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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 Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Malta, Mexico, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea and Saint Kitts and Nevis as well as Malaysia's National Day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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Main Sections

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

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

China: Four generals removed from legislature

(dql) The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's to legislative body, has expelled four senior military officers, marking the latest in a string of purges within the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and reinforcing questions over power struggle and power dynamics with the army.

The dismissed generals include Wang Chunning, People's Armed Police commander and a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee; Wang Zhibin, disciplinary chief of the PLA Rocket Force responsible for strategic nuclear missile oversight; Zhang Lin, CCP Central Committee member and head of the Logistics Support Department of the Central Military Commission (CMC); and Gao Daguang,

political commissar of the CMC's Joint Logistics Support Force.

No official reasons were given, though speculation links the removals to President Xi Jinping's anti-graft campaign, which has increasingly targeted both Xi's political rivals and long-time aides within the (PLA).

Wang Zhibin's case is the latest in Xi's crackdown within the PLA Rocket Force that has intensified over the past years. Most notably, in August 2023 Rocket Force Commander Li Yuchao and Deputy Commander Liu Guangbin were officially removed from their posts, without explanation.

The expulsions of Zhang and Gai follow the suspension and later removal of Admiral Miao Hua in 2024–2025 due to "serious violations of discipline." Miao, previously director of the CMC's Political Work Department, was considered a close associate of Xi. Separately, CMC Vice Chairman General He Weidong has not appeared publicly since March 2025, fueling speculation about his status.

Observers interpret these developments as reflecting internal power dynamics within the CMC, the country's highest military body, and as contributing to the speculated power rivalry with the PLA between President and CMC Chairman Xi Jinping and CMC first-ranked Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia. [SCMP] [The Epoch Times]

China: Draft laws on ethnic integration, expanding Mandarin under review

(dql) Lawmakers are reviewing two draft laws, submitted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the national legislature, and aimed at deepening ethnic integration and reinforcing the role of standard Chinese (Mandarin) as a unifying national language. [Ministry of Justice, China] [China Daily]

The first, the Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, emphasizes cultural exchange, education, tourism, and economic development as tools to foster a "shared national identity." The second, a revision to the Law on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language, expands regulation of Mandarin across public services, education, international communication, and digital spaces. It positions the language as a national symbol comparable to the flag and anthem, while allowing bilingual use where necessary.

Both initiatives underline Beijing's intensified assimilation policies, particularly in regions such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, where language and cultural restrictions have drawn international criticism.

Critics warn that expanding Mandarin use risks eroding minority languages and traditions, though officials argue it is essential for literacy, modernization, and national cohesion. [SCMP]

China: New projects to reform market-based allocation of production factors to be launched

(efg) China is advancing efforts to strengthen market-based allocation of production factors with the State Council launching ten pilot programs over the next two years. These reforms cover key inputs such as land, labor, capital, and technology.

The plan, which takes immediate effect, seeks to foster new drivers of growth while dismantling institutional and regional obstacles that limit the movement of these resources. It also emphasizes equal access to production inputs and fair competition for enterprises across different forms of ownership. At the same time, the pilots are expected to boost local development by strengthening the availability of production factors and spurring innovation-driven growth.

According to officials, these trial zones are intended to act as templates that can later be expanded nationwide to support more comprehensive reform. [State Council, China] [Global Times]

China: Factory output and retail sales hit slowdown, raising doubts overgrowth target

(ask) China's economy showed fresh signs of weakness in August as factory output and retail sales growth both slowed to their weakest pace in nearly a year, adding pressure on Beijing to roll out further stimulus. Industrial production rose 5.2 percent year-on-year, the lowest reading since August 2024 and below forecasts of 5.7 percent. Retail sales expanded 3.4 percent, cooling from July's 3.7 percent and missing expectations of 3.9 percent.

The slowdown reflects broader domestic strains, with consumer confidence dampened by a prolonged property crisis, a wobbly labor market, and shrinking household wealth. Unemployment edged up to a six-month high of 5.3 percent, while new home prices fell 0.3 percent month-on-month. Fixed-asset investment also grew at a slower-than-expected pace of 0.5 percent in the first eight months of the year, marking its weakest performance outside the pandemic. Analysts note that Chinese manufacturers are seeking new markets to offset uncertainties from U.S. trade policy, but external demand has not fully compensated for weaker consumption at home.

Economists caution that Beijing may struggle to meet its 5 percent growth target without further intervention. While consumer subsidies and modest policy support could provide short-term relief, structural pressures from weak demand, a sluggish property sector, and rising unemployment continue to weigh on the outlook. [Reuters]

China's Fujian carrier undertakes key trials in Taiwan Strait, South China Sea

(dql) China's latest and most sophisticated aircraft carrier, the Fujian, has completed a high-profile transit through the Taiwan Strait and into the South China Sea, part of preparations for its formal induction into the navy. The Chinese military described the voyage as routine testing and training, emphasizing it was not directed at any particular target.

The Fujian, the country's third carrier and first built entirely domestically with an electromagnetic aircraft launch system, surpasses the capabilities of the Shandong and Liaoning. It can operate a broader range of aircraft, including early-warning planes and, in the future, stealth fighters, allowing China to deploy three carrier strike groups across the Western Pacific and extend its defensive perimeter well beyond 600 km.

The deployment coincides with intensified regional military activity, including U.S.–Japan drills near Okinawa and sustained Chinese operations around Taiwan and in the South China Sea. Analysts and security officials are closely monitoring the Fujian's trials to assess China's ability to conduct fully integrated carrier operations with escort ships and submarines. [Reuters]

China: Creation of national nature reserve at disputed shoal in South China Sea approved

(aw) China has decided to establish the Huangyan Nature Reserve, marking the next step by the Chinese government to assert its sovereignty over disputed islands in the South China Sea. Huangyan, internationally known as Scarborough Shoal, has been the focal point of several disputes between China and the Philippines, both of which claim the islands. China states that the move aims to preserve the natural environment and promote sustainability. Administered under Hainan province's Sansha city, the island features a diverse marine ecosystem and is home to corals, which are the main conservation targets of the nature reserve. [China Daily] [AP 1]

Beijing's plan to establish the nature reserve has drawn backlash from the Philippines, which accuses China of using it as a pretext for eventual occupation and of maneuvering to enforce its ten-dash line claim over the South China Sea. [AP 2]

China – Hong Kong: Legislature rejects same-sex partnership bill amid conservative backdrop

(dql) Legislative Council (LegCo), Hong Kong's parliament, on September 10 voted overwhelmingly against a bill that would have recognized same-sex partnerships. With 71 of 86 lawmakers opposing it, the measure failed to advance to a final reading, marking the first government-backed bill rejected since Beijing's overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system, which now ensures only "patriots administer Hong Kong."

Opponents cited a lack of societal consensus, noting that the majority of public submissions to the LegCo expressed disapproval. Proponents, including seven Executive Council (Cabinet) members, argued for the bill's importance, highlighting its international attention as a test of Hong Kong's legislative diversity and representation.

Critics framed the vote as a reaffirmation of conservative social norms, while supporters see it as a setback for LGBTQ+ rights and a signal of the limits on progressive legislation under the current political system. [SCMP]

The vote contrasts sharply with a landmark judgment a day earlier, in which a Hong Kong court recognized

both members of a lesbian couple as legal parents of their son. Previously, only one member appeared on the child's birth certificate.

The ruling argued that existing provisions under the Parent and Child Ordinance unfairly restricted the child's ability to publicly acknowledge his relationship with the non-registered partner, signaling a significant step forward for LGBTQ+ family rights in a city that does not yet legally sanction same-sex marriage.

The decision echoes similar developments in Europe, including a 2021 European Court of Justice ruling and a 2025 Italian Constitutional Court judgment, both of which expanded recognition of children with same-sex parents. [AP News]

China – Macau: Beijing accepts first patriots only election despite low turnout

(efg) Macau's first "patriots only" legislative election recorded one of the city's lowest turnouts since the 1999 handover from Portugal, despite officials claiming it drew the highest number of votes ever cast.

Only 53 percent of registered voters participated, with a record number of blank or invalid ballots. Nevertheless, Beijing considered the turnout "acceptable," noting an increase compared with the 2021 election.

Authorities barred 12 candidates for failing to pass patriot checks and had previously arrested a pro-democracy ex-lawmaker in July, marking the city's first use of the expanded powers under the 2023 National Security Law (see AiR No. 31, August/2025, 1.

Beijing's tightened control allows security officials to vet all candidates, granting national security authorities the final say on eligibility and reducing competition. The law produced just six candidate lists, fewer than before the handover. The limited voter choice has left residents voicing disappointment, saying Macau now has "no real politics." [Hong Kong Free Press][China Daily]

Japan: Farm minister to enter ruling party leadership race

(dql) The field of candidates for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) presidential election on October 4, which will select a successor to outgoing

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, is taking shape. On September 7, Ishiba announced he would resign later this month following the coalition's loss of its majority in both houses of parliament and the ensuing mounting pressure from within his party calling for his resignation (see AiR No. 36, September/2025, 2).

Last week, former Foreign Minister and LDP Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi and former Economic Security Minister Takayuki Kobayashi declared their candidacies. On September 16, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi officially entered the race. [Anadolu Ajansı] [The Mainichi 1] [The Japan Times]

Agriculture Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, has also indicated his intention to run, saying he has informed local supporters of his plans and aims to "steadily build toward an official announcement." The 44-year-old lawmaker currently represents the House of Representatives. [The Mainichi 2]

Former Economic Security Minister Sanae Takaichi, seeking to become Japan's first female prime minister, is expected to announce her candidacy soon. She was defeated by Ishiba in last year's LDP presidential contest.

Analysts suggest the race may ultimately come down to a showdown between Koizumi and Takaichi. A recent Kyodo News poll shows Takaichi leading with 28 percent support, followed by Koizumi at 22.5 percent, Hayashi at 11.4 percent, Motegi at 6.1 percent, and Kobayashi at 3.6 percent. [Kyodo News]

Given that the LDP-Komeito coalition now forms a minority government, the next party leader is not automatically guaranteed the premiership, which requires securing a parliamentary majority.

Japan: Aging population surges

(dql) Japan is grappling with a historic demographic milestone as nearly 30 percent of its population—36.19 million people—are now aged 65 or older, the government estimates. The number of senior workers continues to climb, reaching 9.3 million for the 21st year in a row, meaning roughly one in seven employees is a senior.

Most of these workers are employed on part-time or contract terms, mainly in wholesale and retail sectors. Recent revisions to industrial safety laws aim to better

protect older employees, addressing rising risks associated with aging workers.

Demographers project that by 2040, the senior population will expand to nearly 40 million, or 34.8 percent of Japan's total, as the post-1970s "second baby boom" cohort reaches retirement age.

Japan also has a notably high share of people aged 75 and above (17.2 percent), surpassing other large-population nations such as Italy (25.1 percent aged 65+) and Germany (23.7 percent). [Kyodo News]

These trends pose mounting challenges for the labor market, social security systems, and overall economic productivity, emphasizing the urgency for policies that support an aging workforce and address long-term societal sustainability.

Japan: Major firms show renewed optimism amid eased U.S. tariff concerns

(dql) For the first time in two quarters, major Japanese firms reported a positive outlook on business conditions for July–September, boosted by stronger chip demand and easing U.S. tariff concerns. A Finance Ministry's survey placed the overall business sentiment index at 4.7, reversing the previous quarter's negative reading of minus 1.9, with manufacturing at 3.8 and nonmanufacturing at 5.2. Firms remained cautiously optimistic for October–December, with the index at 4.3.

The survey, conducted with roughly 11,000 respondents, followed a trade agreement between Japan and the United States that lowered tariffs on Japanese cars and other products to 15 percent, alleviating fears of higher "reciprocal" duties previously threatened by President Trump.

Despite the improved mood among large corporations, small businesses continued to show pessimism, with their index at minus 9.6. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Land prices see sharpest increase in more than three decades

(dql) Average land prices in Japan rose 1.5 percent year-on-year as of July 1, marking the fastest growth since 1992, driven by strong housing demand, robust inbound tourism, and foreign investment supported by a weak yen.

Commercial land prices climbed 2.8 percent, particularly in urban areas with new hotels and retail developments, while residential land increased 1.0 percent due to urban housing demand and resort-area employee dormitories.

High-profile locations continue to command premium prices; Tokyo's Meidi-ya Ginza commercial site fetched JPY 46.9 million (USD 320,000) per square meter, topping the list for the 20th straight year.

Land prices in Japan have generally risen since recovering from the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, reversing the long-term decline that followed the 1990s asset bubble collapse. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Work on national plan for AI usage and development begins

(ja) Japan is preparing its first national AI basic plan to expand adoption in both public and private sectors, with Cabinet approval expected later this year.

On September 12, the country's first top-level government meeting on artificial intelligence was held at the Prime Minister's office, launching discussions on a national strategy to boost AI use and tighten risk management. The session focused on a draft framework aimed at positioning Japan as a global leader in AI development and application.

Four pillars underpin the draft strategy: advancing AI adoption, improving domestic development capacity, shaping international AI governance, and driving a broader transition toward an AI-driven society.

The draft highlights that Japan's AI investment is disproportionately low given the size of its economy and that the technology has yet to be fully integrated across society. It added that Japan remains behind other advanced economies in AI uptake, with usage rates at just 20 percent among individuals and 50 percent among corporations as of 2023. Recognizing high-quality data as a national advantage, the plan stresses human-AI collaboration, robust copyright and liability rules, and safeguards against risks such as disinformation, errors, and national security threats.

The AI headquarters, established on September 1 under a new law passed in May, is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes all Cabinet ministers. Beyond formulating the national plan, it is also tasked with defining national guidelines and ensuring that the

country's AI policies align with global standards. [The Japan Times] [digwatch]

Japan: Advanced drones to be deployed to monitor airspace and territorial waters

(dql) Japan reportedly plans to deploy advanced U.S. manufactured MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones to detect and intercept unidentified aircraft and vessels, aiming to ease the operational burden on fighter pilots and modernize its military response amid increasing air and maritime incursions. Operational testing is expected to begin next year.

