop, the Pakistani delegation's central narrative emphasizes that the conflict threshold between the two nuclear-armed neighbors has eroded to an unprecedented low. Bhutto-Zardari

warned during an interview that "any terrorist incident, with or without proof, could now trigger war," underscoring the volatility of the current situation. [Arab News 1]

In multiple meetings with U.S. lawmakers, the Pakistani delegation called for U.S. support in restoring dialogue. Bhutto-Zardari also emphasized that Kashmir remains the core unresolved issue and that India's rejection of cooperation—whether through joint investigations or third-party mediation—is pushing both countries toward open-ended confrontation. [Arab News 2] [Geo TV] [X Account of Bilal Bhutto Zardari]

Another pillar of the campaign is the accusation that India is weaponizing non-military instruments, most notably water. Islamabad has denounced New Delhi's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)—a decades-old World Bank-brokered agreement on water sharing—as an existential threat. Bhutto-Zardari warned that India's actions are laying the foundations for the "first nuclear war over water," arguing that if upper riparian states are allowed to unilaterally cut off water to hostile downstream neighbors, global precedents will be shattered. Islamabad responded by holding other bilateral agreements with India, such as the Simla Agreement, in abeyance and closing the Wagah border.

In London, the delegation met with British officials, think tanks, and policymakers, warning that India's "new abnormal"—responding militarily to any incident without proof—has normalized aggression and undermined stability. The Pakistani side reiterated that it acted with restraint despite claiming to have downed six Indian jets. It emphasized that future peace hinges not on coercion but on the restoration of diplomatic channels and respect for international obligations. [DAWN 2]

Brunei joins Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic

(tl) With the presentation of the instrument of accession, Brunei Darussalam has officially joined the Convention on the Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL Convention) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations' specialized agency responsible for regulating international shipping.

The instrument was presented by Captain (Rtd) Zil Husam bin Haji Abdul Rahman, Chief Executive of the Maritime and Port Authority of Brunei Darussalam

(MPABD), to IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez at the IMO headquarters in the United Kingdom.

Zil Husam reaffirmed Brunei's commitment to international maritime collaboration and expressed the country's dedication to advancing the Convention's objectives—facilitating maritime trade, enhancing safety, and protecting the marine environment—in alignment with the IMO's strategic priorities, including security, environmental sustainability, and digitalization. [Borneo Bulletin]

An international treaty adopted by the IMO in 1965, the FAL Convention aims to streamline and simplify procedures and documentation required for ships, cargo, and passengers during port calls, thereby facilitating maritime trade and reducing delays.

Brunei hosts 6th ASEAN Health Cluster 3 Meeting to boost regional healthcare access and equity

(ga) Brunei has assumed chairmanship of the ASEAN Health Cluster 3 (AHC3) for 2025–2026 and is currently hosting the 6th AHC3 Meeting to enhance regional cooperation on health systems and access to care under the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda (APHDA). The meeting, attended by 98 delegates from all ten ASEAN member states, the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Partners, and Timor-Leste, resumed after a two-year pause.

Held in a hybrid format, the meeting aims to advance regional priorities including universal access to safe, affordable, and quality healthcare; promote digital health innovation; and improve service delivery for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and migrant workers.

The event also outlined administrative, logistical, and budgetary requirements, formalized the organizing committee, and continued operationalization of 42 strategic health measures under the ASCC Blueprint through AHC3 and APHDA.

The work contributes to ASEAN's 20 health priorities overseen by four Health Clusters, reinforcing multi-sectoral collaboration across the region. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia: Hun Manet attends UNOC3 to commit to ocean governance

(gm) Prime Minister Hun Manet is representing Cambodia at the Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice, France (June 9–13), under the theme "Accelerating action and mobilizing partnerships".

Hun Manet emphasized that the ocean is "a shared treasure" that provides food, energy, water, and economic opportunities, while regulating climate and sustaining biodiversity. He highlighted Cambodia's expansion of marine protected areas, strengthened fisheries management, and efforts to reduce marine pollution under its Circular Strategy on Environment 2023–2028. [Fresh News Asia]

He reaffirmed Cambodia's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and expressed support for accession to the international "Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction" (BBNJ) agreement adopted in June 2023. On the sidelines of the conference, Hun Manet is expected to hold bilateral meetings aimed at increasing technical and financial support for ocean protection, advancing sustainable fisheries, and promoting integrated marine-climate governance. [Ministry of Information]

Cambodia: UNDP urges cross-sectoral action and financing reform to meet climate goals

(gm) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has praised Cambodia's growing commitment to climate resilience while underscoring key implementation challenges, particularly in cross-sector coordination and climate financing.

UNDP noted progress in policy development and community-level adaptation but emphasized that effective emission reductions require broader integration of climate priorities across all ministries and governance levels. The Ministry of Environment's leadership on carbon neutrality and biodiversity policy was identified as essential but insufficient on its own.

Financing was cited as a critical hurdle. UNDP is assisting the government in creating a National Financing Policy Framework to support climate-related investments under the Pentagonal Strategy, including new tools such as budget tagging, impact bonds, and blended finance mechanisms. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia, EU launch business partnership facility to boost export competitiveness

(gm) The European Union (EU) and Germany launched the EU–Cambodia Business Partnership Facility on June 2 to strengthen Cambodia's agro-processing sector and improve export capacity to European and global markets.

Implemented in cooperation with Cambodia's Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Agriculture, the program offers up to USD 50,000 in co-funding per project, alongside technical support, mentorship, and export-readiness services. [Phnom Penh Post]

The initiative includes an Export Lab and Agri-Innovation Lab aimed at enhancing product standards, packaging, and international market access. Cambodian enterprises are encouraged to align with international compliance standards and develop value-added products to increase their global competitiveness. [Ministry of Commerce, in Cambodian]

Indonesia submits key document in bid for OECD membership

(th) Indonesia has recently submitted a key document, marking a significant step forward in its bid to become a full member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The country has been actively pursuing membership as part of its broader ambition to attain high-income status.

The document was submitted by Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto during his visit to Paris for OECD-related engagements. It contains Indonesia's self-assessment of the extent to which its policies and practices align with OECD standards.

The submission also marks the beginning of the OECD's in-depth review of Indonesia and makes it the first Southeast Asian country to present an initial memorandum.

The OECD does not impose a fixed timeline for accession. While Indonesia is aiming for full membership by 2027, OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann has emphasized that Jakarta should prioritize

meeting the organization’s accession criteria rather than rushing the process.

Indonesia must also secure unanimous approval from all 38 OECD member states in order to join the organization. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia, EU conclude negotiations on Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

(yq) Indonesia and the European Union have concluded negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), following nine years of negotiations across 19 rounds. Speaking from Brussels in a video press conference.

The conclusion of negotiations followed Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto’s meeting with European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maroš Šefčovič.

The EU ranks as Indonesia's fifth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching USD 30.1 billion in 2024, resulting in a USD 4.5 billion trade surplus for Indonesia.

Key benefits of the agreement include substantial reductions in import tariffs, with 80 percent of Indonesia's exports to the EU expected to enjoy tariff-free status within one to two years of implementation. Industries like footwear, textiles, garments, palm oil, fisheries, renewable energy, and electric vehicles are set to benefit from enhanced preferential treatment. The EU raised concerns during negotiations regarding local content requirements, the automotive sector, access to critical minerals, and incentives for foreign investors.

Indonesia sought equitable treatment for its fishery exports, advocating for policy alignment with other ASEAN nations. Airlangga confirmed the EU's commitment to a level playing field for Indonesian fishery products and reassurances from Commissioner Šefčovič regarding deforestation policies, promising special considerations beneficial to Indonesia's forest-based exports.

The CEPA is poised to significantly elevate Indonesia's global competitiveness by facilitating better access to European markets and eliminating key trade barriers. Projections suggest a potential export increase of more than 50 percent to the EU over the next three to four years. Additionally, the agreement is expected to

attract strategic investments from Europe, reinforcing international confidence in Indonesia's legal and business environment.

The two parties are still finalizing the sustainability framework of the agreement. Indonesia has welcomed the EU's proposal to offer flexible implementation of its deforestation regulation for countries with comprehensive trade agreements. [Antara News] [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post].

Laos to upgrade key highway to strengthen trade with China, Thailand, and Vietnam

(dql) An upgrade of Laos' National Road No. 12 will begin in late 2025, aiming to enhance the 147-kilometer highway that links Thailand, Vietnam, and southern China. The project, expected to take 30 months, will start after the rainy season in Thakhek district, near the Thai border, and extend through the towns Yommalath and Boualapha districts to the Na Phao–Cha Lo border crossing with Vietnam.

Funded by Thailand's Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA), the project will receive a THB 1.8 billion (USD 49.3 million) low-interest loan at 1.75 percent annual interest, with a 30-year repayment period and seven-year grace period. Under the agreement, at least 50 percent of materials and equipment must be sourced from Thailand, with Thai contractors and supervisors overseeing implementation.

Once completed, the road is expected to enhancing transport, trade, and cross-border connectivity, particularly between Nanning (China), Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. [The Laotian Times] [Bangkok Post]

Malaysia enhances strategic collaboration with UNDRR on disaster risk reduction

(ga) Malaysia has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening strategic cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) to address complex disaster risks, particularly those related to climate change and community resilience.

Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi discussed the matter with UN Assistant Secretary-General Kamal Kishore during a meeting on the

sidelines of the eighth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) held on June 4–5 in Geneva.

Discussions included the potential development of a National Disaster Risk Reduction Act, improvements to early warning systems, enhanced flood risk mapping, and investments in public education and awareness. Zahid also highlighted Malaysia's response to severe floods affecting over 150,000 people across nine states in late 2024, underscoring the need for data-driven, long-term mitigation strategies.

Kishore commended Malaysia's SMART team for its role in recent search-and-rescue operations in Myanmar and acknowledged the country's leadership in regional disaster response efforts.

Zahid further stated that Malaysia is prepared to take on a greater role in the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) during its ASEAN chairmanship, focusing on enhancing regional preparedness and resilience. [Bernama]

International Labor Organization votes to invoke Article 33 against Myanmar junta

(nj/anl) During the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference on June 5, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a resolution under Article 33 of its Constitution concerning Myanmar. Article 33 allows the ILO to recommend collective action against a member state that has persistently failed to comply with its recommendations regarding labor rights violations. [ILO]

The recent resolution urges member states to reevaluate their diplomatic and economic relations with the military regime to ensure they do not enable or support ongoing violations of labor rights, including forced labor and suppression of freedom of association. The resolution was adopted by consensus; however, Belarus, China, Laos, and Russia expressed opposition.

While the military regime's Ministry of Labor called the move politically motivated, labor rights activists, and the civilian-led National Union Government (NUG) have celebrated the decision. The NUG hailed it as a victory and an important show of support from the international community. The International Trade Union Confederation also welcomed the move as a landmark decision. It reports that the regime has imprisoned 69 trade unionists, targeted civilians and

workers with air strikes, and diverted the flow of humanitarian aid to affected populations following the March 28 earthquake.

In response to the ILO decision, the NUG, the Myanmar Labour Alliance (MLA), and business stakeholders plan to hold a tripartite meeting to form a working committee. This body will coordinate efforts to identify and expose companies and investors still cooperating with the junta.

The ILO has passed similar resolutions in the past. In 2000, it invoked Article 33 and labelled the former military regime led by Than Shwe a terrorist organization. In 2021 and 2023, it condemned the current regime's violations of labor rights.

This latest measure criticizes the regime for escalating abuses and failing to comply with past recommendations. While the resolution urges further pressure against the regime, including the possibility of sanctions and international legal proceedings, it is non-binding. Implementation depends on the willingness of individual member states to act. [ITUC] [The Irrawaddy 1] [The Irrawaddy 2] [Mizzima]

Rising maritime tensions highlight strategic contest in the South China Sea

(dnb/lm/na) The Philippines and the United States concluded two weeks of Kamandag joint military drills on June 6 in the strategic waters off Tawi-Tawi in the country's southern frontier. Held for the first time in this location, the exercises took place near the Sibutu Strait, a critical international waterway linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and form part of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the two countries. The drills involved over 200 personnel from elite Philippine units and U.S. forces, with live-fire sea operations, amphibious landings, and maritime interdiction simulations focusing on responses to piracy, smuggling, and foreign incursions. [Rappler 1]

This shift toward territorial defense and unified operations reflects growing regional concerns amid escalating maritime tensions with China. In parallel with the southern drills, the Philippine military conducted sovereignty patrols across several Philippine-controlled features in the Spratly Islands—including Pag-asa, Panata, and Second Thomas Shoal—to bolster its presence and conduct intelligence gathering. These operations coincided with the seventh Philippines–U.S. Maritime Cooperative Activity

(MCA), which took place off Occidental Mindoro and Zambales and featured coastal operations, fire support drills, and the debut of the newly commissioned BRP Miguel Malvar, a South Korean-built guided missile frigate. [Baird Maritime] [Manila Bulletin] [Philippine News Agency] [Reuters 1]

In a further sign of security realignment, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is preparing to join its third tripartite maritime exercise with the United States and Japan, scheduled for June 16–20 in Kagoshima, Japan. [Baird Maritime 2] [Manila Bulletin]

Amid these activities, the Chinese military and maritime militia intensified their presence. On June 6, a Jiangkai-class Chinese frigate approached Panata Island, leading to radio challenges by a Philippine Navy vessel. The next day, a Chinese fishing vessel—suspected to be part of the maritime militia—briefly ran aground near Pag-asa Island before being assisted by nearby Chinese vessels. These incidents underscored Beijing's continued paramilitary coordination and its expanded control over artificial islands within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. [Channel NewsAsia] [Rappler 2] [Rappler 3]

These incidents are part of broader Chinese maritime maneuvers. From May 25 to 30, the Liaoning aircraft carrier group conducted its most extensive deployment to date in the Western Pacific, including flight operations from waters east of Taiwan toward Guam and concurrent live-fire drills west of the Philippine archipelago. The simultaneous maneuvers were interpreted as a demonstration of operational reach and strategic encirclement. [The Manila Times] [USNI News]

Diplomatic tensions have accompanied these developments. Following a visit to Manila by Kaja Kallas, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, during which the EU and the Philippines agreed to launch a formal security and defense dialogue, the Chinese Embassy in Manila issued a warning. Beijing criticized what it described as foreign provocation and called for a return to bilateral negotiations, cautioning against reliance on external actors to resolve the South China Sea dispute. [The Diplomat] [Reuters 2] [Alarabiya English]

Asian Development Bank launches USD 1.5 billion initiative to cut rice sector emissions in five countries

(lm) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has launched a USD 1.5 billion regional initiative to reduce emissions and enhance climate resilience in the rice sectors of Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Pakistan, and the Philippines. The program, part of ADB's broader USD 40 billion commitment to climate-proof food systems by 2030, aims to address the environmental impact of rice production while safeguarding food security across Asia.

ADB will invest in irrigation improvements, sustainable farming methods, logistics infrastructure, and policy reforms. A key objective is to curb methane emissions from flooded rice paddies, which are responsible for 1.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and consume 40 percent of the world's freshwater supply, according to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

The initiative will also support the development and deployment of climate-resilient rice varieties that use fewer resources, withstand extreme weather events, and reduce emissions. As part of the program, IRRI is partnering with ADB to establish a clearinghouse facility under the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers. [Rappler]

Thailand affirms commitment to OECD accession as part of digital and economic reform drive

(lm/msz) Thailand is accelerating its path toward membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with the government planning to submit its Initial Memorandum by December 2025 as part of the formal accession process. The goal is to complete accession by 2030.