Japan has previously operated various drones for maritime surveillance and search-and-rescue missions, but the adoption of the SeaGuardian system marks a significant step in enhancing its monitoring capabilities and reducing reliance on costly fighter jet scrambles.

Analysts say the move reflects Japan's need to catch up with regional rivals. Chinese and Russian units have increasingly entered Japan's airspace and territorial waters, particularly around the southwestern islands and the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Currently, each suspected intrusion requires two fighter jets to scramble, straining equipment, fuel, and personnel.

The SeaGuardian drones, capable of up to 40 hours of flight and operating with satellite coordination for real-time surveillance, can patrol farther out than manned aircraft and operate from smaller airfields on remote Okinawa islands. While slower than reconnaissance aircraft or fighter jets, the drones match China's current UAV deployments in the region.

According to defense ministry data, 30 unidentified drones were detected near Japan's southwestern islands in the last financial year, up from nine the previous year. Between April and August this year, 16 Chinese drones were spotted. Military experts view such incursions as a strategy by China to probe and wear down Japanese defenses. [SCMP]

Japan: Electromagnetic railgun successfully tested

(dql) Demonstrating advances in its counter-strike capabilities, Japan has successfully test-fired a ship-mounted electromagnetic railgun at a target vessel, marking a significant milestone in next-generation weapons development. The prototype was deployed

on the JS Asuka and tested from June to early July, achieving projectile speeds around Mach 6.5 (6,026 mph) while maintaining barrel integrity after 120 consecutive shots.

The railgun, first tested from a ship in 2023, uses electromagnetic forces to launch projectiles at velocities far exceeding conventional guns, enabling longer ranges and greater penetration power. Research now focuses on enhancing flight stability, developing dedicated fire-control systems, enabling continuous firing, and expanding munitions to include airburst rounds for anti-air warfare.

Japan is exploring the weapon for both anti-ship operations and interception of hypersonic missiles, offering a potentially cost-effective complement to conventional interceptor missiles, which can cost billions of yen per shot. The technology may also be adapted for land-based systems, including coastal defense and counter-artillery roles.

The development places Japan at the forefront of railgun technology, ahead of operational deployment in countries such as China and the United States, where efforts have faced technical hurdles. Experts note that the effectiveness of the railgun will depend on integration with existing defense systems, rate of fire, and range, as well as its balance with alternative technologies like directed-energy weapons. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Audit finds dozens of government systems vulnerable to cyberattacks

(dql) A government audit has revealed that nearly 60 information systems across 12 Japanese government institutions remain vulnerable to cyberattacks. Conducted over three years through fiscal 2023, the survey examined 356 systems in 40 ministries and agencies, uncovering weaknesses in access management and password authentication that fall short of national cybersecurity standards.

Japan's uniform cybersecurity guidelines, overseen by the National Cybersecurity Office—established in July through the reorganization of the National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity—serve as the benchmark for these protections. During the audit period, the government spent JPY 880 billion (USD 5.9 billion) on system maintenance and operations. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Safety of Fukushima treated water release confirmed

(dql) The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has confirmed that Japan's controlled release of ALPS-treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station remains safe and compliant with international standards. Independent sampling of the 15th batch, discharged by TEPCO, showed tritium concentrations far below Japan's operational limit of 1,500 becquerels per litre. The findings reinforce previous assessments that the release poses negligible risk to human health or the environment.

Japan began gradually discharging the treated water in August 2023, diluting it with seawater to further reduce tritium levels. To date, approximately 109,000 cubic meters have been released, with each batch independently verified by the IAEA. A permanent IAEA presence in Japan ensures continuous monitoring, transparency, and international oversight, addressing global concerns, particularly from neighbouring countries and environmental groups. [IAEA] [Devdiscourse]

Mongolia: Inflation reaches 8.8 percent in August, driven by food and housing costs

(fs) Mongolia's consumer price index (CPI) rose by 8.8 percent nationwide in August compared to the same period last year, and by 1.6 percent from the previous month, marking the highest monthly inflation in three years. In Ulaanbaatar, annual inflation stood at 9.8 percent, remaining above the Bank of Mongolia's target range.

The main contributors were food, beverages, and water prices, which increased by 30.4 percent, and housing, electricity, water, and fuel costs, which rose by 21.3 percent. Education services accounted for a 9.3 percent rise, with tuition fees across all levels of education increasing by 10 to 30 percent this academic year.

Imported goods were also a significant factor, contributing 25.6 percent of overall inflation. Of 430 goods and services in the CPI basket, 238 items, or 55.3 percent, are imported.

The Bank of Mongolia aims to stabilize inflation at 6-7 percent by 2026 and reduce the target to 5±2 percent from 2027, expecting inflation to return to its current

target range of 6±2 percent early next year. [Bloomberg TV, in Mongolian]

Mongolia: Government plans USD 1.1 billion debt guarantee and major repayments in 2026

(fs) The Government of Mongolia plans to issue debt guarantees worth around USD 1.1 billion in 2026 while meeting substantial repayment obligations.

According to the draft budget, the government will pay MNT 2.6 trillion (USD 766 million) in principal and MNT 1.3 trillion (USD 383 million) in interest, totaling MNT 3.7 trillion (USD 1.1 billion) in debt service. This includes the April 2026 repayment of MNT 631.4 billion (USD 186 million) for the Nomad bond traded on international markets.

Domestically, the government plans to issue up to MNT 562.2 billion (USD 166 million) in securities, while Ulaanbaatar City will repay MNT 406.5 billion (USD 120 million) in principal and interest. Ömnögovi Province will issue MNT 150 billion (USD 44 million) in bonds to help finance a 50-megawatt thermal power plant, with up to MNT 500 billion (USD 147 million) to be raised by 2028.

Government debt is projected to decline to 43.8 percent of GDP, slightly lower than 2025 levels. [Bloomberg TV]

Mongolia: Anti-narcotics unit expanded into independent agency amid rising drug concerns

(fs) The Mongolian government has decided to expand the Anti-Narcotics Division of the National Police Agency into an independent agency, Minister of Justice and Internal Affairs L. Munkhbaatar announced. The decision follows global and domestic increases in drug-related crimes and the growing number of users, particularly among youth.

The new agency will employ 145 personnel, extend operations nationwide, and enhance its mandate to include crime prevention, detection, and research. Regional branches will be established in the provinces of Darkhan, Erdenet, and Selenge, while oversight will be strengthened in areas where narcotic plants grow.

The government has allocated USD 2.3 million in next year's budget for new equipment and operational capacity. Authorities have already identified and detained eight groups linked to drug trafficking, with particular focus on smuggling routes from Turkey and Thailand. [iToim]

Mongolia: Authorities impose quarantine in Khuvsgul after confirmed plague cases

(fs) Minister of Health J. Chinburen has reported two confirmed cases of bubonic plague in Khuvsgul province, north of the country, with 110 people identified as primary contacts now under medical observation.

Due to the high risk, the provincial emergency commission imposed strict quarantine measures, closing schools, kindergartens, businesses, and suspending all movement in Khuvsgul until September 15. A mobile medical team from Ulaanbaatar, along with two Russian-donated laboratories, were dispatched to accelerate testing, reducing diagnostic time from 72 hours. [iToim]

Authorities stressed that the plague remains highly dangerous, particularly its pneumonic form, which spreads rapidly, although no cases have been detected outside Khuvsgul province so far. Vaccines are limited, as production is restricted to Russia and Ukraine, but efforts are underway to secure emergency reserves. [GoGo]

(mo) Recent satellite images show North Korea taking steps to conceal wastewater discharge at the Pyongsan uranium refinery. A drainage canal leading to a sedimentation pond is being covered and moved underground, a move analysts believe is aimed at evading international satellite monitoring. Once complete, the canal will be camouflaged with soil and trees, making external detection of wastewater dumping nearly impossible.

The measures come after international scrutiny over visible wastewater discharge, which raised environmental concerns and embarrassed the regime. Several refinery managers were punished—some demoted, others banished—over the incident. At the same time, satellite imagery indicates the addition of a tenth chemical sample tank, suggesting an expansion of uranium refinement capacity in line with Party orders to strengthen nuclear capabilities.

Security has been tightened around the refinery, with strict monitoring of residents and access restrictions, while the regime dismisses international concerns about marine pollution as interference in its sovereignty.

North Korea's efforts to increase fissile material production directly contravene U.N. Security Council resolutions and may enhance its bargaining leverage in future negotiations with the United States. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Smuggling of medicinal herbs stalls amid tighter Chinese controls

(mo) Smugglers are facing severe setbacks as Chinese traders increasingly refuse to accept shipments of medicinal herbs. Prices have dropped sharply, with products that once sold for CNY 100-150 (USD 14.05-21.07) per 600 grams now fetching only about CNY 50. Chinese authorities have tightened quality inspections, making it difficult for even genuine shipments to pass, while traders—who typically pay only after resale—are now rejecting goods outright. [Daily NK] [The Press United]

Smuggling has also been disrupted by rising water levels on the Yalu River and heightened border controls following Kim Jong-un's recent visit to Beijing. This has left North Korean smugglers unable to earn foreign currency and stuck with large unsellable inventories. [Bloomberg]

North Korea: Kim Jong-un's China visit triggers massive coal build up

(mo) Following North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's recent visit to Beijing to attend China's military held in the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the victory against Japan in World War II, North Korea has been stockpiling large quantities of coal at Nampo Port, signaling preparations for exports to China in violation of UN sanctions.

Sources report that from September 1, coal from major mining districts has been transported around the clock by heavy trucks to the port, where it is being readied for shipment to Dalian and Longkou. The operation is being coordinated by North Korea's Ministry of Coal Industry and Ministry of Land and Maritime Transport, with companies handling contracts. [Daily NK]

The UN banned North Korean coal exports under Resolution 2371 in 2017, but Pyongyang has continued shipments through covert methods such as ship-to-ship transfers and falsified records. Analysts suggest the timing of this campaign reflects both improved ties with Beijing and North Korea's urgent need for foreign currency, with China showing less resolve to enforce sanctions amid tensions with Washington. [UNResolution2371]

North Korea: Everyday surveillance expanded

(mo) North Korean authorities have reportedly stepped up surveillance of border neighborhoods with China, focusing especially on individuals labeled as "dangerous elements." In the city of Hoeryong in the northeastern North Hamgyong Province, this includes relatives of defectors, former prisoners, early-discharged soldiers, and users of Chinese phones. Authorities maintain lists of such individuals and track their movements through police and informants.

Even routine activities, such as visiting family or using Chinese phones, are said to be closely monitored, sometimes resulting in constant following and documentation. The intensified scrutiny coincides with year-end police performance evaluations, prompting officers to exceed surveillance requirements to avoid criticism. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Military build-up to deepen

(dql) North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has announced plans to unveil a new policy advancing both nuclear and conventional military capabilities at the upcoming 9th Congress of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). The announcement was made during an inspection of the Armoured Defensive Weapons Institute and the Tank Designing Bureau on September 13. Kim emphasized the importance of modernizing conventional forces to build a stronger army while inspecting the development of new armored vehicles and electronic weaponry. [KCNA]

Kim's statement underscores Pyongyang's determination to expand its military power after declaring itself an "irreversible" nuclear state following the failed 2019 U.S. summit. His emphasis on modernizing conventional forces reflects recognition that nuclear deterrence alone is insufficient, signaling a broader strategy to strengthen war-fighting capacity.

Analysts suggest the policy will likely outline mid- to long-term modernization goals tailored to "modern warfare," building on the ambitious agenda introduced at the 2021 party congress. [The Defense Post] [The Korea Times]

The development comes amid deepening North Korea–Russia cooperation. Pyongyang has dispatched troops to support Moscow's war in Ukraine and, in return, has secured vital backing from Russia, including the possibility of advanced military technology transfers. Last year, Kim and President Vladimir Putin signed a mutual defense pact, cementing a strategic partnership that has raised alarm in Seoul and Washington (see AiR No. 26, June/2024, 4).

Kim's recent joint appearance with Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping at Beijing's military parade, that marked the 80th anniversary of China's victory over Japan in World War II, highlighted the growing trilateral alignment, which U.S. President Donald Trump sharply criticized as an emerging front against the United States (see AiR No. 36, September/2025, 2). [Lowy Institute]

South Korea: President Lee marks 100 days with vision for economic recovery, strengthened diplomacy

(dql) On September 11, marking his 100th day in office, President Lee Jae Myung outlined his vision for national recovery and long-term growth during a news conference at Cheong Wa Dae. Framing his early tenure as a period of "recovery and normalization," Lee emphasized the urgent need to restore the people's livelihood economy, citing stimulus measures that boosted consumption to a seven-year high and pushed the main stock index to record levels.

Looking ahead to the remaining four years and nine months of his term, Lee pledged to pursue "major advancement and growth," aiming to build a society where citizens' well-being is central.

On foreign policy, Lee highlighted active engagement with the G7, the U.S., and Japan. He stressed transparency in bilateral negotiations, particularly on tariffs and visa issues, and affirmed that decisions would protect South Korea's national interests. Regarding Japan, he proposed a "two-track strategy" that separates historical and territorial issues from future-oriented social, economic, and civilian exchanges.

Addressing North Korea, Lee reiterated his commitment to dialogue beyond political preconditions and emphasized multilateral efforts to ensure the stability of the Korean Peninsula.

The speech underscores Lee's dual focus on domestic economic revitalization and proactive, principled diplomacy as cornerstones of his administration. [Korea.net] [The Korea Times]

Opposition blasts Lee administration's first 100 days

Opposition People Power Party (PPP) floor leader Song Eon-seog delivered a scathing assessment of President Lee Jae Myung's first 100 days in office, portraying his administration as marked by disarray, economic mismanagement, and weakness toward North Korea. Speaking before the National Assembly, Song accused Lee's ruling Democratic Party (DP) of steering the country toward one-party dominance and using legislative power for partisan ends.

He condemned the DP's push to extend special counsel investigations into former President martial law declaration, alleged corruption involving former first lady, and the death of a Marine, arguing these inquiries amount to political persecution. The DP, holding 167 of 298 seats and thus able to pass legislation unilaterally, defends the probes as essential for accountability, but the PPP contends they are tools of retribution.

Turning to foreign policy, Song rejected Lee's conciliatory line toward Pyongyang, urging a more assertive approach to safeguard national security and dignity. He also dismissed Lee's recent summit with U.S. President Donald Trump as fruitless, pointing to the detention of hundreds of South Korean workers in Georgia during a U.S. immigration raid at a Hyundai-LG battery plant (see article in this edition). [Yonhap News Agency]

The speech highlights the entrenched polarization shaping South Korean politics, with the DP pressing ahead on reforms to the judiciary, prosecution, and media while the PPP warns of creeping authoritarianism.

Legal scholars condemn DP's insurrection tribunal plan

Meanwhile, 21 senior legal figures from Seoul National University's 1976 law class have criticized the DP's proposed "Special Tribunal for Insurrection," that is intended to address alleged insurrection related to last December's attempted martial law.

The group warned that it threatens judicial independence and constitutional norms and opposed provisions allowing politicians and lawyers to recommend special judges, arguing it infringes on the judiciary's authority and risks predetermined outcomes. It specifically denounced efforts to block Judge Jee Kui-youn—who overturned former President Yoon Suk-yeol's detention—from the case, noting parallels to past abuses under military rule.

They also highlighted that a tribunal targeting particular individuals effectively creates "individual case law," historically deemed unconstitutional, and warned that the proposal undermines separation of powers and democracy, urging the party to abandon it. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: New ruling party floor leaders signals hard line against opposition party in first Assembly address

(mo/dql) Indicative of persisting deep polarization in South Korean politics, legislator Jung Chung-rae, new floor leader of the ruling Democratic Party (DP), used his first National Assembly address to call for dismantling what he termed an "internal rebellion"—the fallout from former President Yoon Suk Yeol's martial law declaration. He denounced Yoon's actions as unconstitutional and warned that failure to sever ties with such "rebellious elements" could lead to the Constitutional Court dissolving the opposition People Power Party (PPP).

Despite a meeting the day before with President Lee Jae Myung and PPP leader Jang Dong-hyeok that raised hopes of bipartisan cooperation, Jung maintained a highly assertive and confrontational stance. [Arirang]

He demanded swift passage of bills to investigate Yoon's alleged insurrection, corruption linked to former first lady Kim Keon Hee, and the death of a Marine in flood-relief operations, while also proposing a special court to handle such cases.

Policy-wise, Jung outlined sweeping reforms, including abolishing the prosecution's monopoly on investigation and indictment, expanding the Supreme Court bench, strengthening judicial oversight, and tightening media regulation to curb misinformation. These proposals reflect a major political push to reshape country's legal and information systems.

The opposition criticized Jung's rhetoric as undermining the conciliatory atmosphere created by

President Lee, arguing it focused on eliminating the PPP rather than addressing pressing issues such as youth employment. His remarks provoked walkouts from PPP lawmakers, who accused him of being a "pro-North Korea leftist" referencing his student activism. [The Korea Times] [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Cho Kuk elected as Emergency Committee Chair to lead Rebuilding Korea Party amid crisis

(dql) The minor opposition Rebuilding Korea Party on September 11 elected former Justice Minister Cho Kuk as chairman of its emergency response committee.

Following his election, Cho stated that he accepted the committee's decision with a heavy sense of responsibility, saying the party's current crisis stemmed from his own shortcomings. He emphasized that, through the emergency response committee, he intended to follow the will of party members and the public to rebuild the party and ensure its renewal.

The party's leadership and key officials had resigned on September 7 over their mishandling of a sexual misconduct and workplace harassment case, which had first been reported five months earlier (see AiR No. 36, September/2025, 2).

After his release from prison, Cho had remained silent on the case, but as criticism intensified following the defection of Kang Mi-jeong, a former spokesperson and one of the victims, he explained that he had not been a party member at the time and therefore played no role in the matter. In February 2023, Cho was sentenced to two years prison for falsely submitting documents attesting that his son had completed an internship and forging his daughter's academic credentials. In August, President Lee Jae-myung pardoned him.

Despite opposition within the party over whether Cho, who was seen by some as still bearing responsibility for the crisis, should lead the emergency committee, the general meeting of lawmakers ultimately decided to restore what has been called the "Cho Kuk system."

In his remarks, Cho pledged to align the party's approach with the perspectives of the victims and the public, offering an apology on behalf of the party. He promised to expedite institutional reforms, including measures to support victims and prevent future misconduct. He voiced his determination to transform

the party into a community people would want to return to. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Court proceeds with Yoon Suk-yeol rebellion trial in absentia

(mo) Former President Yoon Suk-yeol has failed to appear in court for his rebellion charges trial nine consecutive times, prompting the Seoul Central District Court's 25th Criminal Division to proceed in absentia on September 15. Yoon, indicted on charges of leading a rebellion and abusing his authority in the context of his failed martial law attempt in December, has not attended any hearings since his rearrest by the special counsel team on July 10, citing health concerns.

The court is currently handling three separate rebellion trials: Yoon's case, the police command case, that concerns the alleged role of senior police commanders and officials in the supposed rebellion, and the trial of military officials including former Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun..

The September 15 session also included testimony from members of the 707th Special Missions Group, who entered the National Assembly by helicopter during the emergency martial law, as well as from former Capital Defense Command Operations Director Colonel Kim Moon-sang. Kim is regarded as the officer who delayed the deployment of martial law helicopters to the National Assembly by withholding and rejecting their request for entry into Seoul's airspace. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Court to decide in November on jury trial request for former President Moon

(mo/dql) The Seoul Central District Court is set to rule in November on whether former President Moon Jae-in will be allowed a jury trial in his ongoing bribery case. Moon, who served as president from 2017-2022, is accused of accepting KRW 217 million (about USD 156,000) from former lawmaker Lee Sang-jik, allegedly to secure a government position for Moon's son-in-law, Seo, who later joined Thai Eastar Jet, a company linked to Lee.

The court, during a second preparatory hearing, scheduled a third session for November 25 to consider the jury trial request. The decision will depend on the

finalization of evidence and whether the number of witnesses can be reduced to seven or eight.

Separately, the court once again denied Moon's request to move the trial to Ulsan, near his home in Yangsan, noting that both the alleged donor and recipient must be present in Seoul. Moon did not attend the hearing, while Lee, currently detained in Jeonju, was present. [Yonhap News Agency] [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Seoul to review possible human rights violations in US raid on workers

(mo) The government has announced it will investigate possible human rights violations after hundreds of its citizens were detained in a U.S. immigration raid at an EV battery plant construction site in Georgia. On September 4, more than 470 workers were arrested in what became the largest single-site raid since President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown began. Among them were some 300 South Koreans.

Following diplomatic talks, the workers were released and flown back to South Korea, where several described harsh conditions, including not being read their rights and being mocked with jibes referencing North Korea and "rocket man," Trump's past insult for Kim Jong Un. [BBC]

The Presidential Office said Seoul, Washington, and the companies involved are jointly conducting a "thorough review" to determine if rights were violated. President Lee Jae-myung called the raid "bewildering," warning it could deter future investment in the U.S. Trump later sought to ease concerns, writing on Truth Social that foreign workers were "welcome" and he did not want to discourage investment. [The Guardian]

Meanwhile, on September 13, progressive civic group Candlelight Action and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions protested the raid, calling for accountability from both the U.S. and Korean governments. The protest centered on the recent arrest and detention of South Korean workers, which the participants denounced as "hostage-taking." Demonstrators tore placards of U.S. President Donald Trump, smashed a mannequin, and chanted slogans such as "Condemn the U.S. hostage drama" and "Yankee go home." Some clashed with police as they marched toward the embassy. [Korea JoongAng Daily] [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Energy security concerns rise amid potential spent nuclear fuel crunch

(mo) South Korea's spent nuclear fuel storage facilities are projected to reach capacity as early as next year, raising urgent concerns over energy security. According to data from Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power (KHNP), the country's largest electric utility, storage at the Gori Nuclear Power Plant is expected to reach 95.1 percent in 2025, while the Hanbit and Wolsong plants are projected to hit similar levels by 2029 and 2033, respectively.

To ease the pressure, KHNP plans to expand dry storage facilities. However, construction is time-consuming and requires both government approval and local resident consent under the new Special Act on High-Level Radioactive Waste Management, which takes effect at the end of this month.

In parallel, political leaders are calling for revisions to the U.S.–Korea nuclear agreement to secure rights for uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing—privileges already granted to Japan under its 1988 agreement with Washington. Lawmakers argued that, with 26 reactors in operation, South Korea must obtain rights comparable to Japan's in order to safeguard its energy security and industrial competitiveness. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Prime Minister pledges semiconductor industry regulation improvements

(mo) Prime Minister Kim Min-seok visited the Yongin Semiconductor Cluster on September 11 and pledged continued regulatory reforms to support the country's semiconductor industry. At a meeting with SK Hynix executives, industry representatives, and government officials, Kim highlighted the cluster's significance as the world's largest semiconductor complex, backed by KRW 622 trillion (USD 450 billion) investment and plans for ten fabrication plants by 2047. He stressed the government's role in easing regulatory burdens while ensuring safety. [Asia Business Daily] [Global Times]

The Prime Minister's Office outlined several regulatory improvements tailored to semiconductor factories. These include exempting buildings from impractical requirements for firefighter access windows beyond

the reach of ladder trucks, introducing flexibility in spacing rules for access windows, and allowing sprinkler systems to substitute for costly fire compartmentalization of large pipeline networks. Exemptions from distributed energy facility requirements and relaxed rules to speed up construction of testing mini-fabs are also under review. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: North Korean-linked cyberattacks target defense body

(mo) A South Korean security institute has revealed that Kimsuky, a hacking group allegedly backed by North Korea, carried out cyberattacks on South Korean organizations—including a defense-related body—using AI-generated deepfake images. [Anadolu Ajasi]

According to the Genians Security Center (GSC) report, the group attempted a spear-phishing attack in July by sending malicious emails disguised as correspondence about ID issuance for military-affiliated officials. The fake ID images were believed to have been generated by AI models. [Genians Security Center]

South Korea: Hypersonic missile project suspended

(mo) The development project for a supersonic air-to-ship missile was confirmed on September 9 to have been halted due to the low probability of long-range engagements with neighboring countries. Moreover, the likelihood of penetrating enemy defense systems is low and Considering the Navy's response procedures against neighboring countries

Concerns have emerged that South Korea is inadequately prepared for North Korea's recent launch of the new destroyer in April to secure maritime nuclear capabilities, as well as increased activities by Chinese and Russian navies in the Yellow and East Sea.

The project cost, initially estimated at 434 million USD, had doubled to 923 million USD, adding to the burden. Consequently, the relevant budget was not included in next year's government budget proposal. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Arms agency to upgrade Black Hawk choppers

(mo) The Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), the country's arms procurement agency, plans to upgrade the military's Black Hawk helicopters in a bid to equip them with a digital cockpit and enhance the survivability of pilots during special operations.

The USD 715 million USD project is designed to upgrade the UH/HH-60 choppers, used by both the Army and Air Force. The planned upgrade is focused on enhancing the cockpit with digital equipment, including digital maps and multifunction displays, according to DAPA. [Yonhap News]

South Korea: Supreme Court upholds prison term for North Korea contacts

(dql) The Supreme Court has upheld a reduced prison sentence for an activist convicted under the National Security Act (NSA) for meeting North Korean operatives abroad and accepting funds from them. The defendant, part of the so-called North Chungcheong Comrade Party, met Pyongyang agents in China in 2017 and Cambodia in 2018, later receiving USD 20,000 hidden in a locker in Shenyang.

Originally sentenced to 14 years, the activist's term was reduced to five on appeal, with the Supreme Court rejecting a final appeal last week. The justices affirmed convictions on verifiable acts—direct contact with DPRK operatives and receipt of funds—while upholding acquittals on broader charges such as espionage, propaganda, and forming an enemy-benefiting organization, citing insufficient proof of intent or concrete threat to national security.

The ruling reflects the judiciary's narrow application of the NSA, treating it as an outdated Cold War law. Analysts note courts are increasingly reluctant to uphold prosecutions based on ambiguous or ideological activity, focusing instead on clear, substantiated violations.

The case is part of a broader wave of NSA prosecutions pursued under the former President Yoon Suk Yeol, many targeting labor union activists and pro-engagement groups with limited political influence. Parallel investigations have linked similar meetings with North Korean operatives in Cambodia, highlighting North Korea's regional outreach networks. [NK News] [The Chosun Daily]

Taiwan: Court restores bail for ex-Mayor Ko Wen-je amid high-profile corruption trial

(dql/acl) The Taipei District Court on September 15 again approved bail for former Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je and Taipei City Councilor Ying Hsiao-wei, maintaining their original bails of NTD 70 million (USD 2.32 million) and NTD 30 million (USD 970,000), respectively. The court imposed restrictions preventing them from leaving Taiwan, wearing an electronic tracking device, and contacting other defendants or witnesses.

The decision follows a Taiwan High Court ruling that temporarily revoked their bail, citing ongoing witness testimony and allegations that Ko had contacted key witnesses after his initial release. The district court held that existing court documents and prior sworn testimony are sufficient for upcoming hearings and that the high bail amounts provide psychological and practical constraints as a substitute for detention. Prosecutors are reviewing whether to appeal the latest ruling.

Ko, founder and former chairman of the Taiwan People's Party, and Ying are on trial in the "Core Pacific City case," accused of accepting bribes and embezzling political donations. Ko faces a potential 28.5-year sentence for allegedly taking NTD 17.1 million (USD 550,000) in bribes during his mayoral tenure and misappropriating campaign funds. The TPP emphasized Ko's presumption of innocence and pledged to support him through the legal process. [Focus Taiwan]

Ko has been in detention since September 5, 2024, and was indicted in December on charges of accepting approximately USD 565,000 in bribes related to a property development deal and embezzling political donations during his 2024 presidential campaign.