This development follows Thailand's invitation in 2024 to begin accession discussions and coincides with its first participation in the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting (MCM) in Paris earlier this month. At the MCM, Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa emphasized that OECD membership will support regulatory reforms critical to modernizing the digital economy, strengthening cybersecurity, and promoting responsible investment practices.

The digital sector is seen as a major growth engine. In 2025, it is expected to reach USD 50 billion—nearly one-quarter of Thailand's GDP—driven by policies such as the "Go Cloud First" mandate, which requires public agencies to adopt secure, internationally compliant

cloud infrastructure. In 2023 alone, the Board of Investment approved USD 7.3 billion in digital-related projects across sectors including AI, semiconductors, and cloud services.

Thailand also aims to integrate responsible business conduct into its economic model, aligning with the OECD Declaration on International Investment. Foreign Minister Maris noted that small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which contribute over 35 percent of GDP, will benefit from streamlined regulations to boost their integration into global supply chains. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand optimistic on progress in free trade talks with European Union

(lm) Thailand's Commerce Minister Pichai Naripthaphan expressed confidence that the upcoming sixth round of negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union, set for June 23–27 in Bangkok, will yield significant progress as both sides move into the critical phase of market access discussions.

Following his recent meeting with European Commissioner for Trade Maroš Šefčovič in Paris, Pichai reported that four chapters of the agreement have already been concluded—covering transparency, good regulatory practices, customs procedures and trade facilitation, and sustainable food systems. He emphasized that concluding the FTA within 2025 remains a key government priority, aimed at enhancing Thailand's trade competitiveness, attracting EU investment, and mitigating geopolitical risks.

The European Union is Thailand's fourth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in 2024 reaching USD 43.5 billion, up 4.26 percent from the previous year. Thai exports to the EU rose over 10 percent to USD 24.2 billion, while imports declined slightly to USD 19.3 billion. Key Thai exports include electronics, automotive parts, and jewelry, while imports from the EU consist of machinery, pharmaceuticals, and aircraft components. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste assumes rotating presidency of PALOP-TL–EU partnership

(lm) Timor-Leste officially assumed the rotating presidency of the partnership between the

Portuguese-speaking African Countries and Timor-Leste (PALOP-TL) and the European Union (EU) during the 15th Ministerial Meeting held in Dili on June 6. The meeting culminated in the adoption of the Dili Declaration, which reaffirms shared commitments to democratic governance, rule of law, sustainable development, and regional peace and security.

Timor-Leste's Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, who opened the ministerial session, underscored the country's ambition to deepen international engagement. He cited Timor-Leste's recent accession to the World Trade Organization and its expected admission to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in October 2025 as strategic milestones to expand economic and diplomatic relations.

The Dili Declaration praised progress in three key cooperation projects: ProPALOP-TL (focused on public finance management), ProCULTURA (supporting cultural sector employment), and ProJUST (targeting justice reform, anti-corruption, and crime prevention). Participating states also approved a new governance model for the PALOP-TL group, emphasizing inclusivity, sustained coordination, and resource mobilization to ensure long-term project viability.

Timor-Leste was mandated to forward the Dili Declaration to EU leadership, including the President of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs. The next technical meeting will be hosted by Mozambique in 2026, followed by a ministerial meeting in Brussels in 2027. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Bangladesh, Bhutan explore enhanced cooperation in hydropower and trade

(ms) Bangladesh and Bhutan have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening bilateral ties, with a particular focus on expanding cooperation in hydropower trade. During a meeting on June 3, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain highlighted the "significant potential" for collaboration in energy and other trade sectors, emphasizing the mutual benefits for both countries. He welcomed newly appointed Bhutanese Ambassador Dasho Karma Hamu Dorjee to Dhaka and expressed confidence in further strengthening the longstanding relationship during her tenure. [Dhaka Tribune]

The two sides discussed convening the next round of the Commerce Secretary-level meeting to identify new

avenues for expanding bilateral trade. Ambassador Dorjee expressed appreciation for Bangladesh's continued support and outlined Bhutan's "Gelephu Mindfulness City" initiative, a transformative national development project. The foreign adviser assured her of full cooperation during her assignment, underscoring Bangladesh's readiness to work together across key sectors. [BSS News]

Bangladesh delays letter of credit, raising uncertainty over Nepal's planned electricity exports

(lm) Nepal's scheduled export of 40 megawatts of electricity to Bangladesh from June 15 has been cast into doubt as the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) has yet to open the required letter of credit (LC). The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) confirmed that last year's dues—USD 30,080 from a 12-hour export trial in November 2024—also remain unpaid. Despite these delays, NEA maintains the export will proceed as planned under the trilateral agreement signed with India and Bangladesh.

The electricity, sourced from the Trishuli and Chilime hydropower projects and approved by India's Central Electricity Authority, is to be exported annually during the June–November monsoon window until 2029. The five-year deal sets the tariff at 6.40 U.S. cents per unit, with NEA responsible for delivery to India's Muzaffarpur substation and Bangladesh covering all downstream costs. [The Kathmandu Post]

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Yunus visits United Kingdom to deepen economic ties and pursue asset recovery

(lm) Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has embarked on a four-day official visit to the United Kingdom from June 10 to 13, aimed at expanding bilateral trade, attracting investment, and advancing efforts to recover laundered assets allegedly held by politically connected elites from the former government of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Key topics under discussion include aviation cooperation, migration, and financial transparency, with officials signaling that the asset recovery agenda will feature prominently in London talks.

During the visit, Yunus is scheduled to meet British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Foreign Secretary

David Lammy, along with senior figures from the UK's political and business communities. He will also hold courtesy meetings with the secretaries-general of the Commonwealth and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and is set to deliver a speech at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, on June 11. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

A central theme of the visit is the Bangladeshi interim government's push for financial transparency and asset recovery. Officials have signaled that discussions in London will highlight the need to repatriate funds allegedly laundered abroad by politically connected elites linked to the former administration of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The United Kingdom has long been considered a financial safe haven for wealth illicitly transferred from South Asia.

The visit has taken on an additional political dimension due to a public appeal from Tulip Siddiq, a British Labour MP and niece of Sheikh Hasina. Siddiq—who recently resigned as UK City Minister following allegations by the Bangladeshi Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) that she or her family benefited from abuses of power under Hasina's regime—has requested a meeting with Yunus in London. In her letter, Siddiq denies all allegations, calling them politically motivated and emphasizing that she has no property or business interests in Bangladesh. While her legal team claims to have delivered the request, the Bangladeshi government has stated it has not yet officially received it. [The Guardian] [The Daily Star 3]

On June 13, Yunus is also set to meet with Tarique Rahman, Acting Chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. The BNP has been the primary political force pressuring Yunus' interim government to hold elections early, a move that has led to significant political tension. The BNP has given Tarique full authority to make decisions during the meeting, which is expected to have significant implications for the current political environment, particularly regarding the opposition's demands for early elections. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star 4]

Cambodia seeks to deepen bilateral cooperation with Central Asian countries

(gm/dql) Cambodia has recently taken steps to deepen bilateral cooperation with Tajikistan and Azerbaijan.

Cambodia and Tajikistan discussed enhancing bilateral cooperation, focusing on clean energy, agriculture, and

education. Prime Minister Hun Manet met President Emomali Rahmon in Nice, France, during the Third United Nations Ocean Conference.

They agreed to mutual official visits and tasked their foreign ministers with deepening ties and exploring new opportunities. President Rahmon highlighted Tajikistan's clean energy goals and recognized Cambodia's agricultural strengths. Prime Minister Hun Manet emphasized the meeting's value for exploring key cooperation areas and reaffirmed Cambodia's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties under Hun Sen's leadership. [Khmer Times]

In a separate development, lawmakers from Cambodia and Azerbaijan held a videoconference on June 4 to discuss opportunities for strengthening interparliamentary ties and broader bilateral cooperation.

The meeting was led by Shahin Seyidzade, head of Azerbaijan's parliamentary group on relations with Cambodia, and Suos Yara, chairman of the Cambodia–Azerbaijan Parliamentary Friendship Group. Both sides emphasized the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in advancing bilateral engagement and expressed interest in expanding cooperation across legislative channels.

The delegations also exchanged views on the current state of relations and discussed potential areas for future collaboration. [Trend]

Cambodia repays USD 117 million to China in Q1 as new lending pauses

(gm/dql) Cambodia repaid approximately USD 117 million in debt service to China during Q1 2025—comprising USD 87 million in principal and USD 30 million in interest—reducing the Kingdom's outstanding debt to China from USD 4.06 billion to USD 3.98 billion, according to a bulletin from the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) released on May 27.

No new Chinese loans were signed during the quarter. Nonetheless, China remains Cambodia's largest bilateral creditor, accounting for roughly one-third of the country's total public debt, which stands at around USD 12 billion. Repayments to China accounted for 70 percent of Cambodia's total Q1 debt service (USD 168 million), marking an 11 percent year-on-year increase. Other major creditors include the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and Japan.

Grants from Beijing continued, including USD 17 million for the new Council of Ministers building and USD 90 million for a road project linking Kratie and Stung Treng provinces. Cambodia also resumed cooperation with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), signing a USD 78.81 million financing agreement in Q1 after the bank paused funding in 2024. [Khmer Times]

Analysts suggest Beijing may be shifting away from sovereign lending toward increased direct investment, especially in infrastructure, logistics, and industrial zones. Recent Chinese engagement has concentrated on Special Economic Zones, such as the Phnom Penh–Sihanoukville Expressway and the Sihanoukville SEZ, and regional development projects like the "Fish and Rice Corridor." This pivot reflects a broader recalibration of China's overseas finance strategy, amid rising scrutiny of debt sustainability and shifting domestic priorities. [Phnom Penh Post] [Reuters]

The "Fish and Rice Corridor" initiative is a two-year technical assistance program, launched to modernize Cambodia's rice and aquaculture sectors.

Meanwhile, on June 4, China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region initiated the Guangxi Modern Rice Industry Cooperation Project in Kampong Chhnang province, aimed at improving rice production and farmer incomes through Chinese expertise. [ECNS]

In parallel, ongoing projects led by Shanghai Ocean University and China's Ministry of Agriculture are promoting rice–prawn co-culture in Takeo province. Cambodian farmers have received training in drone-assisted feeding, prawn seedling cultivation, and ecosystem-based farming. The initiatives run through 2027 in partnership with Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture. [Xinhua] [MOA China]

The initiatives are expected to support national development goals by improving agricultural productivity and reducing rural poverty.

In a separate move, China Energy Engineering Group (Energy China) met with Hem Vanndy, Cambodia's Minister of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation (MISTI), to discuss potential investments in the country's water supply sector. [Khmer Times]

Japan continues support for Cambodia's mine clearance efforts

(dql) Japan continues its support for Cambodia's mine clearance efforts with a new grant of JPY 1.166 billion (USD 7.8 million) announced on June 6. The funding will enhance the Cambodian Mine Action Center's (CMAC) operations through the acquisition of advanced equipment such as robotic mine-clearing machines, demining devices, barrier vehicles, and transport vehicles for heavy machinery. [Construction & Property]

This grant builds on Japan's earlier commitment in March 2025 of over USD 10 million for technical equipment and expertise to support demining (see AiR No. 12, March/2025, 4).

China urges deepening economic ties in talk with Japanese trade organization

(dql/dz) During a June 4 meeting with visiting Yohei Kono, President of the Japanese Association for the Promotion of International Trade (JAPIT), Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed hope the JAPIT would work with like-minded partners in Japan to strengthen bilateral ties and support the stable development of China-Japan relations.

The two sides also discussed enhancing trilateral cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea, particularly in integrating industrial and supply chains to address de-globalization. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

In a separate meeting on June 3, Chinese Premier Li Qiang also called for deepening China-Japan trade and investment ties to promote high-level, mutually beneficial cooperation. He reaffirmed China's commitment to treating Japan as a cooperative partner and He proposed expanding collaboration in emerging fields such as the digital and green economies, biopharmaceuticals, and third-party markets.

Kono, for his part, described China as Japan's most important economic and trade partner, highlighting China's economic resilience and calling for closer coordination to uphold multilateralism and free trade.

Since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972, China-Japan trade has grown over 300-fold, reaching USD 300 billion annually for 15 consecutive years, with total bilateral investment nearing USD 140 billion. [State Council, China] [China Daily]

Chinese President Xi Jinping holds phone with new South Korean President Lee Jae-myung

(dql) Chinese President Xi Jinping has called on South Korean President Lee Jae-myung to steer bilateral relations back on “the right course” by enhancing cooperation on multilateralism and free trade.

In their first phone call since Lee took office on June 4, Xi emphasized the need for mutual respect, stronger diplomatic and economic ties, and deeper cultural exchanges. He described China and South Korea as “inseparable close neighbors” and urged progress on their strategic partnership to benefit both peoples and contribute to regional and global stability. [State Council, China]

Lee, considered more conciliatory toward China than his predecessor Yoon Suk-yeol, has pledged a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy. During the call, he expressed his commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation, praising China’s development and Xi’s leadership. Lee also called on China to play a constructive role in denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and voiced support for deeper cooperation in economy, security, and culture based on mutual benefit and equality.

In contrast to Yoon’s more confrontational stance on issues like Taiwan, Lee has signaled a more neutral approach, stating during his campaign that cross-strait conflict would not be South Korea’s concern. [SCMP] [Reuters]

The upcoming G7 summit this week where Lee will meet U.S. President Trump will be his first diplomacy test as he continues South Korea’s longstanding tradition of balancing its relations between its top trading partner, China, and its defense ally, the U.S. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

China, U.S. hold second round of trade talks

(dql/na) China and the U.S. have opened a new round of trade talks in London on June 9 and 10, seeking to resolve ongoing tensions that have disrupted global trade and economic growth. Chinese Vice Premier and chief trade negotiator He Lifeng met with senior U.S. officials—including Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer—to address key

disputes, particularly over rare earth exports and access to advanced U.S. technologies such as semiconductors and AI-related products. [The New York Times] [Reuters]

The discussions in London come shortly after Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump conducted their first phone conversation on June 5 since trade tensions escalated between the two countries, with both leaders agreeing to hold further talks and continue implementing the May 12 Geneva agreement.

According to the Chinese readout, the phone call between the two leaders addressed ongoing disputes over rare earth mineral exports and visa restrictions for Chinese students. Trump described the conversation as reaching "a very positive conclusion for both countries" and announced that their respective teams would meet "shortly at a location to be determined." [SCMP] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Donald Trump, Truth Social]

Xi emphasized the importance of steering China-US relations away from disruptive influences while defending China's implementation of the Geneva deal that temporarily reduced mutual tariffs. Xi urged the US to "acknowledge the progress already made, and remove the negative measures taken against China," referencing recent US export controls on semiconductor software and restrictions on Huawei technologies. Xi also warned Trump to handle Taiwan issues carefully to avoid both countries being dragged "into the dangerous terrain of confrontation and even conflict." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Reuters]

For his part, Trump indicated that disputes over rare earth exports had been addressed, writing on social media that "there should no longer be any questions respecting the complexity of Rare Earth products." Both leaders extended mutual invitations to visit each other's countries, with Trump expressing appreciation for Xi's invitation to visit China. The call also reportedly included agreements to reverse blocked visas for Chinese students and resume Chinese rare earth mineral exports.