The Core Pacific City case is a high-profile corruption investigation in Taiwan involving former Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je and several others. The case centers on allegations that Ko, during his tenure from 2014 to 2022, authorized a significant increase in the floor area ratio for the Core Pacific City redevelopment project, allowing the developer to expand the complex beyond legal limits.

Taiwan: Semiconductor summit highlights global partnerships and AI infrastructure plans

(yl) The Semicon Network Summit in Taipei gathered over 600 participants from 28 countries, including the US, Japan, the UK, and France, highlighting Taiwan's role in securing global semiconductor supply chains. President Lai Ching-te, National Science and Technology Council Minister Wu Cheng-wen, and Economics Minister Kung Ming-hsin emphasized international cooperation, global investment, and supply chain resilience.

Lai announced the Ten Major AI Infrastructure Projects, including initiatives in quantum computing and robotics, as part of Taiwan's long-term technology roadmap. Kung stressed expanding international partnerships, while Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) President Liu Wen-hsiung highlighted the pressing talent gap, calling for cross-disciplinary expertise. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Government plans coast guard fleet expansion to counter Chinese gray zone tactics

(acl) On September 10, Taiwan's Ocean Affairs Council (OAC) announced plans to construct 40 additional vessels to strengthen Taiwan's maritime defense and counter Chinese gray zone tactics near its maritime borders. The OAC is expected to receive USD 973.5 million from a proposed Cabinet budget of USD 18.2 billion.

According to OAC Deputy Minister and Coast Guard Administration Director-General Chang Chung-Lung, USD 287 million will be allocated for the construction of 12 2,000-tonne vessels, 14 300-tonne vessels, and 14 100-tonne patrol boats. The larger ships will be designed to withstand wind, waves, and collisions, enabling them to counter Chinese coast guard and government ships operating in Taiwan's waters.

Another portion of the budget will be used to enhance cybersecurity and communication resilience through the integration of AI into decision-making, upgrades to surveillance systems, and improvements in aerial and nighttime monitoring. Remaining funds will be used to upgrade base facilities and procure domestically-built drones to expand surveillance and law enforcement capabilities.

Vice President Hsiao Bi-Khim reaffirmed the government's commitment to advancing coast guard shipbuilding in order to strengthen fleet capabilities and bolster maritime defenses.

China's increasing gray zone activities have also prompted Taiwan's coast guard to deepen cooperation with the Philippines, including joint patrols and high-level defense talks. [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2]

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

Bangladesh: Deadlock deepens over reform roadmap as commission's mandate extended

(lm) Bangladesh's transition remains stuck in uncertainty as the interim government has extended the mandate of the National Consensus Commission (NCC) until October 15, but failed to secure consensus on how to implement the "July Charter." The Charter, drafted after the August 2024 uprising that ousted Sheikh Hasina, outlines 84 proposals for constitutional, judicial, electoral, and administrative reforms, alongside recognition of the pro-democracy movement and justice for victims of state abuses. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [The Daily Star 1]

While parties broadly agree that reforms not requiring constitutional change can be enacted by executive order, they remain divided on structural reforms. Options under debate include a referendum, a provisional constitutional order, a presidential

proclamation, a constituent assembly, or deferring changes to the next parliament.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the main opposition and historical archrival to Hasina's Awami League – has proposed that all parties commit to the Charter in their election manifestos, with constitutional changes to follow within two years of a new parliament. Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party and former BNP ally, has called for a Provisional Constitutional Order followed by a referendum, while the National Citizen Party (NCP)—a student-led grouping born from the uprising—has urged a Constituent Assembly election. Left-leaning parties insist reforms should be left entirely to the next parliament. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

In parallel, Islamist and smaller opposition parties are preparing coordinated street movements on September 18 to demand immediate implementation of the Charter, an upper house of parliament elected through proportional representation, and a ban on the Jatiya Party, the main parliamentary opposition party during Sheikh Hasina's last term, which they denounce as a proxy of former ruling forces. Jamaat-e-Islami, has taken a leading role. Islami Andolan Bangladesh, another Islamist party with a strong grassroots network, is joining alongside five smaller allies. The NCP has not yet committed to joining but supports calls for a binding legal framework for reforms. [The Daily Star 4] [The Daily Star 5]

The commission, chaired by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has tried to break the impasse by asking parties to pledge not to challenge the Charter in court. A revised draft removed clauses that would have elevated the Charter above existing laws, limited judicial review, or barred legal challenges, and now records which parties supported or dissented from each proposal. Law Adviser Asif Nazrul has set November 30 as the deadline to finalize reforms, noting that 50 percent of proposals have already been addressed and 70 percent could be implemented by December. [The Daily Star 6] [The Daily Star 7] [Dhaka Tribune 3]

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, who heads the interim government and chairs the commission, emphasized that the that the national election—scheduled for the first half of February—is a foundational step and must proceed as planned. He stated that reform, including the implementation of the July Charter, is one of the interim government's three core mandates alongside ensuring justice and conducting elections. [The Daily Star 8]

Bangladesh: Election boundary protests, reshuffles, and graft probe intensify pre-poll tensions

(lm/mon) Bangladesh's run-up to the February 2026 general election has become increasingly tense as protests over constituency boundary changes spread, senior election officials are reshuffled, and a high-profile graft probe revives criticism of past polls.

The Election Commission (EC) has redrawn the boundaries of 46 constituencies across 16 districts. While four previously divided sub-districts (administrative regions below the district level) were consolidated, 22 others remain split between seats, leaving voters divided across electoral boundaries. Among them are Dhaka's Keraniganj and Savar—industrial and suburban hubs on the outskirts of the capital—Gazipur Sadar, a key manufacturing center north of Dhaka, and Chittagong's Satkania, an agricultural region in the southeast. [Dhaka Tribune]

The new map sparked unrest in several districts. In Faridpur, a central district linking Dhaka with the southwest, residents blocked roads and railways for nearly 12 hours over the transfer of Algi and Hamirdi sub-districts, halting traffic across the region. In Pabna, an agricultural hub in the northwest, residents of Bera enforced a daylong shutdown after being moved to a different constituency. In Bagerhat, a coastal district in the southwest known for its historical sites, demonstrators staged sit-ins demanding the restoration of a lost parliamentary seat. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

Despite these protests, the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) announced it would not participate in demonstrations, framing the issue as a legal matter rather than a political one. Party leaders said they want to avoid chaos in the pre-election period and preserve credibility. [The Daily Star 4]

Alongside delimitation, the EC has released a draft list of 42,618 polling centers with 2,44,046 booths—divided by gender at an average of one per 3,000 voters. Objections will be heard until September 25, with the final list due on October 20. [The Daily Star 5]

The commission is also reviewing applications for party registration. Out of 143 applicants, 22 have passed field-level scrutiny, including the National Citizen Party, a political grouping that emerged earlier this year from two student-led bodies behind the 2024 mass uprising, alongside smaller leftist, Islamist, and grassroots

groups. Once confirmed, the total number of registered parties will exceed 50. [The Daily Star 6]

In a related development, the EC has transferred 61 senior officials, including Secretariat staff and regional election officers, in the latest reshuffle ahead of the 13th national election. The reassignments, confirmed in three separate orders, form part of a broader wave of transfers that has seen over 235 officials reshuffled since January 2025, with similar rounds on July 15 (51 officials), July 27 (71), and July 31 (52). [The Daily Star 7]

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has summoned 12 former senior officials, including seven ex-secretaries and two former ACC commissioners, accused of receiving illegally allocated flats in Dhaka's Dhanmondi area in exchange for facilitating ballot-stuffing during the 2018 election. The Housing Ministry canceled the allocations in July after a media exposé in May 2025. The 2018 election, which gave the ruling Awami League a two-thirds majority, was widely criticized by opposition parties and civil society, with allegations that up to 60 percent of votes were cast before polling day and independent monitors documenting inflated turnout. [The Daily Star 8]

Bangladesh: Islamist-linked panel wins crucial university polls as campus elections spread after decades-long hiatus

(lm) Bangladesh's student politics has re-emerged as a key arena of contestation following the first major campus elections in decades, signaling renewed activism and sharper polarization among youth groups.

At Dhaka University, a panel affiliated with *Islami Chhatra Shibir*—the student wing of Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, barred from open campus activity since the 1990s—secured 23 of 28 central positions in the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) election, including the top three posts. The alliance, Oikyaboddho Shikkharthi Jote, swept 17 of 18 residential halls, including all five women's halls. The result marks Shibir's most significant return to campus politics since independence, with several elected leaders active in the 2024 uprising that toppled the Awami League. The opposition-aligned *Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)*, student wing of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, won no posts and alleged irregularities. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

At Jahangirnagar University—a residential public university on the outskirts of Dhaka—the Central Students' Union (Jucsu) Commission defended its vote, apologizing for minor errors but rejecting allegations of manipulation. Despite boycotting midway, JCD candidates captured 34 hall-level posts, mainly in male dormitories, and are consulting their leadership on whether to take office. Voter turnout was nearly 68 percent, reflecting strong demand for representation after a 33-year hiatus. [The Daily Star 3] [The Daily Star 4]

Momentum is spreading to other campuses. Chittagong University—a major public university in southeastern Bangladesh—will hold its first Central Students' Union (CUCSU) and hall elections in 35 years on October 12, with more than 27,000 students eligible to vote. Campaigning is underway, with independent slates and coalition talks attracting attention alongside panels linked to Islamist groups, July uprising activists, and opposition affiliates. [The Daily Star 5]

At Rajshahi University—a leading public university in northwestern Bangladesh—the final candidate list for the Central Students' Union (RUCSU) polls confirms 248 contenders for 23 central posts and nearly 600 students contesting hall-level positions. Female participation remains strikingly low: just 10 percent of central candidates are women, with many contesting only reserved seats. Candidates cite cyberbullying as a deterrent, prompting the university to form a monitoring cell. [The Daily Star 6]

Bangladesh: Special tribunal advances cases against ex-leaders and defense officials, while uprising charges face review

(lm) Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), a special domestic court created under the 1973 International Crimes (Tribunals) Act to try crimes against humanity, has since the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 expanded its remit to prosecute senior political and security figures accused of systematic abuses.

ICT-1 is currently hearing the case against Hasina and others, with two high-profile witnesses scheduled to testify on September 15: Mahmudur Rahman, editor of the now-closed opposition daily *Amar Desh*, and Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party, a political group that emerged from the student-led 2024 uprising. Prosecutors have listed 81 witnesses and

expect to conclude testimonies by the end of September before moving to final arguments. In a separate ruling, ICT-1 ordered the jailing of a police inspector and a constable over the 2016 shooting of two student activists. [The Daily Star 1]

In parallel, tribunal prosecutors confirmed that defense officers accused of crimes against humanity—including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture—will also be tried at the ICT. Two senior figures are already in custody: Maj. Gen. (sacked) Ziaul Ahsan, a former Rapid Action Battalion commander, and Rear Admiral (retd.) Mohammad Sohail, a former RAB legal and media director. Prosecutors argue that the law was designed from the outset to cover military and auxiliary forces and that only the tribunal, not military or ordinary criminal courts, can try such systematic crimes. [The Daily Star 2]

Alongside tribunal proceedings, the interim government has launched a review of thousands of cases filed during the July 2024 uprising, following concerns that many were false or politically motivated. New committees at district, metropolitan, and ministerial levels—formed under a recently added Section 173A of the Code of Criminal Procedure—are tasked with submitting reports twice monthly to the law ministry and recommending dismissals where evidence is lacking. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: High Court judge resigns amid misconduct probe

(lm) President Mohammed Shahabuddin has accepted the resignation of High Court Justice Md Akhtaruzzaman, who was under investigation by the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) over allegations of misconduct. The resignation, submitted on August 31 and accepted on September 7, came shortly after the SJC completed a hearing into the case.

Justice Akhtaruzzaman was among 12 High Court judges barred from judicial duties in October 2024 – two months after the ouster of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina – following mass protests by students on the Supreme Court premises demanding the removal of what they called “pro–Awami League fascist judges.” Since then, some of the judges have retired, been removed, or resigned, but four remain under active SJC investigation: Naima Haider, Sheikh Hassan Arif, Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar, and SM Maniruzzaman. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Two senior leaders resign from student-led political force

(lm) Two senior leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP)—a grouping that emerged earlier this year from two student-led bodies that carried last year's uprising and has since become a significant force in the post-uprising political landscape—resigned from their positions on September 11.

The resignations by Major (retd) Abdullah Al Mahmud, joint chief organiser, and Major (retd) Mohammad Salahuddin, central committee member, were confirmed in a press release and submitted to the party's convener. No detailed reasons were provided, although the press release cited various internal considerations. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Procurement reform targets political influence and corruption under draft 2025 rules

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has proposed major reforms to its Public Procurement Rules (PPR) 2025, aiming to reduce political influence, increase transparency, and align procedures with international best practices.

Key proposed changes include the removal of the 10 percent plus-minus pricing provision, a rule in the 2016 framework widely seen as enabling bid manipulation and facilitating favoritism in contract awards. The revised rules also tighten subcontracting limits, capping them at 30 percent of contract value, and classify any unauthorized execution of work as a breach of contract.

The reform package introduces a shift to a fully digital procurement system, including electronic document management, e-payment functionality, and online submission of bills and performance securities. Foreign bidders would be required to partner with local IT firms, a measure designed to support domestic capacity.

For the first time, the framework includes provisions for beneficial ownership disclosure, asset disposal policy, and targeted inclusion of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and NGOs—particularly in consultancy services for health and social sectors.

The updated draft consists of 153 rules, with 94 amended, 12 new, and 18 repealed. Full adoption would mandate use of the electronic government procurement (e-GP) system, strengthen oversight mechanisms, and formalize support for local innovation in the procurement process.

Bangladesh: Corruption probe exposes large-scale fraud in Malaysia migration sector

(lm) Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed 13 new cases against 31 officials from overseas recruiting agencies for allegedly embezzling BDT 11.59 billion (USD 196 million) in worker recruitment to Malaysia. Investigators say the agencies charged up to five times the government-set migration fee, with excess funds laundered through illicit transfers. The accused include figures tied to the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), raising concerns about collusion within the industry's regulatory framework.

With these filings, the ACC has now launched 25 cases this year covering BDT 22.88 billion (USD 388 million) in alleged embezzlement, some implicating high-profile political and business elites. Separately, investigators are examining suspected financial irregularities of BDT 80 billion (USD 1.36 billion) linked to the chairman of Eastern Bank and his family. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Draft ordinance aims to strengthen human rights commission's independence

(lm) The government has unveiled a draft National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Ordinance 2025, proposing to replace the 2009 law in order to strengthen the commission's independence, inclusivity, and accountability. The draft aligns with the Paris Principles, which are the United Nations' international standards for the functioning of national human rights bodies, and incorporates recommendations from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the international umbrella body that accredits and monitors national commissions.

At a stakeholder consultation in Cox's Bazar organized by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), officials emphasized

that a credible commission must be free from political influence and grounded in citizen participation. The session follows earlier consultations in Sylhet and Khulna, with further regional meetings and a National Dialogue in Dhaka planned before the ordinance is finalized. Members of the public are invited to submit feedback on the draft by September 18. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Court criticizes delays in high-profile journalist murder investigation

(lm) A Dhaka court has again voiced dissatisfaction with repeated delays in the investigation into the 2012 killings of television journalists Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi, a case seen as a litmus test for press freedom and judicial accountability in Bangladesh. The couple, widely referred to locally as "Sagar-Runi," were murdered in their Dhaka apartment in February 2012.

The court has now extended the deadline for submission of the probe report until November 30, marking the 122nd extension since the case began. The investigation is currently led by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), which took over in late 2023 after earlier inquiries by local police, the Detective Branch, and the Rapid Action Battalion failed to yield results. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Half of girls still married before 18 despite slow decline

(lm) Bangladesh continues to record one of the world's highest child marriage rates, with half of girls still wed before the age of 18. The country ranks eighth globally and first in Asia, according to recent UNICEF and Plan International data.

In 2020, 53 percent of Bangladeshi women aged 20–24 reported being married before 18. The figure rose to 55 percent in 2022 as school closures and financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation. Since then, the rate has declined by about one percent per year, reaching 50.5 percent in 2025.

Authorities have stepped up enforcement of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, which replaced the 1929 law, with penalties for parents, guardians, or adults arranging underage marriages. However, critics warn that a "special circumstances" clause in the 2017 law is

often misused, undermining its purpose. Experts stress that real progress depends on sustained efforts to keep girls in school, raise awareness in rural communities, empower families economically, and strictly enforce existing laws. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Study finds 77 percent of pregnant and postpartum women suffer depression or anxiety

(lm) A study by a Dhaka-based global health research institute has found that 77 percent of pregnant and postpartum women in Bangladesh experience depression or anxiety, with two-thirds suffering from both conditions simultaneously. The research, carried out between 2022 and 2025 across seven hospitals and involving 7,500 women, underscores a significant maternal mental health burden.

The findings come against the backdrop of Bangladesh's severe shortage of mental health professionals—just 260 psychiatrists and 565 psychologists nationwide, most based in urban centers—leaving rural populations with minimal access to care.

The study also evaluated tele-mental health services provided through Wellbeing Centres, where women described online counselling as safe and effective, though follow-up participation was limited. Broader national data presented at the same event indicated that 4–5 percent of reproductive-aged women face moderate to severe mental health conditions, with prevalence highest in disaster-prone regions.

Researchers further noted that cyberbullying significantly increases depression risks among adolescent girls, with bullied girls almost four times more likely to develop severe depression. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government considers shorter life terms for elderly convicts

(lm) The interim government is reviewing whether to reduce the length of life imprisonment for elderly inmates, Home Affairs Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said after a law and order meeting in Dhaka. Under current law, life imprisonment is equivalent to 30 years. The proposal under consideration would shorten the term to 20 years for

women and slightly higher for men, depending on age at the time of sentencing. Officials stressed the plan is not yet finalized and would come with conditions. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Businesses seek LDC deferment as poverty deepens amid jobless growth

(lm) Bangladesh's leading business chambers and trade bodies have urged Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus to seek a six-year deferment of the country's planned graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, currently scheduled for November 2026. In a joint letter, 16 associations warned that without additional preparation time, Bangladesh risks severe economic shocks: key export markets in the European Union and United Kingdom could impose tariffs of up to 12 percent, threatening a 6–14 percent fall in exports. The apparel sector, which generates more than 80 percent of export earnings, is seen as particularly vulnerable, while the pharmaceutical industry could face steep cost increases as relaxed World Trade Organization rules on patents expire. Business leaders pointed to examples such as the Solomon Islands, Nepal, and Timor-Leste, which have previously secured delays, and cautioned that energy shortages and rising compliance costs further undermine competitiveness. [The Daily Star 1]

At the same time, new research and expert discussions highlight worsening poverty trends. A study by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) found that nearly 28 percent of the population now lives below the poverty line, up from 18.7 percent in 2022, with extreme poverty rising to 9.35 percent. Economists attribute this reversal to "jobless growth," where economic expansion has failed to generate sufficient decent employment, compounded by widening inequality, poor access to quality education, and structural weaknesses in rural economies. With over 40 percent of young people classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), experts warned that Bangladesh faces both transitory and chronic poverty risks. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: ADN Telecom partners with South Korean firms on electric vehicles and smart infrastructure

(mon) ADN Telecom, a publicly traded IT and telecom company, has signed memorandums of understanding with South Korea's CND Motors and PBS Co to assemble electric three-wheelers, introduce AI-based traffic management systems, and install solar-powered streetlights in Bangladesh. The projects will be carried out through joint ventures, with the South Korean partners providing technology and expertise and ADN focusing on execution and market development. The firm plans to establish an assembly plant in a hi-tech park, either in Sylhet or Gazipur, as part of the country's broader goal of achieving 30 percent electric vehicle adoption by 2030 to cut carbon emissions by 3.4 million tons. [Financial Express]

The company said the collaboration will promote technology transfer, local employment, and long-term sustainability, positioning Bangladesh to benefit from rising global demand for cleaner energy and modernized mobility solutions. Despite the announcement, ADN Telecom's share price fell 1.51 percent to about USD 0.71 (BDT 78.5) on the Dhaka Stock Exchange, reflecting muted investor response. The firm, which has diversified into healthcare, digital services, and security in recent years, reported FY24 revenue of about USD 130 million (BDT 14.3 billion) and profit of about USD 13 million (BDT 1.44 billion), down 42 percent from the previous year amid rising borrowing costs. [TBS News]

Bangladesh: US citizen remanded over alleged plot against interim government

(lm) A Dhaka court has placed Enayet Karim Chowdhury, a 55-year-old US citizen of Bangladeshi origin, on a two-day remand under the Anti-Terrorism Act following his arrest for allegedly conspiring to overthrow Bangladesh's interim government.

Chowdhury, who has lived in the United States since 1988 and obtained a US passport in 2004, was detained on September 13 in Dhaka under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows preventive detention on suspicion. Police allege he arrived in Bangladesh on September 6, stayed at a Dhaka hotel, and held secret meetings with senior policymakers, political figures, and business leaders.

According to the case file, Chowdhury told investigators he was working as a "contract agent" for a foreign intelligence agency with the aim of replacing the interim government with either a national or caretaker government. Authorities claim his mobile phones contained data supporting these allegations

and that he had gathered sensitive information on government and opposition officials, which was allegedly shared with outside agencies.

The prosecution argues that Chowdhury conspired with others to instigate unrest and damage state property through public protests. The investigation remains ongoing, and authorities have not disclosed which foreign intelligence service he allegedly worked for. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Mob violence continues despite zero-tolerance pledges

(lm) Mob violence continues in Bangladesh despite repeated assurances from the interim government and military of a zero-tolerance approach. On September 10, two individuals were killed in separate mob attacks in Dhaka, the third such incident in the capital within a week. A few days earlier, a mob attacked a religious site in Rajbari District, resulting in one death and multiple injuries.

The violence has spread beyond the capital. In Gazipur's Kapasia sub-district, an agricultural area northeast of Dhaka, a man accused of theft was beaten by a group and later died in hospital. In Feni's Sadar sub-district, a town in southeastern Bangladesh near the Indian border, another man was fatally attacked by locals after being accused of attempting to steal an auto-rickshaw. Police have opened investigations into both cases. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

According to rights group Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 124 people were killed in mob beatings across the country in the first seven months of 2025—55 of them in Dhaka—compared to 128 deaths nationwide in 2024.

The Bangladesh military, which remains deployed under special executive magistrate powers, reaffirmed its zero-tolerance policy, but noted that operational delays can reduce response effectiveness. The Home Affairs Adviser to the interim government acknowledged a slight deterioration in public security and stated that efforts were underway to restore order. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Police introduce strict criteria for station chiefs ahead of election

(lm) Bangladesh police have adopted a new policy for appointing officers-in-charge (OCs) of police stations, aiming to curb political interference and corruption in postings. The policy sets strict eligibility standards: candidates must have at least three years' service as inspectors, completed a police station management course, be under the age of 54, and hold higher educational qualifications. Officers with records of financial misconduct, moral offences, or repeated disciplinary punishments will be disqualified.

The rules also require an average of 80 marks in annual performance reviews for five consecutive years and no negative evaluations over three years. OCs will now serve a maximum of six years. Officials say the changes are intended to ensure merit-based selection for one of the most powerful posts in the police force, responsible for investigations and station resources.

The reform comes just months before the February 2026 national election, where OCs will play a critical role in maintaining law and order. It follows longstanding criticism that OC postings under the Awami League government of ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina were determined by political loyalty, lobbying, and even bribery. Former IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, now on trial for crimes against humanity linked to the July uprising, recently admitted that political interference deepened after 2018, with some OCs acting independently under political protection and even attending meetings at the residence of the then home minister. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government announces two new police commissions and transfers senior officers

(lm) The interim government of Bangladesh has directed the law ministry to draft legislation for two new commissions within the police force: the Independent Investigation Services and the Internal Complaints Commission. The Independent Investigation Services will be chaired by the law adviser or a minister and will handle investigations and complaints against police officers. The Internal Complaints Commission, chaired by the home adviser or a minister with the Inspector General of Police (IGP) as member secretary, will address internal grievances and oversee issues such as recruitment, promotion, postings, training, and police welfare.

This decision was made during an advisory council meeting reviewing police reform proposals. The proposal for a single independent commission was

divided into two separate bodies. The Police Headquarters had earlier submitted a proposal to the home ministry suggesting a commission chaired by the home adviser, with a retired appellate justice as vice-chair and the IGP as member secretary, including other members such as a retired senior police officer and a rights activist. Temporary members would represent the speaker, deputy speaker, and leaders of parliament. If parliament is not in place, the president may form an interim commission.

Previous attempts in 2007 to create an independent police commission with similar aims were not implemented due to resistance from bureaucratic groups. The current commissions are to be implemented by the law ministry, with oversight by several advisers and practical coordination by the home ministry. [The Daily Star 1]

Separately, the home ministry has ordered the transfer of eight additional deputy inspectors general (DIGs) and six superintendents of police (SPs). Notable changes include postings of senior officers to the tourist police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), and various regional ranges. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Cybercrime cases pile up as tribunals face years-long delays

(lm) Cybercrime prosecutions in Bangladesh are facing severe delays, with more than 200 cases pending for over five years in eight specialized cyber tribunals, according to a recent Supreme Court report. One emblematic case involves a 2017 arrest for digital forgery: despite charges being filed in 2018, only one of 15 witnesses has testified in six years, and the accused has since gone into hiding after securing bail. Court staff attribute the backlog largely to police failures in producing witnesses.

As of June 2025, 4,452 cybercrime cases remain pending, with 116 accused held in jail. Although 1,324 cases were disposed of between April and June this year, 367 new cases were filed during the same period, reflecting the system's struggle to keep pace with rising digital offences.

Experts warn that prolonged trials harm both defendants and victims while undermining trust in cyber governance. Offences increasingly include hacking, phishing, revenge porn, online harassment, financial fraud, and AI-driven cyberattacks. In response, the interim government promulgated the

Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025, which expands protections by recognizing internet access as a civil right, criminalizing AI-based attacks and harassment of women and children, making speech-related offences bailable, and empowering courts to dismiss fabricated cases at an early stage. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government extends armed forces' magistracy powers for 60 more days

(lm) The Bangladeshi government has extended for another 60 days the authority of armed forces officers to act as Special Executive Magistrates, allowing them to conduct operations under selected provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1898. The extension, effective from September 12, applies to army captains and officers of equivalent rank in the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Coast Guard, and marks the seventh consecutive phase of this authorization.

The decision follows continued deployment of military forces, originally mobilized in response to the 2024 quota reform protests that culminated in the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024. A curfew was imposed on July 19, and an interim government was formed shortly afterward on August 8.

Since then, the armed forces have remained stationed nationwide to assist in maintaining public order during the ongoing political transition. The government justified the extension as a measure taken "in the public interest" under the President's direction. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bhutan: Surge in child-related offenses highlights rising risks of substance abuse and cybercrime

(lm) Bhutan recorded 106 incidents of children in conflict with the law in the first six months of 2025, up from 67 during the same period last year, according to Royal Bhutan Police data. Offenses include assault, vandalism, and substance abuse, with spikes reported during school vacations. Authorities attribute the increase partly to stronger public engagement and awareness campaigns, which have encouraged more reporting.

Substance abuse remains a critical concern. Police say solvents such as glue, paint thinners, and correction fluids are easily accessible to students, and last year alone 316 minors were arrested for drug-related offenses. The issue underscores gaps in enforcement of the 2015 Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

Cybercrime is also emerging as a new risk for Bhutanese youth. Police recorded 67 cyber cases in the first half of 2025, including scams and misuse of artificial intelligence applications for “deep fakes” among students. Officials stressed the importance of parental monitoring and stronger awareness of online risks.

Overall, Bhutan registered 1,247 criminal cases in the first half of 2025. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Domestic violence reporting rises amid awareness campaigns

(lm) Bhutan has recorded 358 domestic violence cases in the first six months of 2025, with Thimphu district reporting the highest number (145), followed by Chhukha (50) and Sarpang (46). Police said the increase reflects greater public awareness and trust in law enforcement following nationwide campaigns, although challenges remain in addressing related social issues such as suicide.