The conversation comes amid a fragile 90-day tariff reduction agreement reached in Geneva in May, which lowered US tariffs on Chinese goods from 145 percent to 30 percent and Chinese levies on American products from 125 percent to 10 percent (see AiR No. 19, May/2025, 2). Recent weeks have seen mounting tensions as both sides accused each other of violating the deal, with the US claiming China was delaying rare earth approvals while China criticized new US

technology export controls (see AiR No. 22, June/2025, 1).

Analysts viewed the call as crucial for preventing further escalation, though they noted that fundamental trade disputes remain unresolved and could complicate future negotiations. [Nikkei Asia] [Reuters] [SCMP]

China condemns US charges against researchers as "political manipulation"

(na) China has criticized the US for "political manipulation" and an "overstretched concept of national security" following charges against two Chinese researchers accused of smuggling a crop-damaging fungus into America. The Chinese Consulate in Chicago stated it had lodged a "stern representation" over what it characterized as ideologically motivated prosecutions. [SCMP]

US prosecutors described the fungus as a "potential agroterrorism weapon" that causes billions of dollars in global agricultural damage annually, with the US Justice Department noting that electronic devices of one of the indicted contained evidence of Chinese Communist (CCP) membership.

However, Chinese scientists dismissed the allegations as "politicized," arguing that the fungus is a globally prevalent pathogen that has existed in fields for extended periods. Some American agriculture experts also questioned the threat assessment, noting that the fungus has been present in the US for over a century and can be controlled through conventional pesticides. [Department of Justice, US] [USA Today] [SCMP] [Reuters]

The case has intensified concerns about deteriorating US-China scientific collaboration amid broader tensions over trade and national security issues. Last month, the State Department announced plans to "aggressively" revoke visas for Chinese students with CCP connections or those studying in fields deemed critical to national security. [SCMP]

US suspends nuclear equipment export licenses to China

(na) The US has suspended export licenses for nuclear power plant equipment suppliers to China, affecting

companies including Westinghouse and Emerson that provide components for Chinese nuclear facilities.

The suspensions affect business worth hundreds of millions of dollars and impact nuclear equipment suppliers including Westinghouse, whose technology operates in over 400 reactors worldwide, and Emerson, which provides measurement systems for nuclear plants. The restrictions are part of broader measures taken over the past weeks affecting multiple industries, with new license requirements imposed on industrial fluid suppliers and suspensions for GE Aerospace's jet engine exports to Chinese aircraft manufacturers.

The nuclear restrictions expand existing export controls that began under the first Trump administration, which imposed limitations on nuclear reactor technology exports to China in 2018. The Biden administration tightened these further in 2023, requiring specific licenses for nuclear generators, containers, software, and special materials including uranium and deuterium intended for Chinese nuclear plants. The current suspensions now affect operational nuclear plant components, not just new technology transfers. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

China operates 58 nuclear reactors and is constructing 31 more as part of plans to reach 70 GWe of nuclear capacity by the end of 2025. Nuclear power currently provides about 5 percent of China's electricity as Beijing seeks to reduce reliance on coal-fired plants that contribute to air pollution. The restrictions target a sector crucial to China's energy security and climate goals. [World Nuclear Association]

US refrains from labeling China currency manipulator despite transparency concerns

(na) The US chose not to designate China as a currency manipulator in a Treasury Department report issued on June 5, while criticizing China for insufficient transparency in exchange rate policies relative to other major trading partners.

The semi-annual congressional report comes as the Trump administration pursues trade negotiations with China following what both leaders described as a "very positive" phone call between President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Treasury officials indicated they could reassess China's currency practices in the fall and potentially apply the

manipulator designation if evidence emerges. [Department of the Treasury, USA] [SCMP]

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent emphasized that the administration has made it clear to trading partners that macroeconomic policies contributing to an unbalanced trade relationship with the United States will no longer be tolerated. [AP News] [SCMP]

The currency assessment occurs amid ongoing trade tensions, with Trump having temporarily reduced tariffs on Chinese goods from 145 percent to 30 percent for 90 days to facilitate talks, while China lowered its levies on US products from 125 percent to 10 percent.

During Trump's first presidency, the US Treasury designated China as a currency manipulator in 2019, marking the first such designation since 1994. The US Treasury's current monitoring list includes nine economies under enhanced analysis, with Ireland and Switzerland recently added alongside China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, and Germany. [AP News] [BBC] [SCMP]

US sanctions Hong Kong firms over Iran shadow banking network

(na) The US imposed sanctions on over 30 individuals and entities tied to an Iranian financial network that has allegedly laundered billions of dollars through Hong Kong and UAE-based front companies. The action represents the first sanctions against Iran's shadow banking infrastructure since President Trump issued a directive for maximum pressure on Iran in February. [Department of State, USA] [Department of the Treasury, US]

The sanctions affect 17 Hong Kong-based companies and five UAE-based entities that US Treasury officials say help Iranian organizations evade US restrictions and access international financial markets. Among the targeted Hong Kong firms, Hero Companion Limited facilitated approximately USD 20 million in payments for Iranian oil sales in February, while Kinlere Trading Limited and Yiminai Autoparts Trading Limited assisted Iran's largest petrochemical conglomerate in international transactions, according to the US Treasury.

The Treasury claimed that the designated companies are established in areas where business oversight is less stringent, allowing them to avoid examination of

their operations and ownership structures. [Department of the Treasury, US]

The sanctions announcement came one day after President Trump's phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping, though Trump indicated their discussion did not address Iran. The Chinese embassy condemned the measures as "abuse of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction" that undermines international trade rules and infringes on legitimate Chinese business interests. [SCMP]

China closes tech gap to U.S. at high pace

(dz) China appears to be rapidly narrowing the U.S.' lead across five critical and emerging technology domains: semiconductors, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, quantum technologies, and space. While the U.S. continues to top the global rankings in these fields, China is closing the gap at what researchers describe as an "accelerating pace," according to the *2025 Critical & Emerging Technologies Index* of Harvard's Belfer Center.

"Backed by economic resources, human capital, and centralized planning, China is leveraging scale to reduce dependence on imports, attract innovation within its borders, and boost industrial competitiveness," the report notes. [Belfer Center]

The index shows the U.S. still leads in economic resources, computing power, and algorithms, while China holds advantages in data availability and human capital. It estimates that China has closed approximately one-third of the overall technological gap since 2020 and now rivals or exceeds the U.S. in three subfields: pharmaceutical manufacturing, quantum sensing, and launch-vehicle production. [South China Morning Post] [CNBC]

In the area of quantum technology, analysts point to China's QSDC (quantum secure direct communication) experiments in quantum hardware. The index warns that without renewed investment in federal R&D and reforms to high-skilled visa programs, the U.S. could lose its edge in quantum and biotech "well before 2035," transforming today's two-horse race into a close sprint.

The report's release comes shortly after Beijing unveiled its *2030 Action Plan* for disruptive innovation in metrology—the science of measurement. The plan targets longstanding weaknesses in China's measurement infrastructure and outlines

advancements in 50 core metrology technologies. Among the plan's priorities are quantum gyroscopes—ultra-precise navigation tools that operate without external references like GPS—as well as nanoscale chip inspection, rare-earth magnet testing, mini-sensor development, and AI-powered imaging (see AiR No. 22, June/2025, 1).

China and Canada agree to "reset" bilateral relations

(na) Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney agreed to work toward resetting bilateral relations during their first phone call since Carney took office in March, with both sides expressing readiness to resume diplomatic and economic dialogue mechanisms.

Li stated that China hopes to see the relationship develop in a "healthy and stable" way after years of "serious difficulties" and "unnecessary disruption" between the two countries. Both leaders acknowledged the importance of engagement and committed to regularizing communication channels between their governments. [State Council, China] [Prime Minister of Canada] [SCMP]

Li and Carney welcomed the recent agreement by their trade ministers to reconvene the Joint Economic and Trade Commission to address outstanding trade disputes, including Chinese tariffs on Canadian canola, seafood, and other agricultural products imposed in retaliation for Canadian levies on Chinese electric vehicles, steel, and aluminum. Carney specifically raised concerns about trade barriers affecting Canadian agriculture and food exports during the discussion. The two sides also committed to joint action on addressing the fentanyl crisis, building on recent bilateral drug-control cooperation efforts. [CBC]

Li proposed expanded collaboration in emerging fields such as clean energy and technological innovation, noting "huge potential for cooperation" between the two economies. He emphasized that "China views Canada's development as an opportunity, not a threat" and called for both sides to foster mutual trust while resolving differences through dialogue.

The diplomatic outreach comes as both countries face separate tensions with the US, with China engaged in a trade war with the US while Canada confronts President Trump's repeated suggestions that it should become the 51st US state.

Relations between China and Canada deteriorated following the 2018 detention of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou and the subsequent imprisonment of two Canadians in China, along with disputes over alleged Chinese election interference and diplomatic expulsions. [SCMP]

China, Belarus commit to deepening ties during presidents' meeting

(dql) Chinese President Xi Jinping praised Belarus as a "true friend" of China during a meeting on June 4 with visiting Alexander Lukashenko, President of sanction-hit Belarus. Xi reassured Belarus' strategic importance for China, reaffirming his willingness to further advancing relations between the two countries while urging Minsk to join Beijing in opposing "hegemony and bullying" on the international stage, an apparent reference to the U.S.

According to the Chinese readout, Lukashenko reaffirmed his country's commitment to developing bilateral ties and cooperation and to cooperating with China to defend international fairness and justice. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Lukashenko's visit to Beijing marked his first since his victory in the January presidential election, which extended his 31-year rule over the former Soviet republic. Western governments have rejected the results as illegitimate. [AP News]

The Belarusian economy has been severely affected by Western sanctions and trade tariffs due to its support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Cut off from Western markets, Minsk—which allowed Russian forces to use its territory to launch the invasion—has increasingly pivoted toward the East.

Lukashenko, who has visited China 15 times, has long relied on Beijing for credit and investment, even as Belarus remains within Moscow's traditional sphere of influence. Minsk is also looking to China to help transform and modernize its industries. Last year, Belarus officially became a partner nation of BRICS and a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

However, economic imbalances persist despite China's pledges to deepen bilateral cooperation. According to Chinese customs data, China's trade surplus with Belarus widened by 47.6 percent to USD 4.77 billion in 2024 compared to the previous year. Chinese exports —including cars, digital television receivers, and

washing machines—far exceed imports from Belarus, which mainly consist of agricultural fertilizers. [Reuters]

China, France discuss Cognac tariffs in trade talks

(dz/dql) China and France have agreed to address their trade disputes through dialogue, according to China's foreign ministry, though no resolution has been reached on lifting Chinese tariffs on European brandy.

The dispute, which intensified following European Union (EU) tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, centers on Chinese anti-dumping duties of up to 39 percent on European brandy—primarily affecting French cognac brands. These measures have strained relations between Paris and Beijing, with French President Emmanuel Macron denouncing the duties as retaliatory.

Recent talks accelerated last week, with Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao meeting French Trade Minister Laurent Saint-Martin in Paris during an OECD conference on June 4, alongside technical negotiations held in Beijing. Two industry sources said the latest discussions raised hopes for a settlement, although key disagreements remain. [Ministry of Commerce, China, in Chinese]

China, which is seeking closer trade ties with the EU amid rising tensions with the United States, has postponed its final decision on the brandy tariffs twice, now setting the deadline for July 5. Following the talks, Saint-Martin reaffirmed France's commitment to protecting its strategic industries, including cognac.

China is the most valuable export market for French brandy, accounting for USD 1.7 billion in imports last year and ranking second in volume after the United States. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, in a phone with his French counterpart Jean-Noël Barrot on June 6, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged Paris to joins hands with Beijing to "uphold multilateralism, safeguard free trade, and oppose unilateral and bullying practices," in an apparent reference to the U.S.

He also reaffirmed China's expectation towards France opposing "NATO's interference in Asia-Pacific affairs." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1]

The phone conversation came after French President Emmanuel Macron warned that NATO could expand its role in Asia if China fails to stop North Korea from supporting Russia's war in Ukraine in his address at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Macron's remarks mark a shift from France's earlier position opposing NATO's expansion into Asia, including its successful effort to block a NATO liaison office in Japan in 2023. While reaffirming his reluctance to be drawn into strategic rivalries, he suggested France might reconsider its stance if regional threats persist. [Politico]

UK to review China's London embassy plan

(dz) The UK government has pledged to thoroughly assess security concerns over a proposed Chinese "mega-embassy" near the City of London, amid fears it could jeopardize intelligence sharing and ongoing US-UK trade talks. The plan, revived after lobbying by President Xi Jinping, has drawn strong opposition from U.S. President Donald Trump and senior U.S. officials, who warn it could give China access to sensitive communications infrastructure.

The embassy's location near key communication cables is a particular concern, with Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp warning it could be used for espionage. He cited past actions by the Chinese government, including alleged surveillance and intimidation of dissidents in the UK, as reasons to block the project.

The proposed embassy was previously rejected by Tower Hamlets Council in 2022. The redevelopment plan is now under government review following a public inquiry, with a decision pending from the Planning Inspectorate. The controversy has sparked protests, with over a thousand demonstrators rallying earlier this year against the embassy's location near Canary Wharf. [South China Morning Post] [Bloomberg]

In response, Chinese state media criticized U.S. interference, describing the security warning as an overreach and an emotional reaction to strengthening China-UK and China-EU ties and insisting that embassy location decisions are bilateral matters and should not be influenced by third-party pressure. [Global Times]

China, UAE commit to deepening strategic partnership

(dz) On June 4, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met in Beijing with Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak, Presidential Special Envoy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to China.

Citing the steady development of the China-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership, Wang described it as a model for China-Arab relations. He reaffirmed China's commitment to strengthening mutual support on core interests, expanding practical cooperation across sectors, and enhancing coordination in regional and international affairs to further deepen bilateral ties.

Al Mubarak, for this part, highlighted the UAE's readiness to increase high-level exchanges and deepen cooperation in areas including investment, trade, energy, and education. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Pakistan challenges India's treaty suspension but avoids formal rupture in bilateral frameworks

(lm) Pakistan is under increasing strategic pressure from India following New Delhi's unprecedented suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), with Islamabad attempting to uphold the treaty's legal authority while simultaneously signaling frustration over broader bilateral arrangements such as the 1972 Simla Agreement. While Pakistan's defense minister recently claimed the Simla Agreement had "no worth or value" following India's actions, Islamabad clarified that no formal decision has been taken to abrogate any bilateral accord.

India suspended the IWT on April 23, 2025, a day after a terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir, citing Pakistan's alleged ongoing support for cross-border militancy. This marked the first time in the treaty's six-decade history that one party unilaterally put it in abeyance. Since then, India has ceased sharing water flow data on the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers, which are allocated to Pakistan under the treaty. Indian officials declared the suspension will remain in place until Pakistan "irreversibly ends" its support for terrorism.