Reporting patterns have fluctuated sharply in recent years, with just 33 cases in 2020, a spike to 565 in 2022, a sudden drop to 30 in 2023, and a rise again to 426 in 2024. Authorities attributed the volatility to both outreach programs and shifting willingness to report.

Police noted that while overall crime declined from 2,614 cases in 2022 to 2,476 in 2024, the severity of offenses has increased. Suicide remains a pressing concern, with 51 deaths reported so far in 2025—35 men and 16 women—mostly from southern regions, alongside 25 attempts. Officials said family breakdown, relationship issues, and lack of support for elderly citizens were key drivers. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Oversupply of hotels deepens tourism industry crisis

(lm) Bhutan’s tourism sector is struggling with structural overcapacity, as hotel construction incentives of the past decade have left nearly 8,625

rooms across 397 certified hotels competing for far fewer visitors. Average occupancy fell to 20.8 percent between January and August 2025, despite arrivals rising 51.8 percent in 2024 and another 19 percent in early 2025. With just 115,536 tourists in the first eight months of this year, operators say the current supply would require 180,000 arrivals per month to break even—well beyond what Bhutan's controlled-entry model has ever attracted.

Three-star hotels, the largest segment, are under the most pressure, with many reporting months of zero occupancy and resorting to drastic price cuts. Even at pre-pandemic highs in 2019, when 315,599 visitors entered the country, the sector was already oversupplied. Authorities have since imposed a moratorium on new hotel loans and tightened certification, but concerns remain over systemic issues such as fronting by foreign tour operators, tax evasion through informal bookings, and concentration of infrastructure in western Bhutan. [Kuensel]

India: Supreme Court suspends parts of religious endowment law

(lm) ndia's Supreme Court has issued an interim order on petitions challenging the Waqf (Amendment) Act 2025, which regulates Islamic charitable endowments known as waqf. Waqf refers to properties or assets donated under Islamic law for religious, educational, or charitable purposes, often including mosques, graveyards, schools, and community facilities.

The law, passed in April despite opposition resistance, triggered widespread protests and dozens of legal challenges from political parties, religious groups, and rights organizations. Violence linked to the legislation left at least three people dead in West Bengal earlier this year.

A bench led by Chief Justice BR Gavai suspended several provisions. These include the requirement that an individual must have practised Islam for at least five years before creating an endowment, and new powers granted to district collectors to decide property disputes. The court ruled that properties already declared as waqf must remain protected until a tribunal or court resolves ownership, and that no third-party rights can be created during disputes. It also capped the number of non-Muslims allowed in state boards and the central council overseeing such endowments, while permitting—but not requiring—the appointment of non-Muslims as chief executive

officers, with the court noting that a Muslim should be chosen “as far as possible.”

The interim order clarifies how the amended provisions will operate while the broader constitutional challenge proceeds. A final judgment remains pending. [INDIA TODAY] [Anadolu Ajansı] [The Times of India]

India: Supreme Court seeks election commission’s response on plea to regulate political parties

(lm) India’s Supreme Court has asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to respond to a public interest petition demanding rules for the registration and regulation of political parties. The plea argues that many small outfits—such as the Indian Social Party, Yuva Bharat Atma Nirbhar Dal, and National Sarva Samaj Party, which exist mainly on paper rather than contesting elections—are being used as conduits for money laundering. It cited recent Income Tax raids in July–August 2025 that exposed their involvement in *hawala* transactions, an informal and often illegal system of money transfer that operates outside formal banking channels.

According to the plea, these entities collect cash donations and return them by cheque after deducting a commission, converting unaccounted wealth into legal funds. It warned that such practices enable criminals and anti-social actors to enter politics, misuse public benefits, and secure undue police protection.

The petitioner stressed that despite political parties’ constitutional and statutory recognition under the Tenth Schedule and Section 29A of the Representation of People Act, no comprehensive law governs their internal functioning, transparency, or accountability. Yet, parties enjoy significant state benefits such as tax exemptions under the Income Tax Act and free airtime on national broadcasters.

The petition seeks directions requiring the ECI to frame regulatory rules, urging the Union government to introduce legislation mandating inner-party democracy and accountability, and calling for measures to prevent the misuse of parties as vehicles for corruption and black money. The Court has also instructed the petitioner to include all recognized national parties as respondents before further hearings. [Bar and Bench]

India: Modi visits Manipur after two years of ethnic clashes, pledges peace and nearly USD 1 billion in development projects

(lm) Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his first visit in two years to Manipur, a northeastern state scarred by violent clashes between the majority Hindu Meitei community and the largely Christian Kuki tribes. Since May 2023, the conflict has left at least 260 people dead and displaced more than 60,000, many of whom continue to live in temporary camps.

Speaking in Kuki-dominated Churachandpur and Meitei-majority Imphal, Modi urged both communities to “take the path of peace” and strengthen “the bridge of brotherhood between the hills and the valley.” He promised federal backing for reconciliation and stability, announcing the construction of 7,000 homes for displaced families alongside new highways, hostels, sports facilities, and other infrastructure worth nearly USD 963 million.

Manipur, which borders Myanmar, has been under direct federal rule since February, when Chief Minister Biren Singh of Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party resigned following accusations of bias and failure to stem the violence. Tensions between Meiteis and Kukis are rooted in disputes over land rights and government job quotas, but rights groups have also accused political actors of inflaming divisions.

Modi framed development as central to restoring order in the state of nearly three million people, while vowing that New Delhi “is with the people of Manipur.” His visit formed part of a wider regional tour that also included Assam and Bihar, where he announced investment plans worth USD 8 billion ahead of upcoming elections. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters]

India: Study finds entrenched dynastic politics across parliament and state legislatures

(lm) A new analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) highlights the depth of dynastic politics in India, showing that 21 percent of sitting lawmakers at the national and state levels come from political families. The study covered 5,204 elected representatives across the Lok Sabha (the directly elected lower house of parliament), the Rajya Sabha (the indirectly elected upper house), state assemblies,

and state legislative councils, identifying 1,107 with immediate or extended family ties to politics.

The Lok Sabha has the highest dynastic concentration at 31 percent, compared with 20 percent in state assemblies. Regionally, Andhra Pradesh leads with 34 percent of legislators from political families, followed by Karnataka with 29 percent and Bihar with 27 percent. Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, has the highest absolute number with 141 dynastic legislators.

Party differences are also notable. Dynastic representation is lowest in left-wing and reformist groups such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist), a long-established Marxist party influential in Kerala and West Bengal, and the Aam Aadmi Party, a reformist, anti-corruption party founded in Delhi in 2012. By contrast, caste-based regional parties report the highest levels of dynastic influence: the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, and the Janata Dal (United), also prominent in Bihar, all show rates between 30 and 40 percent. [scroll.in]

India: Exporters seek relief from central bank as US tariffs bite

(lm) Indian exporters hit by U.S. tariffs of up to 50 percent have appealed to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for emergency relief measures, including a 12-month moratorium on loan repayments and access to a more favorable rupee exchange rate. The requests were presented in a closed-door meeting by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, which warned that sectors such as textiles, chemicals, gems and jewelry, and fisheries face sharp declines in orders, potential layoffs, and the need to reorient exports toward Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Exporters also urged the RBI to implement a collateral-free credit guarantee scheme similar to the one used during the COVID-19 crisis, which would encourage banks to extend lending by having the government backstop part of the risk. In addition, they asked to be allowed to sell dollars at the rupee's real effective exchange rate—about 15 percent higher than the spot rate—to maximize returns from their foreign currency holdings.

Indian banks, while prepared to support a government-led fiscal package, signaled reluctance to grant repayment moratoriums, citing risks of rising defaults. The government is weighing measures to

cushion exporters, but no agreement with Washington has yet been reached to reduce tariffs, even as trade negotiations are set to resume. [Reuters]

India: Legal dispute clouds USD 9.7 billion Great Nicobar mega-project

(lm) India's USD 9.7 billion Great Nicobar Islands development plan, designed to include a transshipment port, airport, and urban infrastructure, faces renewed legal uncertainty as forest rights compliance is challenged in the Calcutta High Court. The Great Nicobar Islands, India's southernmost territory in the Bay of Bengal, are strategically positioned near key Indian Ocean shipping lanes and have been promoted by New Delhi as a project with major geopolitical and economic significance.

Petitions argue that the consent of Indigenous communities was either bypassed or misrepresented in the diversion of 13,000 hectares of forest land. A Tribal Council has alleged that no formal process to settle community rights was initiated, while the government insists compliance procedures were met. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has distanced itself from the case, saying the responsibility lies with local authorities, while the Environment Ministry has withheld final clearance pending confirmation of 37 conditions, including adherence to the Forest Rights Act. [The Hindu]

India: Prime minister opens military commanders' conference with focus on reforms and readiness

(lm) Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 16th Combined Commanders' Conference (CCC) in Kolkata on September 15, a three-day forum that brings together India's top civilian and military leadership to set strategic direction for the armed forces. Attendees include Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, the Defence Secretary, and the chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

This year's theme, "Year of Reforms – Transforming for the Future," highlights institutional reforms, greater integration across the services, and technological modernization while maintaining multi-domain operational preparedness. Modi praised the armed

forces for their role in Operation Sindoor, the May 2025 missile and air strikes against militant targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, conducted as a coordinated tri-service action. These strikes were carried out across the Line of Control, the de facto military frontier dividing Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. He also commended the military's contributions to humanitarian relief, anti-piracy missions, and evacuations from conflict zones. The prime minister urged the Ministry of Defence to accelerate reforms to strengthen jointness, promote Atmanirbharta (self-reliance), and foster innovation. [Prime Minister's Office, India]

Deliberations over the three days will review operational readiness in light of emerging security challenges, evaluate reforms implemented over the past two years, and shape the roadmap for the next phase of transformation. The CCC is structured to include perspectives from across the ranks, with interactive sessions designed to ensure field-level insights inform high-level planning. [The Business Standard] [The Times of India]

India: Defence secretary highlights lessons from May cross-border strikes, calls for new air-defense upgrades

(Lm) India's Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said the May missile and air strikes against militant targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir—codenamed Operation Sindoor—served as a "reality check," exposing gaps in India's military preparedness. He pointed to weaknesses in electronic warfare, counter-drone measures, radar coverage at low altitudes, and drone survivability in GPS-denied environments. Immediate needs are being met through emergency procurement, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), India's state agency for military research and technology development, has been tasked to deliver indigenous solutions.

Singh also confirmed that India is close to finalizing a partnership with a foreign engine manufacturer to co-develop fighter jet engines with full intellectual property transfer to India, a long-term project that could take a decade but is seen as crucial to reducing reliance on imports. He stressed that defense cooperation with the United States remains unaffected by wider trade frictions, citing deliveries of General Electric engines for India's light combat aircraft and Apache helicopters.

Looking forward, Singh highlighted the government's newly announced Sudarshan Chakra Mission, a program to expand and modernize India's multi-layered air-defense shield. The mission, unveiled by the prime minister during his Independence Day address, is aimed at ensuring full coverage of India's critical infrastructure, cities, and industries. DRDO has been tasked with preparing a detailed plan to close remaining gaps in the country's air-defense network. [The Indian Express]

Maldives: Ruling party presses ahead with contested media bill

(ya/lm) The Maldivian government is moving rapidly to pass a controversial media regulation bill, with the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) using its overwhelming parliamentary supermajority to force the legislation forward despite intensifying protests from journalists, legal experts, and civil society. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

The bill, introduced in August by an independent MP, would dissolve the Maldives Media Council (MMC) and the Broadcasting Commission (BroadCom), replacing them with a new Maldives Media and Broadcasting Commission (MMBC). The seven-member MMBC would be composed of four representatives elected by media outlets and three presidential appointees confirmed by parliament, with authority to impose fines and suspensions on outlets. Critics argue this effectively replaces self-regulation with political oversight, granting the government sweeping influence over journalism.

PNC leaders continue to insist on swift passage. Deputy parliamentary leader Mohamed Ismail argued that a "supermajority of the public" supports the legislation, framing it as essential to curb misinformation while upholding Islamic and moral values. Attorney General Ahmed Usham has acknowledged flaws in the original draft but defended the bill as a necessary framework to strengthen accountability. His office has submitted 14 amendments, including the removal of penalties against individual journalists, clarifying vague terms such as "public order," and limiting presidential control over appointments. Youth Minister Ibrahim Waheed has likewise insisted the bill will modernize journalism, highlighting that the government has pledged 0.1 percent of the state budget to support private outlets. [The Sun 3] [The Sun 4] [The Sun 5] [The Sun 6]

Deputy Speaker Ahmed Nazim, who helped draft the legislation, has sent mixed signals. Earlier this year, he openly supported regulating social media, later

insisting that the bill will not affect platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube. Seeking to calm fears, he emphasized that "what happened in Nepal will not happen in the Maldives," a reference to youth-led protests in the South Asian country earlier this month that toppled the government after a ban on 26 social media platforms. He stressed that Maldivians are "more sincere" and that the country's constitutional safeguards remain intact. [The Sun 7] [The Sun 8] [The Sun 9]

The government appears keenly aware of the risks of being compared to Nepal. Alongside the bill, President Muizzu has rolled out youth-focused measures, including ordering a soft loan scheme for digital creators to be launched within two weeks. Economic Development Minister Mohamed Saeed met with content producers on September 15 to design the program, signaling an effort to court young Maldivians even as journalist protests continue. [The Sun 10] [The Sun 11]

Opposition has been mounting. The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) has organized repeated demonstrations outside parliament and the president's office, while 151 journalists signed a petition calling for the bill's withdrawal. On September 10, parliament security forcibly expelled reporters from a closed-door committee session reviewing the bill — an unprecedented move condemned as an attempt at silencing. Tensions escalated again on September 15 when Ahmed Zahir, one of the country's most senior journalists, resigned as president of the Editors Guild, saying the body had been "paralyzed" after many of its leaders accepted government positions. [The Sun 12] [The Sun 13] [The Sun 14]

Former Attorney General Ahmed Ali Sawad has branded the bill a "huge deception," warning it seeks to regulate the public under the guise of media oversight. He argued that vague provisions could extend state control over all internet users, undermining constitutional guarantees of free expression. At an open forum, youth activist Rashwan Mohamed warned the bill would silence all critics, forcing them to "say nothing more than 'thank you, President.'" The Bar Council of the Maldives has likewise urged parliament to pause the process, calling for substantial revisions to align with constitutional principles and international best practices. [The Sun 15] [The Sun 16] [The Sun 17]

At the same time, the president's office on September 14 shut down the Media Fenda — a press center set up across from the presidential palace in May — citing misuse by unauthorized individuals. The facility, located in Male's Green Zone, a high-security district

surrounding state institutions, had provided accredited reporters 24/7 access. Its closure, journalists argue, further restricts access to information at a critical moment. [The Sun 18]

Separately, BroadCom has intensified sanctions against politically active private broadcasters. Channel 13, widely seen as supportive of former President Abdullah Yameen, was ordered to suspend its prime-time programming for one evening after failing to respond to an inquiry into remarks made at an April 17 political gathering. RaajjeTV was formally warned after a March 12 broadcast was deemed harmful to children's dignity and rights, with regulators cautioning that repeat violations would trigger harsh penalties. Both outlets have faced repeated fines in recent years. [The Sun 19] [The Sun 20]

The political climate has also been inflamed by remarks from PNC parliamentary leader Ibrahim Falah, who said on August 27 that journalists spreading false information should be executed by *ulubeyndhun*, an ancient form of impalement. The MJA condemned the statement and filed a police complaint, but the Prosecutor General's Office has remained silent on whether an investigation will proceed. Falah has refused to apologize, later describing his words as "regrettable." President Mohamed Muizzu has called the remarks inappropriate but continues to back the bill. [The Sun 21] [The Sun 22]

Maldives: Parliament approves referendum law as government links it to decentralization reforms

(ya/lm) The Maldivian parliament on September 15 passed a government-backed referendum bill that establishes the legal framework for holding national referendums on constitutional and national issues, including changes to presidential and parliamentary terms, the method of electing the president, ratification of unendorsed bills, and alterations to the country's territory. The bill passed by 64 votes to 12 after incorporating committee amendments requiring that a referendum succeed with at least 50 percent of valid votes, granting the Elections Commission discretion to shorten the minimum 45-day preparation period, and obliging the Finance Ministry to release funds within 10 days of request. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

The legislation comes as President Mohamed Muizzu's administration advances decentralization reforms that would abolish atoll councils, reduce the size of island

councils, and synchronize presidential and parliamentary elections. Muizzu has described atoll councils as an unnecessary "layer" of governance, while Local Governance Minister Adam Shareef said their functions could be handled by appointed civil service officials. A referendum will be required to shorten the current parliamentary term in order to implement the new election cycle. [The Sun 3]

The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has strongly opposed the reforms. Former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih pledged that if the MDP returns to office in 2028, it will restore powers recently stripped from local councils and double their financial grants. He accused the government of undermining decentralization through amendments limiting council authority over recruitment, land and lagoon leases, and development projects, while stalling infrastructure programs launched during his administration. [The Sun 4]

Maldives: Ruling party distances itself from calls to extend presidential term

(lm) Public debate erupted after North Machangolhi MP Ibrahim Mohamed, known as Janab and brother-in-law of President Mohamed Muizzu, suggested in a televised interview that extending the presidential term beyond five years could serve the "greater good." His remarks quickly went viral, drawing strong criticism across social media platforms, where most commentators rejected the idea as unconstitutional and undemocratic. [The Sun 1]

The ruling People's National Congress (PNC), however, has moved to quell speculation. Parliamentary group leader Ibrahim Falah told lawmakers on September 15 that the administration has no intention of lengthening the president's mandate and that Muizzu himself "is not the least bit in favor." Instead, Falah said the government is exploring a plan to align presidential and parliamentary elections, which could shorten terms rather than extend them. [The Sun 2]

Under the Maldivian constitution, the presidential term is fixed at five years. Any amendment would require a public referendum, not just parliamentary approval, even though the PNC currently holds a supermajority.

Maldives: Institutional independence reforms spark debate over judiciary and

attorney general's office

(lm) President Mohamed Muizzu has announced that beginning in 2026 the judiciary will receive a block grant tied to a percentage of projected state revenue, with the aim of granting financial and administrative independence. The initiative, welcomed by the Supreme Court and the Department of Judicial Administration as a historic step to strengthen independence and expedite justice, is framed as a mechanism to reduce external influence. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

At the same time, Attorney General Ahmed Usham has emphasized that the newly enacted Attorney General's Office Act, ratified in May, curtails avenues of outside interference and expands the office's constitutional responsibilities. [The Sun 3]

Both reforms come against a backdrop of contested institutional autonomy. Earlier this year, three Supreme Court judges were suspended and later dismissed by Parliament in a politically sensitive case on constitutional amendments, prompting criticism from international observers over due process and judicial independence.

Former Chief Justice Husnu Al Suood criticized the Supreme Court for publicly endorsing the president's block grant proposal, arguing that such actions undermine judicial integrity. Former President Abdulla Yameen has gone further, rejecting the plan outright, calling block grants untested internationally and warning they could foster corruption rather than independence. [The Sun 4] [The Sun 5]

Meanwhile, the Attorney General's Office Act, in development since 2009, is presented as a milestone for institutional autonomy, though amendments passed by Parliament reduce its internal discretion by requiring the President's Office to approve staff structures and granting the president power to appoint a deputy attorney general.

Maldives: Lawmakers submit overdue financial statements amid scrutiny of asset disclosures

(lm) All five Maldivian parliamentarians who missed the August 31 deadline for submitting mandatory financial statements have now filed the documents within a 15-day extension. Under parliamentary rules, members

who fail to comply risk suspension from sittings and salary deductions until submission.

The disclosures require lawmakers to declare assets, liabilities, and business interests, though information on spouses and underage children is excluded from publication. The process has fueled controversy as earlier statements revealed lawmakers receiving large sums in “gifts.” Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla and South Hulhumale MP Mohamed Shamheed each reported nearly MVR 1 million (USD 65,000) in such payments, prompting allegations from former President Abdulla Yameen that these were bribes rather than legitimate benefits. [The Sun]

Maldives: Opposition lawmakers protest after being denied meeting with housing minister

(lm/ya) The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has escalated pressure on the ruling People’s National Congress (PNC) through a mix of street protests, parliamentary tactics, and symbolic defiance, accusing the government of obstructing accountability and mishandling housing policy.

On September 14, MDP lawmakers and supporters demonstrated outside the Housing Ministry’s temporary offices in Male after being denied a meeting with Housing Minister Abdulla Muthalib, despite having submitted questions three months earlier. Kendhoo MP Mauroof Zakir said staff told them “no one of stature” was available, with officials reportedly leaving through a back door. Vaikaradhoo MP Hussain Ziyad argued that if elected lawmakers are treated this way, it is even harder for ordinary citizens to secure answers. The protest followed a similar action at the Finance Ministry, where Minister Moosa Zameer was abroad. [The Sun 1]

A day later, three MDP MPs entered parliament without ties, breaking long-standing dress rules in a symbolic protest against what they called systematic violations of standing orders. They accused Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla, who also chairs the PNC, of blocking cabinet ministers from being summoned for questioning. The Speaker rebuked the gesture, insisting lawmakers must maintain parliamentary dignity through formal attire. [The Sun 2]

At the same extraordinary sitting, MDP MPs attempted to table an emergency motion over the Dhonfanu land reclamation project near Hanifaru Bay, a UNESCO biosphere reserve. The project, signed on August 13 to

reclaim 13 hectares, was canceled following environmental concerns and strong local opposition, including seaborne demonstrations. Housing Minister Muthalib later confirmed reclamation would not proceed but said harbor development and coastal protection projects are continuing. [The Sun 3]

With just 12 of 93 seats in parliament, the MDP lacks the numbers to challenge the PNC's supermajority directly. Instead, it has turned to symbolic acts, public forums, and street mobilization, with leaders announcing plans for a large-scale rally on October 3.

Maldives: Ex-president rejects Sri Lankan claims linking him to controversial social media account

(lm) Former President Mohamed Nasheed has denied allegations from Sri Lankan media that he operates the anonymous "Hassan Kurusee" account on X, which has published politically sensitive claims about leaders in both Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The accusation followed reports of a Sri Lankan investigation into a Kurusee post alleging that President Anura Kumar Dissanayake orchestrated the arrest of former leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Nasheed dismissed the claim as baseless and expressed concern that it could damage relations between the Maldives and Sri Lanka, a country he described as a long-standing partner. He has previously denied involvement with the account, which Maldivian authorities also investigated in 2023 and 2024 without confirming its operator. The account has attracted controversy for posts critical of multiple governments, including allegations against Russia that prompted objections from Moscow's ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. [The Sun]

Maldives: Parliament confirms new leadership for civil service and human rights commissions

(ya) Parliament has approved President Mohamed Muizzu's nominations for senior posts in two key oversight bodies, confirming Mohamed Mujthaz as president of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), Mohamed Nasih as its vice president, and Mohamed Shafeeg Mahmoodh as vice president of the Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM).

Mujthaz, a former lawmaker who joined the CSC in April and became vice president shortly after, secured unanimous approval with 68 votes. Nasih, who previously led the CSC and was reappointed earlier this month despite surviving a no-confidence motion in late 2024, was endorsed with 64 votes in favor and one against. Shafeeg, a former CEO of several state-linked entities, including the Maldives Airports Company Limited and the Local Government Authority, received 67 votes in favor and one against. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Opposition council member briefly detained during police operation

(ya) On September 11, Maldivian police arrested Hussain Hassan, a National Council member of the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), during a counter-narcotics operation. Police said Hussain, who also has a background in journalism and represents Villingili in the party's council, obstructed officers and ignored orders while attempting to photograph the scene. He was taken into custody on charges of obstruction. [The Sun 1]

The Criminal Court ordered his release the same day, rejecting a police request to extend his remand. The court directed Hussain to cooperate with the ongoing investigation. The MDP criticized the arrest, accusing authorities of using excessive force and targeting political figures. Police defended their actions, maintaining that the arrest was linked to Hussain's conduct at the scene rather than his political affiliation. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: State housing corporation appeals tribunal ruling on dismissed executive

(ya) The Housing Development Corporation (HDC), a state-owned company responsible for urban development projects in the Maldives, has appealed a recent Employment Tribunal ruling in favor of its former Chief Business Officer, Ahmed Yameen. Yameen was dismissed in February following a criminal investigation into alleged corruption linked to housing allocations in Hulhumalé, a reclaimed island developed as part of the capital region's expansion.

Documents that surfaced in December 2024 showed that individuals had received plots under the Binveriya

scheme—a government housing allocation program—despite not appearing on the official 2023 recipient list, prompting investigations by the police and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). In August, the Employment Tribunal ruled Yameen's dismissal unlawful and ordered HDC to reinstate him within two months. The tribunal also directed HDC to pay six months of salary, amounting to MVR 144,000 (USD 9,360), and MVR 20,000 (USD 1,300) in legal fees. HDC filed an appeal with the High Court on August 31.

While police had previously imposed travel bans on 24 individuals linked to the case, these restrictions were lifted in March. [The Sun]

Maldives: Civil servants allowed to wear face veil if ID tags displayed

(lm) The Maldives has amended its Civil Service Regulation to allow women civil servants to wear the niqab—a full-face veil that leaves only the eyes visible—provided they display identification cards or tags when required for verification. The previous rule mandated attire that made staff "easily identifiable," which had effectively barred women wearing the niqab from holding civil service roles. The change, introduced on September 14, follows a similar amendment two weeks earlier permitting judicial employees to wear the niqab. [The Sun]

Maldives: New penalties for employers who neglect expatriate workers

(ya) The Maldives has introduced stricter enforcement measures under amendments to the Employment Act, targeting employer negligence toward expatriate workers. Starting September 11, fines of MVR 50,000 (USD 3,250) per violation will apply, rising to MVR 100,000 (USD 6,500) for repeat cases, alongside possible suspension of state services. Companies that fail to comply will also be blocked from the government's Expat portal, which is required for registering migrant workers.

Authorities have linked the country's growing number of undocumented foreign workers to employer malpractice and positioned the new rules as part of a three-year plan to curb illegal immigration. [The Sun]

Maldives: Fiscal strains deepen as grants dry up, SOE losses mount, and subsidy reforms stall

(ya) The Maldives faces mounting fiscal pressures, with the Finance Ministry's latest weekly report showing multiple areas of concern. By September 4, the government had received only MVR 203.1 million (USD 13.2 million) in grant aid—just 8 percent of the MVR 2.6 billion (USD 169 million) it projected for the year—leaving 92 percent still outstanding. The shortfall compounds default risks, as the country faces external debt equal to 134 percent of GDP, including repayments of USD 500 million in October, USD 100 million in November, and USD 1.1 billion in mid-2026. Rating agencies Moody's and Fitch have downgraded the Maldives further into junk status, citing growing vulnerability, while the World Bank has warned the funding gap makes external assistance harder to secure. [The Sun 1]

Meanwhile, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) remain a heavy drag. Government spending on SOEs reached MVR 1.2 billion (USD 78 million) by early September—865 million (USD 56 million) above the annual allocation—while dividend returns fell by 109 million (USD 7 million) compared to last year. Attempts at reform, such as merging housing and airport companies or dissolving loss-making entities like the tourism and agriculture corporations, have stalled. Collectively, SOEs carried MVR 125 billion (USD 8.1 billion) in debt at the end of 2023, much of it sovereign guaranteed. [The Sun 2]

Subsidy spending has also overshot targets. With over three months left in the year, the government had already spent MVR 2.2 billion (USD 143 million) on subsidies, exceeding the annual allocation of MVR 1.8 billion (USD 117 million). Although this is lower than last year's MVR 2.8 billion (USD 182 million) for the same period, promised reforms—such as phasing out universal subsidies in favor of targeted ones, restructuring the health insurance and pension systems, and reforming SOEs—remain unimplemented. [The Sun 3]

While headline figures show a narrow surplus of MVR 868.7 million (USD 56.5 million) on paper, the government owes billions in unpaid bills to suppliers, infrastructure projects are stalled, and revenue from import duties and profit taxes has declined. The unresolved combination of grant shortfalls, SOE inefficiencies, subsidy overruns, and looming debt repayments underscores the Maldives' precarious fiscal trajectory heading into 2026.