Pakistan has sent multiple formal letters to India's Jal Shakti Ministry—responsible for water and sanitation

—arguing that the IWT, signed in 1960 under World Bank auspices, cannot be suspended unilaterally and must remain in force regardless of political tensions. Pakistani officials have warned that tampering with the treaty's provisions or obstructing river flows could be considered an "act of war," underscoring Islamabad's vulnerability due to its downstream dependence on river systems originating in India. [mint]

In parallel, the defense minister has called into question the validity of the Simla Agreement, which governs how India and Pakistan manage the Kashmir dispute and maintain the Line of Control (LoC). The agreement—signed after the 1971 war—has long underpinned bilateral commitments to resolve disputes without third-party mediation. By declaring its provisions void, the minister suggested that Pakistan no longer sees the framework as politically viable. However, Islamabad has stopped short of an official withdrawal. [Arab News]

India and U.S. aim to finalize interim tariff deal ahead of July deadline

(lm) India and the United States are holding two-day talks in New Delhi to finalize an interim trade deal before the self-imposed July 9 deadline, reportedly set by the U.S. administration. The negotiations, led by senior officials from the Office of the United States Trade Representative and India's chief trade negotiator, focus on tariff reductions in sectors such as agriculture and automobiles, as well as market access and supply chain linkages. The deal may be announced by the end of June.

India, encouraged by recent trade progress with the United Kingdom and the European Union, is offering tariff reductions averaging 10 percent, closer to the U.S. baseline, while resisting full liberalization of its farm and dairy markets due to concerns over domestic backlash. Washington, meanwhile, is pressing India to lower its average agricultural tariff of 39 percent and to permit corn imports for ethanol production.

Bilateral trade reached USD 129 billion (INR 10.75 trillion) in 2024, with India running a USD 45.7 billion surplus. The long-term goal remains expanding trade volume to USD 500 billion by 2030. [Reuters]

New India–Italy working groups to focus on space, automobiles, and green tech

cooperation

(lm) India and Italy have agreed to establish joint working groups on the space and automobile sectors, while deepening collaboration in green hydrogen, biofuels, Industry 4.0 technologies, and energy transition. The agreements were reached during the 22nd session of the India–Italy Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation (JCEC), co-chaired by India's Commerce Minister and Italy's Deputy Prime Minister in Brescia, the industrial hub of northern Italy.

The two countries committed to strengthening cooperation in digital transformation, mobility, skill development, and the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The JCEC session was complemented by a high-level India–Italy Growth Forum that brought together CEOs and industry leaders to explore joint ventures and new industrial opportunities.

Further areas of collaboration include agri-tech, food processing, packaging, and renewable energy. Both sides also discussed facilitating the mobility of skilled professionals between India and Italy. A large Indian business delegation accompanied the minister during his visit, holding sectoral meetings and corporate engagements with Italian industry leaders. [Financial Express]

Russian foreign minister to visit India

(lm) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to visit India in June to advance strategic cooperation and reinvigorate talks on the long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), under negotiation since 2015. Lavrov is also expected to lay the groundwork for a potential meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the upcoming BRICS summit in Brazil.

On the economic front, Lavrov's visit is likely to prioritize the EAEU–India FTA, described by Russian officials as a "game changer" in bilateral ties. India–Russia trade reached nearly USD 70 billion in 2024, driven largely by Indian imports of Russian energy despite Western sanctions. Negotiations on payment, insurance, and banking mechanisms have reportedly progressed.

However, the visit is set against the backdrop of renewed controversy over the India–Pakistan ceasefire that followed New Delhi's Operation Sindoor. The

operation, launched by India in early May 2025, targeted terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan in response to fatal cross-border attacks Indian-administered Kashmir. A four-day conflict followed, ending in a ceasefire on May 10.

This will be the first visit to India by a foreign minister from a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council since the military escalation between India and Pakistan, and tensions resurfaced after Russian Presidential aide Yuri Ushakov repeated former U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that Washington mediated the ceasefire—an assertion repeatedly denied by India. New Delhi maintains that the cessation of hostilities was arranged bilaterally through military channels. While the source of Russia's reference remains unclear, Indian officials are expected to restate their position during Lavrov's visit. [The Hindu]

Indonesian defense ministry considers purchasing Chinese-made J-10 jets

(th) As part of its efforts to modernize the military, particularly the air force, Indonesia is considering purchasing Chinese-made J-10 fighters, the model that destroyed a French-built Rafale warplane during the recent conflict between India and Pakistan. Indonesia has long been interested in the J-10 models before the conflict.

According to Donny Ermawan Taufanto, Indonesia's deputy minister of defence, China had extended an offer to sell the jets to Indonesia during Mohamad Tonny Harjono's, Indonesia's air chief marshal, visit to an arms fair in China. [SCMP] [The Diplomat]

Indonesia, France to deepen cooperation in digital safety

(dql) Indonesia and France are deepening their collaboration to foster the digital economy and ensure a safe digital environment. This partnership, led by Indonesia's Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs, focuses on key areas including start-up development, AI regulation, and child protection online.

Minister Meutya Hafid highlighted three main pillars: securing digital space, strengthening infrastructure, and developing digital human resources. Current joint

projects include building a national data center and launching the SATRIA-1 satellite, alongside efforts to boost start-ups and digital innovation ecosystems. [Antara News]

The Netherlands supports Indonesia development programs

(dql) The Dutch government is committing USD 300 million to support Indonesia's free nutritious meal initiative and affordable housing projects through the investment agency Invest International, as announced by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin). Dutch Ambassador Marc Gerritsen reaffirmed the Netherlands' commitment to sustainable development and tangible community impact.

A delegation of 120 Dutch companies is scheduled to arrive in Indonesia next week to attend a trade and investment mission spanning Jakarta, Medan, Semarang, and Makassar. The mission will focus on food security, maritime affairs, and water management.

The Netherlands is the largest EU investor in Indonesia, accounting for around 46 percent of total European investment. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesian government cautioned against rushing diplomatic relations with Israel

(th) The centre-left Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has advised the government against rushing into diplomatic engagement with Israel. Djarot Saiful Hidayat, Chairperson of the PDI-P Central Executive Board, cited the 1945 Constitution, which mandates the eradication of all forms of colonialism.

Djarot emphasized that diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Israel cannot be established as long as Palestine remains under occupation. He reaffirmed the PDI-P's continued support for an independent and internationally recognized Palestinian state.

In an earlier statement, made during a joint press conference with visiting French President Emmanuel Macron on May 28, President Prabowo Subianto affirmed that should Palestine achieve independence, the Indonesian government would be willing to assist Israel in maintaining its security. [Tempo]

Chinese aircraft carrier spotted near Japan's easternmost island for first time

(ja/ad) The Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning has been reported sailing in the vicinity of Japan's easternmost island, with officials noting this is the first time a Chinese carrier has sailed those waters.

The Japanese Defense Ministry noted that the carrier, alongside two destroyers and another vessel, were seen in waters approximately 300 kilometers southwest of Minamitori on June 8. The area is located within the Japanese exclusive economic zone.

The Liaoning and its accompanying ships then moved further southwest and conducted landing and takeoff drills involving its aircraft. [Kyodo News]

The area lies along China's so-called "second island chain," which extends from the Ogasawara Islands to Guam and is seen as a strategic buffer zone against U.S. military forces. The Ministry believes China's activities aim to strengthen the *Liaoning*'s ability to operate over long distances. Japanese forces continue to monitor the situation closely. [NHK World]

In a latest development, the ministry reported that carrier *Shandong* and four accompanying vessels entered Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on June 10. [Al Jazeera]

Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba holds talks with new South Korea president

(ja) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and new South Korean President Lee Jae Myung held their first phone call since Lee took office on June 4, with both leaders agreeing to develop stronger bilateral ties.

The two countries also agreed to try and maintain trilateral cooperation with the U.S., expressing their commitment toward working within the tripartite framework to jointly respond to geopolitical challenges.

During the call, Japan also sought out South Korea's cooperation in addressing challenges posed by North Korea, such as its nuclear proliferation, its seeking of closer military ties with Russia, and the North Korean abduction of Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 1980s.

Lee is a liberal who has taken a firm stance on compensating South Korean wartime laborers during

Japan's colonial rule between 1910 and 1945. Ishiba said that the two leaders touched on "issues of concern" to both sides, however declined to comment directly on whether compensation for wartime laborers was one such issue.

The two leaders also hope to be able to meet in person soon. The earliest date for an in-person summit meeting would be at the meeting of the Group of Seven nations to be held in Canada that starts on June 15, of which both South Korea and Japan plan to attend. [The Mainichi]

Japan urges tariff reconsideration in talks with US as another round ends without agreement

(ad) During a meeting with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on June 5, Japan's lead tariff negotiator, Ryosei Akazawa, once again urged the United States to reconsider the steep import tariffs imposed. The meeting marked Akazawa's third consecutive week in Washington, as both sides continue high-level trade talks aiming for a mutually beneficial agreement ahead of a mid-June summit between Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and President Donald Trump.

The two officials also discussed broader economic issues, including trade cooperation, non-tariff barriers, and economic security.

Anticipating continued U.S. resistance to a full repeal of Donald Trump's 25 percent auto tariff, Japan has proposed a system to at least reduce the rate, government sources said. While Tokyo continues to press for complete removal, it is now suggesting a tariff reduction based on each country's "degree of contribution"—such as increased local production and exports of U.S.-made vehicles by Japanese automakers.

Facing mounting pressure from the tariffs' impact on its auto industry, Japan appears now more open to negotiated reductions to mitigate economic damage, while maintaining full removal as its long-term goal. [The Asahi Shimbun]

In response to concerns about China, recent reports also suggest that the agreement between the two countries might involve collaboration to bolster U.S. supply chains for rare earth elements and other materials used in electric vehicle batteries, as well as a boost in imports of semiconductors and liquefied natural gas from the United States. [The Japan Times]

After the fifth round of high-level talks in Washington, it is reported that both have made some progress in their ongoing tariff negotiations but have yet to reach a final agreement. Akazawa stated that discussions would continue in hopes of achieving a mutually beneficial deal. [The Japan News]

Under Trump's reciprocal tariff policy introduced in April, Japan faces a total tariff rate of 24 percent, including a country-specific 14 percent on top of a standard 10 percent. Japan is also subject to additional sector-based tariffs, including a 25 percent levy on automobiles, justified on national security grounds.

Japan and Lithuania agree to collaborate in efforts to promote peace in Ukraine

(ad) Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda have agreed to collaborate on efforts to bring peace to Ukraine, along with addressing a range of other issues.

Ishiba expressed his desire to work closely with Nauseda to uphold and strengthen a free and open international order grounded in the rule of law.

Both leaders agreed that any unilateral attempt to alter the status quo through force is unacceptable. They reaffirmed their commitment to working together to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan]

The two also voiced serious concern over growing military ties between Russia and North Korea and agreed to deepen cooperation in various fields, including security, transportation, maritime affairs, and renewable energy. [NHK World]

New Zealand seeks to strengthen security relationship with Japan

(ad) Amid rising geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific, New Zealand is working to deepen its defense ties with Japan through joint military exercises, maritime patrols, and potential space cooperation, according to Defense Minister Judith Collins.

In an interview with *The Japan Times*, Collins emphasized the importance of growing collaboration between the two nations, particularly in sensitive areas such as the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. She

described the effort as a careful and deliberate approach to strengthening the relationship.

The move reflects a shift in New Zealand's defense and foreign policy, driven by increasing regional security concerns and China's assertiveness. Collins pointed to recent developments—such as China's strategic partnership with the Cook Islands, missile tests near the Pacific, and naval drills in the Tasman Sea—as reasons for greater vigilance and cooperation.

To respond to the evolving security landscape, New Zealand has committed to boosting defense spending by NZD 12 billion (USD 7.2 billion) over four years, aiming to raise its military budget to 2 percent of GDP by 2032/33.

Japan plays a key role in New Zealand's strategy, with Collins praising Tokyo's willingness to support a rules-based international order. The two countries have increased military engagements, including port visits, patrols in the South China Sea, and joint passages through the Taiwan Strait. High-level defense exchanges have also been growing.

To facilitate deeper cooperation, Tokyo and Wellington are advancing talks on a possible acquisition and cross-servicing agreement, which would streamline logistics such as sharing fuel, supplies, and facility access during joint operations. Another major step under discussion is an Information Security Agreement (ISA) to enable the secure exchange of classified intelligence. This deal could be finalized by the end of the year.

New Zealand also sees opportunities to work with Japan on emerging technologies, including space and drones. Collins highlighted her country's strong satellite launch capabilities and the potential for bilateral collaboration in space and unmanned systems, especially as New Zealand explores its role in initiatives like the AUKUS Pillar II program.

While not actively seeking to join alliances like the U.S.-led informal security groupings, such as the Quad and the Squad, New Zealand is increasing its defense outreach across the Indo-Pacific, strengthening ties with democratic partners including India and the Philippines.

Regarding intelligence sharing, Collins acknowledged Japan's cooperation with the Five Eyes alliance, though she said formal membership is not currently under consideration. Still, she noted that Japan has benefited from shared intelligence and will likely continue to do so when appropriate. [The Japan Times]

Laos-China solar power project set to begin operations

(dql) A major Laos–China joint solar power project in Oudomxay Province has reached 60 percent completion and is on track to begin operations by late 2025. The project is expected to generate 1.7 billion kWh annually, enough to power about 10 million households.

Spanning 2,090 hectares across seven villages, the 1,000-megawatt project is being carried out under a concession agreement signed in September 2024 with CGN Energy Technology (Laos) Co., Ltd., a subsidiary within the China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN), a major Chinese state-owned enterprise specializing in clean energy.

Electricity from the plant will be transmitted to China's Yunnan Province via the China–Laos 500 kV power grid interconnection, supporting Yunnan's energy transition and regional grid stability.

The project is a cornerstone of the Northern Laos Interconnected Clean Energy Base, a broader initiative integrating solar, wind, and biomass power across Oudomxay, Luang Namtha, and Phongsaly provinces. It is part of Laos's goal of reaching 30 percent renewable energy consumption by 2025. [The Laotian Times]

Malaysia, Brunei strengthen cooperation on disaster preparedness and security

(ga) Malaysia and Brunei have reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing regional cooperation in disaster preparedness and cross-border security. The agreement was reached during a bilateral meeting between Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Brunei's Minister of Home Affairs Awang Ahmaddin on the sidelines of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) 2025 in Geneva.

Both countries agreed to continue joint training initiatives involving the Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART) and Brunei's National Disaster Management Centre.

The cooperation includes knowledge transfer programs, rescue operations, emergency simulations, and field training exercises to improve coordination

during cross-border disasters. The initiative aims to reinforce existing bilateral ties and ensure better regional response mechanisms. [Bernama]

Malaysia and Japan explore Agro-tech cooperation

(tl) Malaysia's Agriculture and Food Security Minister Mohamad Sabu held an official meeting with Japan's Fukui Prefectural Government to strengthen bilateral cooperation in agriculture, food security, and agro-technology. The discussion focused on technology transfer, smart farming innovation, and youth training programs to enhance Malaysia's food resilience amid global challenges like climate change and supply disruptions. [Bernama]

Malaysia, UK to form joint committee for franchise cooperation

(tl) Malaysia and the UK are set to establish a joint committee to support Malaysian franchise brands entering the UK market, particularly in halal sectors like food, cosmetics, and traditional medicine. Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who also chairs the Cabinet committee on franchises, announced the initiative during a working visit to the UK. The committee will monitor progress biannually and aims to assist Malaysian businesses through support from the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) and digital grants from the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC).

Malaysia targets USD 21.2 billion in franchise sales by 2030 and is positioning itself as a gateway for UK franchises to access the ASEAN market. [Bernama]

Malaysia, Poland strengthen bilateral ties

(tl) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim welcomed Polish President Andrzej Duda on an official visit to Malaysia, where both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and interregional cooperation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia]

Both leaders exchanged views on global and regional issues, including Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship, its relations with China and the Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC), Poland's upcoming European Union's Council presidency, the Ukraine war, the Middle East crisis, and concerns over North Korea.

Moreover, the overlapping leadership roles of Malaysia's ASEAN chair and Poland's EU council presidency mark the key moment to boost ASEAN-EU relations, especially in trade. Anwar noted renewed momentum in free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with the EU, while Duda emphasized Poland's desire to enhance cooperation between Malaysia and Central European countries via the Three Seas Initiative, a platform involving EU member states focused on economic connectivity and infrastructure.

Speaking at the joint press conference, the two leaders pledged to deepen collaboration in education, culture, tourism, and security. Efforts are underway to finalize an MoU on higher education and promote academic and cultural exchanges. Tourism cooperation will be enhanced through efforts to boost direct air connectivity.

Both countries agreed to strengthen cooperation in tackling transnational crimes such as human trafficking and illegal immigration. Poland's accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) was also welcomed, and both nations committed to upholding international law, human rights, and addressing global challenges like climate change, health threats, and cybersecurity. [Bernama1]

Furthermore, defense cooperation will also be strengthened, with discussions focusing on long-term procurement opportunities and strategic engagement between their defense ministries. Discussions also covered cooperation in food technology, digital innovation, renewable energy, and the halal industry. Anwar praised Poland's capabilities in green hydrogen and modern food technology, which align with Malaysia's sustainability and halal goals. Extensive discussion on boosting exports such as palm oil, timber, rubber products and electronics goods were also held. [Bernama2]

Poland is the 8th largest EU trading partner of Malaysia and the bilateral trade grew by 19.5 percent to MYR 5.66 billion (USD 1.33 billion) in 2024, with key exchanges in electronics, machinery, and transport equipment. [Malay Mail1] [Malay Mail2]

Guinea-Bissau president makes first official visit to Malaysia

(tl) Malaysia Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim held bilateral talks with visiting Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embalo on June 4. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia]

The discussions focused on enhancing cooperation in trade, agriculture, education, and capacity building. They also exchanged views on regional and global issues.

Diplomatic ties between Malaysia and Guinea-Bissau have remained friendly since 1974, supported by shared participation in platforms like the the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In 2024, trade between the two nations totaled USD 861,000, with Malaysia exporting goods worth USD 848,400. [Malay Mail]

Chinese delegation to assess council office construction as part of Maldives' nationwide infrastructure plan

A Chinese delegation is scheduled to visit the Maldives in July 2025 to conduct a feasibility study for the construction of 50 island council buildings under a grant from the Chinese government. This follows the signing of a Letter of Exchange between the two countries on May 22. The project targets island councils with the most severe space limitations and deteriorated infrastructure, aiming to upgrade local governance facilities as part of the Maldives' decentralization efforts.

In parallel, the Maldivian government is funding the construction of council buildings in an additional 55 islands. That portion of the project, announced in January, is being implemented through a contract with a Malaysian contractor. [avas] [The Sun]

Japan grants USD 1.3 million to support Maldivian scholarship program

(lm) Japan has awarded a grant of approximately USD 1.3 million to the Maldives to support the continuation of the Japanese Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS) program. The grant will fund six scholarships for Maldivian students this year, reinforcing Japan's commitment to capacity building and education in the Maldives. The JDS program, launched in 2020, focuses on developing human

resources through graduate-level academic opportunities in Japan. [The Sun]

Hajj visit by Maldivian President strengthens ties with Saudi Arabia

(lm) Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and First Lady Sajidha Ahmed concluded an official visit to Saudi Arabia on June 9, where they performed the Hajj– the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and one of the five pillars of Islam– at the invitation of the Saudi government. The presidential couple was accompanied by a high-level delegation of senior Maldivian officials.

During the visit, President Muizzu met with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman to express appreciation for the hospitality extended to Maldivian pilgrims and to discuss avenues for deepening bilateral cooperation. The talks focused on enhancing strategic ties in areas of mutual interest. [avas] [The Sun]

Mongolia, India hold joint military exercise in Ulaanbaatar

(fs) The 17th edition of the joint military exercise Nomadic Elephant 2025 between India and Mongolia is taking place between May 31 and June 13 at the Special Forces Training Centre in Ulaanbaatar.

The exercise focuses on non-conventional operations in semi-urban and mountainous terrains under a United Nations mandate.

The primary goal is to enhance the operational capabilities of both forces by exchanging best practices in counter-terrorism, precision sniping, and improving interoperability. It also includes various drills such as endurance training, reflex shooting, and cyber warfare.

The exercise alternates annually between India and Mongolia, with the last edition held in Meghalaya (India) in 2024. [The Economic Times]

Mongolia, Japan expand defense cooperation

(fs) Commander of the ground forces of the armed forces of Mongolia Major General Tsogtjargal

Chimedgochoo paid an official visit to Japan on June 5 at the invitation of chief of staff of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Yasunori Morishita.

During bilateral talks, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening defense ties under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between their defense ministries in 2024 (see AiR No. 51, December/2024, 3).

The meeting highlighted progress in joint military activities, particularly the Zam engineering exercises, which began in 2014 and have completed three phases. Starting in 2025, the program will be renewed with a focus on engineering and infrastructure development for United Nations peacekeeping missions. [Akipress]

Mongolia, South Korea enhance maritime cooperation

(fs) The Mongolia Maritime Administration and the Korea Shipowners' Association signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in the maritime sector on June 4.

The agreement aims to support the development of Mongolia's maritime activities, improve ship registration quality, and advance maritime transport policies. It also provides for the exchange of relevant information between both parties. [Montsame]

China pressures ethnic armies to halt offensives, aiming to shield belt and road projects in Myanmar

(nf) China is redoubling efforts to dictate the course of Myanmar's internal conflict, having already appealed to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Arakan Army (AA) to halt their military offensives in Kachin and Rakhine States in exchange for improved relations with Beijing.

Chinese envoy Deng Xijun reportedly met with the leaders of both sides late last month, in a bid to protect major Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects—most prominently, the Kyaukphyu deep-water port and the city of Bhamo, which are key to China's energy and trade corridors.

The action replicates Beijing's recent achievement in pushing the other two members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), into ceasefires after they had captured significant territory in northern Shan State, including the main commerce center of Lashio, which was then handed over to junta control under Chinese supervision.

Although the Chinese government has not yet publicly approved of the latest developments, the trend is unmistakable: Beijing is trying to stabilize those areas where there is Chinese infrastructure involvement, even at the expense of shoring up Myanmar's beleaguered military junta. This is indicative of China's desire for stability and its discomfort with the pro-West leanings of the National Unity Government and affiliated opposition forces, who would serve to destabilize Beijing's long-term strategic and economic footing in the country. [The Diplomat]

Myanmar included in Trump's travel ban

(nj) United States President Donald Trump issued a total entry ban on 12 countries on Wednesday, June 4, following an attack on pro-Israeli protestors in Colorado by an Egyptian national. According to the US government, the attacker illegally overstayed his tourist visa.

Myanmar was included in the ban, alongside Afghanistan, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

In a video statement, Trump stated that the bans target countries where individuals cannot be properly vetted and screened prior to entering the United States, and who's country of origin does not cooperate in repatriation efforts. These countries also have a higher rate of visa overstays.

According to the United States Department of Homeland Security, there is a 27 percent overstay rate for individuals from Myanmar with tourist and business visas, and a 42 percent overstay rate on student, vocational, and exchange visitor visas.

The United States is home to a growing number of Myanmar refugees. According to the Refugee Processing Center, Myanmar was the top nation of origin for refugees between 2013 and 2023, with over

117,000 entering the United States. [The Diplomat] [The Irrawaddy] [White House]

United States seizes USD7.7 million in cryptocurrency linked to North Korean IT worker laundering network

(fw) The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) has seized over USD 7.7 million in cryptocurrency connected to a sophisticated North Korean money laundering operation involving IT workers employed globally under false identities. These operatives exploited remote work opportunities at international tech firms, earning payments in stablecoins such as USDC and USDT, which were then covertly funneled back to North Korea to finance its weapons programs and evade sanctions. [Department of Justice, USA]

According to the DOJ's civil forfeiture complaint, North Korean nationals secured jobs using fabricated documents and identities, often in blockchain and decentralized finance sectors. They laundered funds through complex methods including "chain hopping" across different cryptocurrencies, token swaps, and using non-fungible tokens (NFTs) to obscure transactions. [TRM Labs]

This seizure is part of the broader U.S. initiative, known as the DPRK RevGen: Domestic Enabler Initiative, aimed at disrupting North Korea's digital revenue streams. Over recent years, North Korea has increasingly relied on cybercrime and deceptive employment schemes to generate cryptocurrency, estimated to total around USD 5 billion stolen through various hacks and illicit activities. The use of remote IT workers represents a growing vector for sanctions evasion and weapons financing. [NK News]

The FBI has also issued warnings about job scams involving North Korean actors using stolen U.S. identities to gain employment, urging companies to strengthen hiring vetting processes. Technology firms like OpenAI and Google have taken steps to shut down accounts linked to these operations, which often utilize AI tools to fabricate résumés and job applications. [U.S. Department of Justice]

Russia transfers advanced drone and missile technology to North Korea

(fw) Russia is actively supporting North Korea in developing advanced military technology, including the domestic production of Iranian-style Shahed-136 long-range attack drones and improvements to ballistic missile systems. This deepening military-technical partnership is poised to significantly shift the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula and has broader implications for regional and global security.

According to Lieutenant general Kyrylo Budanov, head of Ukraine's Defense Intelligence, Russia is helping North Korea set up production lines for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) modeled on the Iranian Shahed-136 drone—known as the Geran in Russia. The plan includes not only the Shahed-136 but also long-range attack drones such as the Garpiya. Originally supplied by Iran and mass-produced by Russia for use against Ukraine, these drones are capable of long-range attacks and have been a persistent threat on the Ukrainian battlefield. Russia currently produces about 2,000 Shahed drones per month, with plans to increase output to 5,000 monthly.

The ability to manufacture these drones will give North Korea the capacity to strike targets anywhere in South Korea, potentially in overwhelming volumes that could challenge South Korean air defenses. There is also the possibility that North Korea could export these drones back to Russia for continued use in Ukraine.

In addition to drone technology, Russia is helping North Korea improve the accuracy and reliability of its KN-23 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), also known as Hwasong-11. Initial batches of these missiles supplied to Russia reportedly suffered from poor accuracy and frequent in-flight failures. Russian technical assistance has since dramatically improved their performance, with the latest versions striking targets with much greater precision.

This growing partnership is part of a broader arms-for-technology exchange. North Korea has supplied Russia with millions of rounds of artillery, rocket launchers, and self-propelled guns such as the M1989 Koksan. In return, Russia is transferring advanced military technology, including drone manufacturing know-how, missile upgrades, and potentially other strategic systems.

Approximately 11,000 North Korean troops are currently present in Russia's Kursk region, supporting Russian military operations. Additionally, new agreements have been reached for North Korean labor migrants to work in Russia, potentially replacing Central Asian workers or being recruited into the Russian military.

Security analysts warn that this deepening Russia–North Korea military-technical cooperation could destabilize Northeast Asia, trigger regional arms races, and complicate efforts to contain the proliferation of advanced weapon systems. The transfer of drone and missile production capabilities gives North Korea new offensive options and challenges existing defense strategies in South Korea and the broader region. [Daily NK] [The War Zone]

Pakistan confirms acquisition of Chinese J-35 stealth jets

(lm) Pakistan has officially confirmed the acquisition of up to 40 Chinese J-35 fifth-generation stealth fighter jets, making it the first international operator of China's latest stealth aircraft. The deal—one of Pakistan's most significant defense procurements in recent years—also includes KJ-500 airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft and HQ-19 ballistic missile defense systems.

Pakistani officials confirmed that pilot training on the J-35A variant is currently underway in China, with the first aircraft expected to arrive by August 2025. The J-35A, developed by Shenyang Aircraft Corporation and first unveiled at the 2024 Zhuhai Airshow, is equipped with stealth features, advanced sensors, and multi-role combat capabilities designed for low detectability and high agility in contested environments. [Defence Industry Europe] [Daily Times]

This announcement comes in the wake of a four-day military escalation between India and Pakistan from May 7 to 10, widely seen as the most intense in decades. The conflict involved cross-border missile and air strikes—including deep air strikes from India inside Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Punjab—and extensive drone engagements. Pakistan countered with its own barrage of drone, missile, artillery, and air responses, and both countries claimed aircraft shootdowns. Pakistan said its Chinese-built J-10C fighters shot down six Indian jets—including Rafales—while India later acknowledged unspecified aircraft losses but denied larger claims.

Pakistan 's blockchain minister meets U.S. counterpart

(lm) Pakistan's Minister of State for Crypto and Blockchain, Bilal Bin Saqib, met with Bo Hines,

Executive Director of the U.S. President's Council of Advisers for Digital Assets, at the White House to advance bilateral cooperation on crypto regulation and blockchain strategy. The meeting follows Pakistan's recent digital finance initiatives, including the launch of a Strategic Bitcoin Reserve and the formation of the Pakistan Crypto Council earlier this year.

Saqib emphasized Pakistan's ambition to lead the Global South in digital assets and economic modernization, highlighting plans to use 2,000 megawatts of surplus electricity for Bitcoin mining and AI data zones. Talks focused on regulatory alignment, innovation ecosystems, and financial inclusion.

The government also aims to create an autonomous regulator for digital finance. Saqib's visit included discussions with the White House Counsel's Office on blockchain governance, underscoring Pakistan's intent to integrate private-sector innovation with sovereign policy to build a robust crypto economy. [Arab News]

Pakistan seeks deeper defense and tech ties with Belarus

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed his commitment to enhancing defense and technology cooperation with Belarus during a meeting with Belarusian Defense Minister Victor Khrenin in Islamabad. The talks follow a series of agreements signed during Sharif's official visit to Belarus in April 2025, including a military-technical roadmap through 2027 and multiple memoranda of understanding covering trade and industrial cooperation.

The Pakistani side emphasized interest in Belarus's strengths in agricultural machinery and manufacturing, alongside expanding ties in information technology and defense. Sharif also used the occasion to brief the Belarusian delegation on Islamabad's position in the ongoing standoff with India, citing a recent escalation triggered by accusations following an attack in Indian-administered Kashmir. Pakistan has denied involvement and condemned India's military response, which it claims targeted civilians. [Arab News]

Pakistan's prime minister and Saudi crown prince discuss regional tensions and deepen investment ties

(lm) Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Mecca on June 6 to advance economic cooperation and discuss regional security concerns, including Pakistan's recent military escalation with India and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The meeting marks Sharif's first high-level foreign engagement since a recent four-day military escalation between India and Pakistan and comes amid mounting bilateral momentum following Saudi Arabia's recent USD 5 billion investment pledge to Pakistan.

The two leaders reaffirmed strategic ties and pledged to expand collaboration across political, economic, and defense sectors. In addition to reiterating support for the Palestinian cause, Sharif thanked Riyadh for its mediating role during the May 2025 India–Pakistan standoff. Crown Prince Mohammed had earlier hosted Sharif at a royal court luncheon attended by top Saudi officials.

The visit underscores growing Saudi financial engagement in Pakistan. In 2024 alone, 34 investment memorandums worth USD 2.8 billion were signed, with Saudi firm Manara Minerals now in advanced talks to acquire a 10 to 20 percent stake in the USD 9 billion Reko Diq mining project. Defense cooperation also remains central, with ongoing Pakistani support for Saudi military training. The 2.7 million Pakistanis living in Saudi Arabia continue to be a major source of remittance income. [Arab News]

Pakistan confirms deaths of two nationals in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan amid continued border tensions

(lm) Pakistan has confirmed that two Pakistani nationals were killed in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, a restive region near the shared border long afflicted by instability and cross-border militancy. The deceased reportedly died under circumstances not publicly detailed by either government.

The incident adds to ongoing tensions between Islamabad and Tehran, who frequently accuse each other of failing to contain militant groups operating in the borderlands. Sistan-Baluchistan, one of Iran's most impoverished and restive provinces, is known for armed clashes involving drug traffickers, Baloch separatist groups, and extremist militants. In April 2025, eight Pakistani nationals were killed in Iran's Mehrestan County in an attack claimed by the Balochistan National Army (BNA), a separatist group active in southwestern Pakistan. [Arab News]

Singapore and Philippines advance concrete cooperation on energy, climate, and healthcare

(dnb) Singapore and the Philippines agreed on a series of practical initiatives during Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's official visit to Manila from June 4 to 5. The visit yielded concrete steps in energy, climate policy, healthcare, and administrative cooperation.

On energy, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to realizing the ASEAN Power Grid by 2045, aimed at enabling cross-border electricity trading among member states. Singaporean firms expressed interest in investing in Philippine solar and wind projects, aligning with Manila's efforts to diversify its energy mix.

In the climate domain, the two countries are finalizing a legally binding agreement for cross-border carbon credit transfers, consistent with Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. The agreement is expected to facilitate commercial investment, technology transfer, and job creation in sustainability sectors.

A bilateral health cooperation agreement is also in progress, targeting workforce development and reintegration programs for returning Filipino health professionals. Singapore's Temasek Foundation will expand its healthcare initiatives in areas such as Taguig.

The two countries are also launching a digital leadership program between the Philippine Civil Service Commission and the National University of Singapore, with the goal of enhancing public sector capacity.

The upgraded air services agreement signed in 2024, which raised code-share flight limits to 150, supports expanded business and labor mobility—reinforcing the economic dimension of the bilateral relationship. [The Straits Times]

Singapore finalizes strategic land agreements with neighbors

(nl) Singapore has concluded two key land transactions aimed at preserving heritage sites and expanding critical infrastructure. The agreements involve a land swap with Johor's regent, Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, and the acquisition of Malaysian-owned land to

support the expansion of Woodlands Checkpoint (WCP), a major cross-border gateway to Malaysia.

Singapore secured 13 hectares of privately owned land near the UNESCO-listed Singapore Botanic Gardens, transferring 8.5 hectares of state-owned land in return. The swap is intended to reduce development pressure near the heritage site while allowing the Johor royal family to consolidate holdings in Tyersall Park, a historically significant area that includes the ruins of Istana Woodneuk, an abandoned former royal palace that once belonged to the Sultan of Johor. [Channel NewsAsia]

Separately, on June 4, Singapore announced plans to acquire two land parcels owned by the Malaysian government to support the redevelopment of Woodlands Checkpoint (WCP), a major cross-border entry point connecting Singapore to Malaysia. The plots, totaling 0.79 hectares, are located within the planned expansion zone. The redevelopment, which will be carried out in phases over the next 10 to 15 years, aims to alleviate chronic congestion caused by rising cross-border traffic. Between 2023 and 2024, daily traveler volume at WCP increased by 22 percent, with projections reaching up to 400,000 travelers by 2050. [Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, Singapore] [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore foreign minister's Washington visit addresses tariffs, tech cooperation, and student visa

(lm/nl) Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs concluded a visit to Washington, D.C., from June 4 to 7, 2025, focused on strengthening bilateral relations and addressing emerging geopolitical and economic challenges. The trip included a key meeting with U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Marco Rubio, where both sides reaffirmed their close cooperation in core areas such as trade, defense, and security, and explored new opportunities in fields like critical technologies, energy, and artificial intelligence.

Minister Balakrishnan raised concerns about the impact of U.S. tariff policies on Singapore's small and trade-dependent economy. He emphasized Singapore's openness to constructive engagement, particularly on sectoral issues such as pharmaceutical exports. He also noted that although U.S. tariffs are not directly aimed at Singapore, their secondary effects could significantly disrupt global trade flows, which Singapore is especially vulnerable to given its trading volume exceeds its GDP.

In meetings with U.S. officials and members of Congress from both parties, the minister stressed the need for ongoing cooperation and policy clarity in light of global instability and the evolving world order. He welcomed the U.S. commitment to the Indo-Pacific but urged continued engagement beyond the military sphere, underlining the region's strategic economic relevance to the U.S.

Student visa delays were also discussed, with the minister conveying the concerns of Singaporean students—particularly those at Harvard—and pressing U.S. authorities for timely clarifications. Singapore is preparing contingency measures to support affected students.

The minister also engaged with think tank representatives and participated in a discussion at the Hudson Institute, sharing Singapore's perspective on regional order and the need for adaptive diplomacy amid growing global uncertainty. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore 1] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore 2]

Singapore's President pushes tech, supply chain, and climate cooperation in Germany

(lm) During his working visit to Germany from June 4 to 8, Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam advanced cooperation on artificial intelligence, supply chain resilience, and climate response. His meetings with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and business leaders focused on strengthening bilateral collaboration in strategic sectors, as Germany and Singapore mark 60 years of diplomatic relations.

Talks highlighted Singapore's positioning as a key Asian hub for emerging technologies and as a reliable partner in restructuring global supply chains amid rising geopolitical fragmentation. President Tharman also emphasized the need for stronger region-to-region linkages and international coordination on climate change, pandemic preparedness, and social resilience.

At a policy roundtable hosted by the Körber Stiftung, he joined German lawmakers and analysts to discuss shared challenges in navigating a more volatile world order, signaling Singapore's interest in shaping transnational strategies alongside key European partners. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore]

South Korea leads defense partnership with Philippines through USD 700 Million FA-50 jet deal

(fw) South Korea is poised to strengthen its strategic defense partnership with the Philippines beyond arms sales, potentially joining joint maritime patrols in the South China Sea and negotiating a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) to facilitate deeper military cooperation.

Both countries face security challenges from hostile neighbors: the Philippines contends with aggressive Chinese maritime actions in the West Philippine Sea, while South Korea confronts nuclear threats from North Korea, an ally of China.

The Philippines currently conducts regular joint patrols with allies including Australia, Japan, and the United States, and has upgraded its ties with South Korea to a strategic partnership since last year. South Korea is among Manila's top arms suppliers, and the potential VFA would enable joint amphibious training, maritime interdiction, and anti-terrorism exercises, while also supporting maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) hubs in Southeast Asia. This agreement would align with South Korea's global security strategy and elevate its role from an arms seller to a strategic security partner. [The Star]

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. expressed openness to initiating VFA discussions following South Korea's elections, emphasizing existing interoperability, particularly in naval operations and the use of South Korean FA-50 fighter jets. This sentiment coincides with a USD 700 million deal signed on June 3 by Korea Aerospace Industries Ltd. (KAI) to export 12 additional FA-50 light attack fighters to Manila by 2030. This contract marks the second phase of FA-50 exports to the Philippines, following an initial 2014 deal for 12 jets. [Yonhap News Agency]

The Philippines has introduced various South Korean-made defense systems over the past decade, including frigates and corvettes, totaling approximately USD 3 billion in arms purchases, making South Korea its largest arms supplier in Southeast Asia. The FA-50, a versatile light combat aircraft, has also been exported to six other countries, including Indonesia, Iraq, Malaysia, Poland, and Thailand. Prior to the Philippine deal, South Korea signed a contract in 2023 to supply 18 FA-50 jets to Malaysia, underscoring the growing global footprint of South Korean defense exports. [The Korea Times]

South Korea commits to strengthened dialogue with U.S. amid currency monitoring concerns

(fw) South Korea has pledged to intensify communications with the United States to foster greater mutual understanding and trust concerning foreign exchange (FX) rate policies. This commitment follows the U.S. Treasury Department's decision to retain South Korea on its currency monitoring list, a status reinstated in November 2024 after a brief removal in November 2023—the first since April 2016. [The Korea Herald 1] [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Department of the Treasury, USA]

The U.S. Treasury Department's latest list includes South Korea among nine countries under observation for their currency practices: China, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, and Vietnam, with Ireland and Switzerland being new additions since the previous report. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

South Korea's inclusion is attributed primarily to its substantial bilateral trade surplus with the United States and a significant current account surplus, which surged from 1.8 percent of GDP in 2023 to 5.3 percent in 2024, largely driven by goods trade. The Treasury report advises South Korea to restrict currency market interventions to exceptional cases involving disorderly market conditions.

The U.S. monitors trading partners based on criteria established by the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015. To be listed, a country must meet at least two of the following: a bilateral trade surplus with the U.S. exceeding USD 15 billion, a current account surplus of at least 3 percent of GDP, and persistent one-sided foreign exchange market intervention amounting to at least 2 percent of GDP over a year. [The Korea Herald 2]

Currency policy remains a critical issue in ongoing trade discussions between South Korea and the United States, which also encompass tariffs, non-tariff measures, economic security, and investment cooperation. Both countries aim to finalize a comprehensive "package" agreement by July 8, coinciding with the expiration of a 90-day suspension on U.S. tariff implementations. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

Last month, South Korea's Deputy Finance Minister Choi Ji-young met with U.S. Treasury Assistant Secretary for International Finance Robert Kaproth at the 58th Asian Development Bank Annual Meeting in Milan. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to

ongoing discussions aimed at building mutual understanding and trust regarding foreign exchange rate policies. [ABP News] [The Korea Herald 1]

New leadership and commemoration highlight strengthened U.S.-Korea military partnership

(fw) Major General Valerie Jackson officially assumed command of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Korea (MARFORK) on June 5, during a ceremony held at the U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province. She succeeded Major General William Souza and pledged to build on the longstanding Korea-U.S. alliance by achieving remarkable outcomes through a partnership grounded in shared values and regional stability. [United States Forces Korea 1]

Jackson highlighted the strength of the bilateral relationship and expressed confidence that their united vision would lead to significant achievements. Since its establishment in 1995, MARFORK has played a crucial role in maintaining the readiness of U.S. Marine Corps forces in Korea, enhancing interoperability with South Korea's Marine Corps, and supporting combined and joint military exercises. [The Korea Times]

South Korea finalizes USD multi-billion power plant deal with Czech Republic

(fw) South Korea's state-run Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co. (KHNP) has officially signed a landmark USD 18.6 billion contract to build two new nuclear reactors at the Dukovany nuclear power plant in the Czech Republic, marking the country's first overseas nuclear export project since 2009. The final agreement was signed on June 4 shortly after the Czech Supreme Administrative Court overturned a lower court injunction that had temporarily blocked the deal following a legal challenge from France's EDF, the losing bidder in the tender process.

The Dukovany project involves constructing two APR-1000 reactors, each with a capacity of approximately 1,055 megawatts, adjacent to the existing four reactors at the site about 170 kilometers southeast of Prague. The first unit is expected to begin trial operations in 2036, followed by the second unit about two years later. The APR-1000 design is based on South Korea's advanced APR-1400 reactor, adapted to meet

European standards and local requirements. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

The contract faced multiple hurdles, including the injunction issued after EDF's legal complaint and an intellectual property dispute with U.S. company Westinghouse Electric Co., which was resolved in January 2025. Additionally, the European Union is assessing whether KHNP received foreign financial contributions, potentially prompting a formal investigation. KHNP has maintained that the bidding process was transparent and fair under Czech government supervision.

Beyond Dukovany, KHNP holds exclusive negotiating rights for a potential expansion at the Temelin nuclear power plant, located about 100 kilometers south of Prague, for the next five years. The agreement also strengthens bilateral cooperation, with 14 additional memorandums of understanding signed to expand collaboration in energy, construction, infrastructure, science, and technology sectors. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2]

South Korea-Poland set to sign major tank deal

(dql) South Korea is expected to sign a defense contract worth approximately USD 6 billion with Poland later this month to export 180 additional K2 tanks, marking the country's largest single arms export to date, according to government sources.

Under the agreement, 117 tanks will be produced by South Korea's Hyundai Rotem, with the remaining units manufactured locally by Poland's state-owned PGZ.

The deal, initially expected in late 2023, was delayed due to political instability in both countries, including South Korea's brief declaration of martial law in December. It follows an initial 2022 agreement to supply 1,000 K2 tanks to Poland, under which Hyundai Rotem signed a USD 3.3 billion contract for the first batch of 180 tanks.

The new contract is expected to exceed the previous one in value due to technology transfer, maintenance provisions, and upgrades to the Polish-built tanks. It is part of Poland's broader push to strengthen its military in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which also led to additional 2022 deals for K9 howitzers and FA-50 light attack aircraft. In April, the U.S. approved a missile sale valued USD 1.33 billion missile sale. [Yonhap News Agency] [TVP]

South Korea-Cuba ties deepen with opening of embassy in Seoul

(dql) Diplomatic relations between South Korea and Cuba are deepening after the Latin-American nation officially opened its embassy in Seoul on June 10. The move marks a key follow-up to the establishment of diplomatic relations with South Korea in February last year and the opening of the South Korean embassy in Havana in January.

The diplomatic breakthrough was widely viewed as a setback for North Korea, which has long maintained close ties with Cuba. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

India and Sri Lanka hold first defense meeting since April partnership

(at) A Sri Lanka-India Defense Dialogue took place in Colombo last week, marking the first discussion between the two countries since signing their defense partnership on April 5. The meeting was led by Sri Lankan Defense Secretary Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha (Retd) and Indian Defense Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, with discussions also involving Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister of Defense Major General Aruna Jayasekara and Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Santosh Jha.

According to the Sri Lanka Defense Ministry, the talks focused on expanding bilateral defense cooperation, particularly in enhancing maritime security and exploring new avenues of partnership and strategic engagement.

This meeting is viewed as a significant step forward in fostering the friendship and peace-building efforts between India and Sri Lanka, and is considered crucial for strengthening Sri Lanka's defense capabilities. The defense partnership, signed on April 5, marked a historic move, reuniting the two countries for the first time in four decades since the intervention of the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

However, the agreement has faced criticism from some quarters, with concerns raised about the potential implications for Sri Lanka's political autonomy. [Colombo Gazette] [The Economic Times]

Sri Lanka's President to visit Germany to deepen economic and trade ties

(lm) Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will undertake an official visit to Germany from June 11 to 13 to strengthen bilateral cooperation in key economic sectors. The visit will include high-level meetings with the German President, federal ministers, and other senior officials to explore partnerships in trade, investment, the digital economy, and vocational training.

President Dissanayake will also chair a business forum organized by the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, where he will promote Sri Lanka's economic reforms and investment potential. In addition, meetings are planned with representatives of Germany's tourism and travel sector to expand engagement in that field. [Daily Mirror]

China issues arrest warrants for 20 Taiwanese

(dql) China issued arrest warrants targeting 20 Taiwanese citizens accused of conducting cyberattacks on the mainland, allegedly under the direction of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

Beijing also banned commercial ties with Taiwanese firm Sicuenes International Company Ltd., accusing its owners—legislator Puma Shen and his father—of being staunch Taiwan independence supporters. The company reportedly specializes in sourcing bicycle parts from China.

The DPP rejected the accusations, calling them politically motivated.

The developments come amid rising cross-strait tensions. China continues to assert its claim over Taiwan, dispatching military aircraft and vessels around the island, including an aircraft carrier currently stationed southeast of Taiwan. In response, Taiwan has strengthened its military, and private citizens have established guerrilla warfare training programs. [Euronews]

Taiwan remains on US currency watchlist

(yl) On June 5, the US Treasury Department released its semiannual report on the macroeconomic and foreign

exchange policies of major trading partners, keeping Taiwan on its currency manipulation watchlist. [Department of the Treasury, USA]

While the report found no major economy to be manipulating exchange rates for unfair advantage, Taiwan was one of nine economies still flagged for close monitoring, along with China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, and Germany. Ireland and Switzerland were newly added.

The report noted that Taiwan reports its foreign exchange intervention data semi-annually with a three-month lag, and urged authorities to allow currency movements in line with economic fundamentals and closely monitor non-bank financial risks.

Taiwan meets two of the three monitoring criteria: a significant trade surplus with the US and a current account surplus above 3 percent of GDP. Meeting all three criteria could lead to a formal currency manipulator designation. [Focus Taiwan]

Guatemala and Taiwan sign semiconductor and political consultation agreements

(yl) On June 5, Taiwan and Guatemala signed two agreements to deepen bilateral ties during the visit of Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo to Taipei. The first agreement focuses on strategic cooperation in the semiconductor industry, with Taiwan pledging support for Guatemala's industry development. The second establishes a formal mechanism for ongoing political consultations between the two countries. [Focus Taiwan] [Radio Taiwan International] [Office of the President, Taiwan]

In remarks after their meeting, President Lai Ching-te highlighted Guatemala's strategic location and workforce advantages, encouraging Taiwanese firms to invest and form resilient, long-term supply chain partnerships. Arévalo described the bilateral relationship as entering a "new and dynamic phase," emphasizing shared values in democracy and development. [Focus Taiwan]

The two sides also referenced a jointly launched vocational training program on semiconductor technologies, aimed at boosting Guatemala's capacity in critical technology sectors. Taiwan's National Development Council and industry partners are expected to play key roles in facilitating this collaboration. [Radio Taiwan International]

The agreements come amid heightened efforts by Beijing to poach Taiwan's remaining 12 diplomatic allies. [Reuters]

Taiwan and Marshall Islands sign security pact

(yl) On June 4, Taiwan and the Marshall Islands signed a letter of intent to strengthen bilateral security cooperation amid growing hybrid threats in the Pacific. The agreement was signed in Taipei by Taiwan's National Security Bureau (NSB) Director-General Tsai Ming-yen and Marshallese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kalani Kaneko, who was appointed by President Hilda Heine to represent the delegation. [Office of the President, Taiwan]

The pact outlines cooperation in maritime domain awareness, cybersecurity, and countering foreign malign influence. Both sides committed to joint operations, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building programs. Taiwan's NSB emphasized that the agreement marks a "new chapter" in bilateral security collaboration. [Focus Taiwan]

The initiative was first proposed by Heine during a security consultation in 2024, in response to external maritime threats and infiltration into the Marshall Islands. Taiwan expressed concern over China's growing political and digital influence in the South Pacific, citing cyberintrusions and disinformation campaigns. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan has pledged to support its diplomatic allies in strengthening cybersecurity defenses and countering China's cognitive warfare tactics. [Taipei Times]

Cambodia-Thailand tensions ease after military standoff, but structural dispute remains unresolved

(lm) After days of rising tensions that brought Thailand and Cambodia to the brink of direct military confrontation, the situation has de-escalated following the withdrawal of Cambodian troops from a disputed area in Thailand's Ubon Ratchathani province. However, the broader conflict over contested border zones remains unresolved and continues to carry geopolitical and legal implications.

The immediate flashpoint was a May 28 clash in the Chong Bok area, which resulted in the death of a Cambodian soldier. The incident followed what Thailand describes as a military incursion by Cambodian forces, who crossed into Thai territory in April and constructed a military base, trench, and concrete road by late May. The Royal Thai Armed Forces released aerial imagery taken between April 20 and May 24, showing the build-up of Cambodian military infrastructure in an area that Thailand claims has been historically unoccupied. Thai officials argue this violated a 2000 bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) that prohibits unilateral military development in contested zones. [Bangkok Post 1]

Following Thailand's protests and its demand for troop withdrawal, Cambodia initially refused and instead submitted the border dispute—covering four long-disputed areas along the 817-kilometer border—to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on June 2. Thailand, which withdrew from the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction in 1962 after the Preah Vihear ruling, rejected the filing and reaffirmed its position that such disputes must be resolved bilaterally under the 2000 MoU framework. [Bangkok Post 2]

In response to Cambodia's moves, the Thai government over the weekend granted the Royal Thai Army full operational control of all border checkpoints and implemented a multi-stage escalation plan. This included restricting border crossings to essential trade and labor activities, shortening operating hours, barring heavy trucks and gamblers, and threatening full closures in high-risk zones. Internet and electricity cuts were also considered for Cambodian border areas hosting illegal gambling and scam operations. [Thai Enquirer 1] [Thai Enquirer 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

As both sides reinforce positions near the border, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, serving as ASEAN chair, has stepped in to mediate. He reached out to both governments, urging restraint and support for a peaceful resolution through diplomatic channels. Anwar's intervention has been welcomed by both Prime Ministers, while China also issued a statement calling for dialogue and reaffirming its commitment to regional stability. [Thai PBS World 1] [Thai PBS World 2]

Against the backdrop of Thailand's multi-stage escalation plan, negotiations were held between senior Thai and Cambodian military officials in Chong Bok, leading to an agreement for both sides to withdraw to their previous positions. Cambodia also agreed to fill in trenches dug in the disputed area. Weekly meetings between military representatives were agreed to

prevent further escalation. [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5] [Bangkok Post 6]

Nonetheless, the legal dimension of the conflict persists. Cambodia's ICJ application, which was unanimously endorsed by its legislature, remains active. Although Cambodia will attend the Joint Boundary Committee (JBC) meeting in Phnom Penh on June 14, it has excluded the four contested areas—Chong Bok among them—from the agenda. Thailand maintains that it will not accept international arbitration and continues to insist on bilateral negotiation as the sole legitimate path to resolution. [The Nation]

Thai prime minister meets with outgoing Chinese ambassador to discuss enhancing cooperation

(acs/msz) On June 4, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra met with Chinese Ambassador Han Zhiqiang, marking the conclusion of Han's term. During the meeting, key areas of cooperation were discussed. In tourism, China pledged to continue promoting travel to Thailand, following the success of the "Sawasdee Nihao" event, which involved over 350 Chinese companies. In agriculture, China facilitated easier export procedures for Thai durians, aiming to strengthen bilateral trade. Additionally, Thailand invited China to the upcoming Mekong–Lancang Summit, highlighting regional collaboration. [Royal Thai Government]

In a significant scientific development, Thailand and China launched a 13-meter VGOS (VLBI Geodetic Observing System) radio telescope in Chiang Mai. This facility, a product of collaboration between Thailand's National Astronomical Research Institute and China's Shanghai Astronomical Observatory, will enhance geodetic research and earthquake prediction. The project aligns with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations and is part of broader efforts to establish a Thai-Chinese Joint Laboratory for Astronomy and Space Technology, which will focus on research and technology development in areas such as geodesy, data science, and astronomy. [The Nation]

Fifth Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge to open in December, boosting regional trade links

(msz) The Fifth Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge, linking Bueng Kan province in northeastern Thailand with Bolikhamxay province in Laos and forming part of a broader economic corridor to Vietnamese deep-sea ports, is scheduled to open in December 2025. The project, launched in 2020, is expected to boost cross-border trade by at least 5 percent annually and improve regional logistics within the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Annual trade through Bueng Kan currently stands at THB 28 billion (USD 812 million), with steady growth anticipated following the bridge's completion. [Bangkok Post] [The Nation]

New momentum for India–Thailand trade and investment ties

(lm) India and Thailand are strengthening trade, tourism, and investment relations as they mark 78 years of diplomatic ties. Central to this effort is the ongoing review of the ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement, aimed at modernizing rules to reflect current economic realities. The alignment between Thailand's "Act West" and India's "Act East" policies is reinforcing connectivity across South and Southeast Asia.

India's ambassador in Bangkok highlighted the growing interest of Thai investors, particularly in renewable energy, construction materials, and hospitality, citing a USD 453 million Thai investment in India's green energy sector as a milestone. India's vast market, he noted, offers major scale even for small market shares.

Tourism is another key pillar, though Indian destinations remain underpromoted in Thailand. India's diverse offerings—from beaches to ski resorts—are underutilized due to a lack of awareness and lingering safety misconceptions.

Deep-rooted cultural and spiritual ties, including shared Buddhist heritage and literary influences, continue to serve as the foundation for deeper collaboration. With over 400,000 people of Indian origin residing in Thailand, the Indian community plays a notable role in sustaining people-to-people links. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand and United States to begin formal trade negotiations as tariff

suspension nears deadline

(lm) Thailand and the United States are preparing to begin formal trade negotiations ahead of the expiration of a temporary U.S. tariff suspension on July 8. The talks follow informal discussions and were confirmed by Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Pichai Chunhavajira, who announced that Washington has officially agreed to enter into negotiations. [Bangkok Post 1]

The renewed engagement comes amid mounting pressure, as Thailand faces a 36 percent tariff on exports to the United States if a deal is not reached before the moratorium lapses. According to Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa, the U.S. Trade Representative has requested an early meeting with Pichai, who is expected to hold talks with key U.S. officials, including the Trade Representative, the Treasury Secretary, and the Secretary of Commerce.

The development follows a series of recent high-level exchanges, including Maris's meeting with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in Paris, and Pichai's participation in the Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering hosted by Australia. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Bangkok–Dubai economic ties deepen as Thailand positions itself as regional trade partner

(ed) Following the inauguration of the Dubai International Chamber international representative office in Bangkok, the Thai Commerce Minister Pichai Naripthaphan had a meeting with the President and CEO of Dubai Chambers to enhance bilateral relationship with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and expand the economic growth in the Middle East.

During the meeting on June 8, they focused on an economic collaboration to navigate the global economic crisis. The commerce minister affirmed Thailand's position to becoming a leading economic partner for the UAE within the ASEAN region and vowed to encourage greater participation from the Thai private sector in UAE markets.

They both agreed in principle to establish systems that sustainably strengthen economic ties between the two countries focusing on information exchange, joint business development, e-commerce promotion, and a resilient, integrated supply chain.

Pichai conveyed Thailand's recognition of Dubai's potential under the Dubai Economic Agenda 2033 (D33), which aspires to position the city as a global business hub. He stated that Thailand could capitalize on D33 to boost trade, investment, and services in sectors like processed food, health and beauty, herbal products, and wellness and medical tourism.

The President and CEO of Dubai Chambers highlighted Thailand as a key ASEAN partner, citing its strong capabilities in food production, agricultural processing, creative industries, and tourism, and announced the UAE's goal to double bilateral trade with Thailand by 2031. He also emphasized that Thailand's expertise in food production across the supply chain and the UAE's strengths in IT and robotics present a valuable opportunity to jointly develop a high-tech, efficient, and cost-effective food industry. [Bangkok Post] [The Nation]

Cambodia and Vietnam deepen defense ties amid broader strategic cooperation

(lm) Vietnam and Cambodia have reaffirmed their commitment to expanding defense cooperation during a high-level military visit by General Nguyen Tan Cuong, Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army and Deputy Minister of National Defense, to Phnom Penh from June 3 to 6.

In meetings with top Cambodian leaders—including Senate President Hun Sen, Prime Minister Hun Manet, and senior defense officials—both sides emphasized the strategic role of defense ties in the overall bilateral relationship. They praised the growing trust between the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Cambodian People's Party, viewing it as foundational for advancing broader political and security cooperation.

General Cuong and his Cambodian counterparts reviewed achievements in personnel training, joint exercises, defense dialogue, and transnational crime prevention. They agreed to enhance coordination in ASEAN-led security mechanisms and continue collaboration on non-traditional security challenges, including disaster response and environmental protection.

A key focus remains the ongoing repatriation of the remains of Vietnamese soldiers and experts who died in Cambodia during the war, with both governments pledging to intensify search and recovery efforts. The Vietnamese side also requested continued support for

its diaspora and business presence in Cambodia. [Viet Nam News]

China and Vietnam deepen judicial cooperation with focus on e-courts and cross-border legal exchange

(lm) Vietnam's Chief Justice Le Minh Tri led a high-level delegation to China from June 3–7 to expand judicial cooperation with Chinese counterparts. The visit included meetings with senior Chinese officials, such as Chief Justice Zhang Jun and Prosecutor General Ying Yong, and focused on advancing legal collaboration as part of broader bilateral engagement.

The two sides agreed to intensify information sharing and cooperation in key areas such as the establishment of specialized courts within financial centers, resolution of cross-border commercial and intellectual property disputes, and the application of artificial intelligence in court proceedings. Strengthening e-court systems and legal digitalization was also a key theme.

Both parties confirmed plans to co-host a conference of border-region courts in November to address transboundary legal issues. [Viet Nam News]

Japan-Vietnam ties deepen across strategic, economic, and maritime sectors

(lm) Vietnam reaffirmed that Japan remains a top foreign policy priority during a series of high-level engagements held in early June. In a meeting with Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki, Vietnamese President Luong Cuong emphasized the importance of the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership, upgraded in late 2023, and called for stronger cooperation in defense, digital transformation, and green development. The president noted that Japan is a vital partner in Vietnam's efforts to industrialize and build a resilient, self-reliant economy, and highlighted the need for greater collaboration on economic security, high-tech innovation, and human resource training—especially in the semiconductor sector.

The meeting also served to consolidate momentum following the April visit of Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru, which opened new avenues for collaboration in trade, defense, and innovation. Ambassador Ito echoed Japan's commitment to

supporting Vietnam's development, proposing deeper cooperation in artificial intelligence, green transition, and bilateral academic projects, including the Việt Nam–Japan University. Japan also confirmed its intention to accept 250 Vietnamese interns and to intensify people-to-people exchanges. [Viet Nam News 1]

Separately, Vietnam's Coast Guard and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) advanced their maritime cooperation agenda. In a meeting between Coast Guard Commander Lieutenant General Lê Quang Đạo and JICA's Chief Representative Kobayashi Yosuke, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to joint maritime security efforts. Central to the agenda was Japan's ongoing support through the "Maritime Security and Safety Capacity Improvement Project," which includes six new patrol vessels funded by Japanese development loans. Two bilateral training programs are also scheduled for late 2025, aimed at strengthening Vietnam's maritime law enforcement capabilities. [Viet Nam News 2]

Vietnam signals push for high-tech investment and balanced trade with South Korea

(lm) Vietnam's top political leader has signaled that the country will use its upgraded strategic partnership with South Korea to pursue concrete economic and technological goals—particularly attracting advanced investment and addressing trade imbalances. During a June 5 meeting with the South Korean ambassador, Communist Party General Secretary To Lam called for an accelerated rollout of the bilateral action plan, targeting USD 150 billion in two-way trade by 2030, with a focus on balancing the current deficit Vietnam runs with South Korea.

The Vietnamese side emphasized the need for South Korean firms to transfer foundational technologies and invest in high-skill sectors, especially semiconductors and artificial intelligence. The appeal aligns with Vietnam's broader shift toward industrial upgrading and economic self-reliance, particularly as it seeks to move up the value chain and reduce dependence on low-end manufacturing.

The discussion also reflected Vietnam's growing focus on defense-security coordination and regional alignment, as both countries prepare for upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summits—in South Korea in 2025 and in Vietnam in 2027. The Vietnamese leadership appears intent on using these

high-level mechanisms not only to deepen bilateral ties but to position Vietnam more firmly within strategic tech and supply-chain frameworks emerging across the region. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam-U.S. trade talks enter critical phase

(cmc) Vietnam's trade negotiations with the United States have reached an increasingly tense stage, with Washington pressing Hanoi to make wide-ranging structural commitments before a looming July deadline to avoid a proposed 46 percent reciprocal tariff on Vietnamese goods. The talks—initially centered on tariff imbalances—have evolved visibly into a broader strategic push by the United States to reshape regional supply chains and reduce Vietnam's economic reliance on China.

According to sources familiar with the negotiations, U.S. officials have presented Vietnam with a lengthy annex of demands that would require factories in the country to cut their use of Chinese inputs, particularly in electronics, textiles, solar, and footwear sectors. Washington is also urging Hanoi to strengthen export controls, especially to prevent dual-use technology from reaching China, and to improve labor and trade rule enforcement. While no binding quotas have been disclosed, the specificity of the demands points to a shift from transactional trade discussions to strategic conditionality. [Reuters 1] [South China Morning Post] [The Diplomat]

Vietnam's export-driven economy has benefited significantly from the U.S.–China trade war, nearly tripling its exports to the United States since 2018. However, the country has simultaneously expanded its imports from China—reaching USD 16.2 billion in May alone—underpinning a manufacturing model deeply integrated into Chinese supply chains. As a result, U.S. requests for de-coupling pose economic and logistical challenges, and any compliance would likely require gradual, calibrated shifts.

Trade data underscore Washington's concern: in May alone, Vietnam posted a USD 4.67 billion trade surplus and exported USD 13.68 billion in agricultural goods to the U.S. in 2024, while importing only USD 3.4 billion. The U.S. side views Vietnam's growing surplus—and allegations of transshipped Chinese goods masquerading as Vietnamese exports—as indicators of unresolved structural imbalances. [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3]

In an effort to ease tensions, Vietnam has stepped up symbolic and material concessions. It signed a series of memorandums of understanding to import USD 2 billion worth of U.S. agricultural products over three years, and reached a separate USD 600 million agreement with the state of Ohio. The Ministry of Agriculture emphasized the complementary nature of bilateral trade—Vietnam exports tropical goods such as coffee and fruit, while the U.S. supplies bulk commodities like soybeans and corn. Still, American negotiators have signaled that such deals may be insufficient unless translated into binding contracts. [Reuters 4] [SGGP]

U.S. officials have also hinted that Vietnam's long-sought designation as a "market economy" under U.S. law, which would shield its firms from steep anti-dumping duties, may hinge on Hanoi's willingness to meet broader geopolitical expectations.

Vietnam' prime minister on working visit in France

(hn/lm) Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh is undertaking a five-day working trip to France, marking his first official visit since Vietnam and France upgraded bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in October 2024. The visit coincides with his participation in the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3) in Nice, where Vietnam is engaging in high-level multilateral diplomacy and promoting maritime cooperation.

Chinh's visit builds on the momentum of French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to Vietnam in May. Meetings are being held with top French officials, including Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noël Barrot. Discussions have focused on expanding cooperation in cybersecurity, aerospace, infrastructure, transport, and energy. Both sides reaffirmed shared support for multilateralism, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and peaceful dispute resolution in the region, especially in the South China Sea. [VietnamPlus]

France is currently Vietnam's fifth-largest trading partner and largest bilateral development assistance donor in the European Union. As of May 2025, France had invested nearly USD 4 billion in Vietnam, while bilateral trade reached USD 5.42 billion in 2024. Vietnam hopes to expand future cooperation into emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, nuclear energy, and innovation.

The visit aims to translate the strategic partnership into concrete action and broaden multilateral and bilateral cooperation in line with Vietnam's development and digital transformation goals. Both sides agreed to increase exchanges at all levels and accelerate approval of the EU-Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA). [Viet Nam News 1] [Viet Nam News 2]

Vietnam–Estonia relations focus on digital transformation, investment protection, and cultural cooperation

(hn/lm) Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's visit to Estonia focused on strengthening bilateral relations, with discussions centering on digital transformation, trade, investment protection, and cultural exchange. A key outcome was the signing of a memorandum of understanding on digital diplomacy, aimed at leveraging Estonia's public-private partnership models to support Vietnam's digital development.

The visit also highlighted Estonia's support for the EU–Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA) and efforts to enhance trade and investment, particularly in ICT, education, and cultural sectors. Prime Minister Chinh visited major Estonian companies, including Bolt, and discussed expanding operations in Vietnam, with a focus on emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

Cultural diplomacy was also emphasized, with engagements at art institutions and a symbolic gift exchange between the two prime ministers. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to international law and peaceful maritime dispute resolution, underlining the importance of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). [Viet Nam News 1] [Viet Nam News 2] [Viet Nam News 3] [Viet Nam News 4]

Lithuanian president to make first official visit to Vietnam as bilateral ties deepen

(lm) Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda and his spouse will visit Vietnam from June 11 to 12 at the invitation of State President Luong Cuong. The visit marks a new stage in expanding bilateral ties, amid growing European engagement with Southeast Asia. Talks are expected to focus on trade diversification, economic cooperation, and shared positions on

international security, digital governance, and multilateral coordination. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam and Jordan explore deeper cooperation across trade, technology, and diplomacy

(lm) Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh met with Jordanian King Abdullah II on the sidelines of the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3) in Nice, France, where both leaders agreed to advance bilateral ties through concrete institutional and sectoral cooperation.

The two sides discussed accelerating negotiations for trade and investment agreements, a visa exemption deal for official and diplomatic passports, and the establishment of political consultation mechanisms between their foreign ministries. Vietnam also offered to support Jordan in agriculture, food security, and digital transformation.

King Abdullah welcomed these proposals and expressed interest in expanding collaboration on science, education, mine clearance, and prosthetics production. Both leaders also committed to enhancing coordination at multilateral forums and reaffirmed support for peaceful dispute resolution under international law, including in the South China Sea. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam proposes diplomatic ties with Tuvalu, eyes climate and regional cooperation

(lm) At the United Nations Ocean Conference in France, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh proposed establishing formal diplomatic relations with Tuvalu, a Pacific island nation facing existential threats from rising sea levels. The proposal underscores Vietnam's intent to expand its partnerships with climate-vulnerable states amid intensifying global focus on climate resilience. The two leaders discussed joint action on climate change and agreed to strengthen coordination in international forums, including support for maritime stability and legal order in the South China Sea. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam and Costa Rica explore deeper trade and maritime cooperation

(lm) On the sidelines of the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted a meeting between Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves. The two leaders discussed expanding bilateral cooperation, focusing on trade, investment, tourism, agriculture, and the digital economy.

Vietnam welcomed Costa Rica's recognition of its market economy status and expressed interest in expanding sectoral partnerships, particularly in consumer goods, software development, and digital transformation. Both sides acknowledged the untapped potential for collaboration in sustainable ocean economy development, including marine environmental protection and climate action.

The leaders also proposed mutual high-level visits and agreed to direct their foreign ministries to coordinate future exchanges. Prime Minister Chinh invited Costa Rica to join the signing ceremony of the upcoming UN Convention against Cybercrime in Hanoi this October. [Viet Nam News]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

11 June 2025 @ 9:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Governance of finance for climate adaptation at national and subnational levels in East Africa

This seminar examines climate adaptation finance in East Africa, focusing on how funds flow from international donors to rural communities in Kenya and Tanzania. It explores the governance of adaptation finance at national and sub-national levels and evaluates how well funding aligns with local priorities. Drawing on fieldwork and practitioner insights, the event highlights challenges in defining adaptation and implementing Locally Led Adaptation, offering a comprehensive overview of climate finance access and governance in vulnerable rural regions. For more information, see [Danish Institute for International Studies].

11 June 2025 @ 12:00 – 1:15 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

Indo-Pacific and Europe: growing partnerships in support of rules-based trade order

This online event addresses the fragmentation of the global trade order and rising U.S. protectionism, highlighting the need for stronger EU–Indo-Pacific cooperation. Co-hosted with RIETI, the discussion explores how Europe and key regional partners, particularly Japan, can lead efforts to rebuild a resilient, rules-based trade framework. Emphasis is placed on broader strategic approaches beyond trade deals, including potential convergence between the CPTPP and the EU, to strengthen global economic stability and multilateral collaboration in an evolving geopolitical landscape. For more information, see [Bruegel].

12 June 2025 @ 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Clingendael, Netherlands

Gaza Tragedy: Impact And Consequences

This online event explores the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with UNRWA's Sam Rose detailing the devastating conditions facing Palestinians. Laurens Dassen discusses Dutch political responses, while journalist Zainab Hammoud highlights the impact of restricted media access. Moderated by Clingendael's Erwin van Veen, the panel considers legal and policy avenues for restoring neutral aid. Amid famine risk and widespread displacement following Israel's military actions, the event examines how international law can guide effective humanitarian response in a deeply

politicized context. For more information and to register online, please see [Clingendael].

12 June 2025 @ 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. (GMT+11), Brookings, USA

Trump and the West: A conversation with Dr John Hamre and Dr Michael Fullilove

This special online event features Dr. John Hamre, president of CSIS and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, in conversation with Dr. Michael Fullilove of the Lowy Institute. They will discuss President Trump's record, his approach to the Western alliance, and implications for Australia's strategic outlook. The event also previews the upcoming G7 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada, where Prime Minister Albanese and other Western leaders will gather, with Trump expected to play a prominent role in shaping discussions. For more information, see [Lowy Institute].

12 June 2025 @ 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), East Asian Institute/National University Singapore, Singapore

Westlessness: Is Trump Accelerating Multipolarisation in Asia and the Wider World?

This online event features Dr. Puri discussing his book Westlessness, which explores accelerating global shifts in power from the West to Asia. He examines how demographic, economic, military, and cultural trends are reshaping the international order, with rising powers like India, Indonesia, and China challenging long-standing Western dominance. Dr. Puri highlights the fragility of Western influence and questions whether the West will relinquish its privileged status. His talk analyzes key trends defining a more diverse and multipolar global future. For more information, see [EAI/NUS]

16 June 2025 @ 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. (GMT+1), International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

Russia's Information Confrontation Doctrine in practice – intent, evolution and implications

This webinar explores Russia's Information Confrontation Doctrine (ICD), a strategy combining cyber operations, propaganda, psychological warfare, and sabotage to advance its geopolitical aims. The ICD blurs lines between peace and conflict, exploiting digital and societal vulnerabilities to achieve political goals without conventional warfare. The event examines the doctrine's evolution, domestic use, and application across post-Soviet states, while analyzing its broader role in destabilizing the West and expanding Russian influence in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. For more information, see [IISS].

17 June 2025 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT+1), Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

Quo Vadis Finance? The Impact Of Geopolitics And Technological Innovation On The Global Financial System

This online event explores how the global financial system is evolving amid recent geopolitical shifts. It focuses on monetary trends, technological innovation, and the impact of economic sanctions. Insights will be drawn from a collaborative research project led by the IAI-Intesa Sanpaolo Taskforce, which includes economists and political scientists from academia, financial institutions, and think tanks. The discussion aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of current financial transformations and their broader geopolitical implications. For more information and to register, visit [IAI].

Recent Book Releases

Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift, Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds, Pluto Press, 256 pages, published November 20, 2024. For a review, see [LSE].

Darshana M. Baruah, ***The Contest for the Indian Ocean and the Making of a New World Order***, Yale University Press, 240 pages, published October 8, 2024. For a review, see [LSE].

David S. Tonge, ***The Enduring Hold of Islam in Turkey: The Revival of the Religious Orders and Rise of Erdogan***, Hurst, 384 pages, published January 1, 2025. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs].

James DJ Brown, ***Cracking the Crab: Russian Espionage Against Japan, from Peter the Great to***

Richard Sorge, Hurst, 624 pages, published May 8, 2025. For a review, see [Asia Review of Books].

Sam Tanenhaus, ***Buckley: The Life and the Revolution That Changed America***, Random House, 1040 pages, published June 3, 2025. For a review, see [Penguin Books].

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

The **United Nations Development Programme – South Korea** is looking for an **Intern - Governance and Gender (Anti-corruption)**. The deadline for application submission is June 30, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

The **World Bank - Mexico** is looking for a **(Senior) Investment Officer, Manufacturing, Agribusiness, Services, LAC Region**. The deadline for application submission is June 21, 2025. For more information, see [World Bank].

The **United Nations Development Programme - Moldova** is looking for an **AdTrade/National Consultant for Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis**. The deadline for application submission is June 20, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization – Italy** is looking for a **Partnerships Consultant (Family Farming and Parliamentary institutions)**. The deadline for application submission is June 20, 2025. For more information, see [FAO].

The **United Nations Development Programme** is looking for an **Internship - Governance Data and Analytics**. The deadline for application submission is June 22, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services – United States** is looking for a **Director, Washington Liaison Office**. The deadline for application

submission is July 4, 2025. For more information, see [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Environment Programme - France** is looking for a **Communications Expert Sustainable Buildings and Construction**. The deadline for application submission is June 24, 2025. For more information, see [UNEP].

The **University of Sunderland in London** is looking for a **Lecturer (Accounting/Finance and Business Law)**. The deadline for application submission is June 22, 2025. For more information, see [University of Sunderland in London].

The **University of Oxford** is looking for an **Researcher in the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies**. The deadline for application submission is June 13, 2025. For more information, see [University of Oxford].

IES London is looking for a **Health & Human Rights Lecturer**. The deadline for application submission is June 20, 2025. For more information, see [IES London].

British University in Dubai is looking for an **Assistant/Associate/Professor of Law**. The deadline for application submission is August 25, 2025. For more information, see [British University in Dubai].

The **PHG Foundation – Cambridge** is looking for a **Senior Policy Analyst/Policy Analyst (Humanities)**. The deadline for application submission is 30 June, 2025. For more information, see [PHG Foundation].

Newcastle University is looking for a **Lecturer in Law**. The deadline for application submission is June 22, 2025. For more information, see [Newcastle University].

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