In response, President Mohamed Muizzu has announced sweeping fiscal reforms, including suspending pensions for retirees who return to public service and cutting benefits for former presidents and MPs. Ex-presidents currently receive MVR 50,000–75,000 (USD 3,250–4,875) per month plus housing and office allowances, while former MPs qualify for 30–45 percent of their salaries and health insurance from age 55. The proposal, backed by most lawmakers in Muizzu's ruling People's National Congress (PNC) which holds a supermajority, follows growing public calls to extend cuts to judges, security services, and nearly 1,000 political appointees. [The Sun 4] [The Sun 5] [The Sun 6]

Former President Mohamed Nasheed has become the first ex-head of state to endorse the measures, framing economizing as essential to avoid "debt and shame." [The Sun 7]

Maldives: Government faces debate over food security strategy amid rising prices

(ya) The Maldivian government's plan to stabilize soaring food prices through state-led imports is sparking debate over whether it adequately addresses structural food security challenges. On September 10, President Mohamed Muizzu's cabinet approved bulk imports of fruits, vegetables, lentils, eggs, potatoes, and staples such as rice, flour, and sugar through the State Trading Organization (STO). Prices of essentials have spiked in recent months, with apples now costing more than triple their earlier rate. [The Sun 1]

Former officials caution that reliance on bulk imports risks masking deeper vulnerabilities. Former Finance Minister Ibrahim Ameer argued that true resilience requires investment in domestic production capacity rather than dependence on foreign suppliers, particularly during emergencies. Former STO head Hussain Amr similarly stressed that large-scale government imports distort private markets and are not a sustainable model. Both highlighted the importance of resilient supply chains, access to foreign currency for private operators, and robust storage and reserve systems. [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

In response, Economic Minister Mohamed Saeed announced that permanent storage facilities have been established and that retail prices for key fruits and vegetables will be cut starting October 15. The import list will also be reviewed annually. Parallel efforts are underway to reduce import dependency by increasing domestic banana production by 50 percent

by 2028, a move projected to cut banana imports by 25 percent. The program, implemented through local Women's Development Committees, will provide technical support, subsidized seedlings, and fertilizers. [The Sun 4] [The Sun 5]

Maldives: Handover of residential land plots near Malé begins under state housing scheme

(ya) The Ministry of Construction, Housing and Infrastructure has begun distributing land plots in Gulhifalhu—a reclaimed island in Kaafu Atoll near the capital Malé—under the Binnveriyaa scheme, a government housing initiative that allocates plots for citizens to build their own homes.

The Binnveriyaa scheme, first introduced under former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, was designed to increase land availability outside Malé. The current administration has updated documentation for plot changes while maintaining the original agreement, continuing efforts to expand access to housing. [The Sun]

Maldives: Deputy managing director appointed to state-owned power company's board

(lm) The Privatization and Corporatization Board has appointed Aishath Muzna, Deputy Managing Director of the State Electric Company (STELCO), to the company's board of directors. STELCO is the state-owned utility responsible for electricity generation and distribution across the Maldives. Muzna replaces Mohamed Amir, who had served on the board since late 2023.

Muzna, who has worked at STELCO since 2000 and became deputy managing director in November 2023, is married to Mohamed Shahid, a senior parliamentarian from the ruling People's National Congress. [The Sun]

Maldives: Defense Ministry maintains confidentiality on India defense agreements

(ya) The Maldivian Defense Ministry has declined to release details of military agreements signed with India under the previous administration, citing national security and confidentiality obligations. A request filed under the Right to Information Act for information on the agreements' terms, duration, and extensions was rejected, with officials warning that disclosure could breach confidentiality clauses and strain international relations

President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu previously indicated that certain concerning provisions in the agreements had been addressed, but the Defense Ministry has confirmed that amendments are still underway. A high-level committee is coordinating changes, though specific details remain undisclosed, leaving uncertainty over the agreements' current status.

Earlier government claims of a significant Indian military presence were later clarified to involve 74 unarmed personnel stationed in the Maldives. While these concerns initially strained bilateral relations, recent high-level visits—including two by Muizzu to India and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day trip to the Maldives—indicate a recalibration of ties [The Sun]

Nepal: Interim prime minister takes office amid governance collapse, fiscal emergency, constitutional dispute

(lm) Nepal has entered a historic but volatile transition with the appointment of Sushila Karki, a former chief justice known for landmark anti-corruption rulings, as the country's first female prime minister. Sworn in on September 13, she leads a six-month interim government mandated to hold elections by March 2026, following youth-led protests that killed more than 50 people and forced the resignation of former prime minister KP Sharma Oli. The protests, triggered by a social media ban, escalated into a nationwide movement against corruption and political patronage, culminating in the storming and torching of parliament buildings in Kathmandu. [Al Jazeera] [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Karki has begun assembling a lean cabinet, inducting former finance secretary Rameshore Khanal as finance minister, Kulman Ghising—credited with ending chronic power cuts—as minister for energy, infrastructure, and urban development, and lawyer Om Prakash Aryal, a mediator during the Gen Z talks, as minister for home affairs and law. She has pledged

to keep the cabinet below 15 members during the interim period. [The Kathmandu Post 4] [The Kathmandu Post 5]

The interim government's legitimacy, however, has immediately come under challenge. President Ramchandra Paudel dissolved the House of Representatives at Karki's recommendation, a key demand of the protest movement. But eight major political parties—including the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist), which led the coalition government of Oli, as well as the main opposition Maoist Centre—have denounced the dissolution as unconstitutional and demanded parliament's reinstatement, arguing that reform and elections should proceed through elected institutions rather than by presidential fiat. [BBC] [The Kathmandu Post 6]

While most parties have more recently signaled readiness to participate in elections if conditions are free and fair, skepticism remains about whether the interim government can deliver a secure, credible vote. Leaders stress that creating a "fearless" environment for polling will determine whether Nepal's fragile democratic order can be restored. [The Kathmandu Post 7]

Meanwhile, the state apparatus has been crippled. The September 8–9 protests destroyed or damaged over 300 government offices, including municipal headquarters in Biratnagar, Birgunj, Bharatpur, and Pokhara. Customs at Belahiya, Nepal's second-busiest crossing with India, now function from tents, slowing regional trade flows. Ministries, courts, and tax offices operate under temporary setups, underscoring the fragility of administrative capacity. [The Kathmandu Post 8]

The private sector faces equally severe disruption. Early estimates place damages at NPR 3 trillion (USD 21.9 billion)—nearly half of GDP. Flagship firms such as Bhat-Bhateni Supermarket, Chaudhary Group, and telecom operator Ncell sustained major losses. Tourism alone reported NPR 25 billion (USD 183 million) in damages, with at least 10,000 jobs lost. Economists warn GDP growth will likely fall below 1 percent this fiscal year. [The Kathmandu Post 9] [The Kathmandu Post 10] [The Kathmandu Post 11]

The crisis has forced immediate policy shifts. Finance Minister Rameshore Khanal has begun stripping small-scale projects from the budget to redirect NPR 100 billion (USD 730 million) toward reconstruction and elections. Energy Minister Kulman Ghising has relaunched efforts to recover billions in unpaid

electricity dues from industrial users that benefited from preferential supply during years of nationwide power cuts—an initiative previously blocked under political pressure. [The Kathmandu Post 12]

Nepal: Government declares youth protesters martyrs as interim leader pledges probe into violence

(lm) Nepal's interim government has moved to recognize the scale of the recent youth-led anti-corruption protests, declaring those killed as martyrs and pledging a judicial probe into the use of force, amid continued pressure from victims' families for broader recognition and justice.

At least 72 people died and more than 1,700 were injured during the September 8–9 demonstrations, which saw widespread clashes with police and arson attacks on state institutions, including Parliament, the Supreme Court, and ministerial offices. Doctors at Kathmandu's National Trauma Centre said most protesters they treated had bullet wounds to the head, chest, and abdomen, describing the incident as a preventable "man-made disaster" and condemning excessive police violence. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Prime Minister Sushila Karki, who assumed office on September 12, vowed that the destruction of state institutions would be investigated, describing it as coordinated violence possibly amounting to a conspiracy. She pledged full accountability for both vandalism and the security response, while stressing that national unity, relief for victims, and elections form the core of her government's roadmap. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

On September 15, her cabinet declared the deceased as "Gen Z martyrs" and announced NPR 1.5 million (USD 10,950) in compensation for each bereaved family. Funerals will be conducted with state honors, and September 17 has been designated a national day of mourning with flags flown at half-mast. The government will cover transport costs to return bodies to families in remote districts and continue free medical care for the injured. Nepal Police separately pledged NPR 1 million (USD 7,300) to families of police officers killed, funded by salary deductions across all ranks.

A judicial inquiry commission, headed by a former Supreme Court judge, will investigate the protests and the security crackdown. The government also

announced plans to build a “Gen Z Awakening Memorial Park” in memory of the deceased.

Despite these measures, families of victims initially refused to collect the bodies, demanding state recognition, funerals with national honors, and lifelong pensions at secretary level for bereaved households. They have formed a struggle committee together with injured protesters to press for a formal written government commitment before funerals proceed. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: First female attorney general appointed after predecessor’s resignation

(lm) Nepal has appointed senior advocate Sabita Bhandari as its first female attorney general, following the resignation of Ramesh Badal. President Ramchandra Paudel confirmed the appointment on September 14 on the recommendation of Prime Minister Sushila Karki. Bhandari, a former commissioner at the Information Commission and daughter of legal scholar Krishna Prasad Bhandari, takes office during Nepal’s ongoing political transition under an interim government.

Her predecessor, Ramesh Badal, had submitted his resignation on September 9 in line with the tradition of leaving office when the appointing prime minister steps down. Badal, who was appointed by former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, formally vacated the post only after the President’s Office accepted his resignation. His tenure coincided with mass protests and the political upheaval that led to Oli’s departure and the eventual formation of Karki’s government. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Political figures resign and form new party amid continued fallout from protests

(lm) Nepal’s political landscape saw two major developments on September 14.

Resham Chaudhary, a Tharu politician from the western Tarai region and patron of the Nagarik Unmukti Party (a regional party founded in 2022 with a base in the Tharu community, an indigenous group concentrated in southern Nepal), resigned from the organisation and announced the launch of a new group called the Nagarik Unmukti Party Nepal. The

move followed a prolonged internal split with his wife, Ranjita Shrestha, who led a rival faction of the original party, which had won four seats in the 2023 federal elections. Chaudhary linked his decision to the unfinished agenda of the September 2025 Gen Z youth uprising, saying his new party would align with that movement. He also pledged to hand over his personal property to the state. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

On the same day, former education minister Sumana Shrestha resigned from the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), a reformist force formed in 2022. In her resignation note, she accused the leadership of fostering a culture of impunity, punishing internal critics, and conducting "media trials" against dissenting voices. Shrestha had already stepped down as the party's joint general secretary in April but had continued to serve as an RSP lawmaker. She said Nepal's political dysfunction was rooted in entrenched elite behavior and urged leaders across parties to reflect on their conduct. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Ex-prime minister secures leadership dominance as party convention removes age and term limits

(lm) Just days before the Gen Z–led anti-corruption protests that forced his resignation, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli consolidated control of the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) at its statute convention. Delegates unanimously endorsed his push to abolish the two-term limit and 70-year age bar for top leadership positions, clearing the way for the 74-year-old to continue as party chair.

The convention also approved Oli's political and organizational reports, while sidelining dissent. A particularly contentious issue was whether to allow former President Bidya Devi Bhandari to return to active politics. Bhandari, who had served as UML vice-chair before becoming head of state in 2015, was barred from renewing her party membership. Oli's camp argued that constitutional officeholders cannot rejoin. Bhandari is a prominent political figure in her own right but also known as the widow of Madan Bhandari, the CPN-UML leader credited with articulating the doctrine of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMD) in the early 1990s. Madan Bhandari's sudden death in a car accident in 1993 turned her into a symbolic custodian of his political legacy, further complicating internal debates within the party about her exclusion.

Despite strong support for her reinstatement among delegates from provinces such as Sudurpaschim and Bagmati, Oli blocked the move, underscoring his dominance. The convention also debated questions of internal democracy and party discipline, with Oli emphasizing unity behind his leadership.

Oli used the gathering to introduce the idea of "Socialism with Nepali characteristics," which analysts say reflects influence from Chinese and East Asian models of "corporate socialism." Party leaders insisted the UML remains rooted in PMD, the framework established by Madan Bhandari that blends democratic competition with socialist principles. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Media sector faces heavy losses as youth-led protests spill into press freedom

(lm) Nepal's youth–led anti-corruption protests, which have left more than 70 people dead and state institutions in ruins, also dealt a major blow to the country's media sector. Journalists covering clashes outside Parliament in Baneshwar were wounded by bullets, shrapnel, and stones, while press offices across the country were set ablaze.

Major outlets including Kantipur Publications, Kantipur Television, Annapurna Post, Nepal Television, and Radio Nepal suffered arson and vandalism, forcing temporary shutdowns. Websites of eKantipur and *The Kathmandu Post* went offline for days, while regional broadcasters such as Kalika FM in Chitwan, Nepalvani FM in Ilam, and Radio Jagaran in Butwal were also targeted.

The Federation of Nepali Journalists documented at least 13 cases of physical assault and harassment, including beatings, forced deletion of footage, and destruction of equipment and vehicles. Despite the damage, many newsrooms continued publishing and broadcasting under improvised conditions. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Rights body urges fugitive inmates to surrender as mass jailbreaks strain security

(lm) Nepal's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has called on inmates who escaped during the

September 8–9 Gen Z–led anti-corruption protests to surrender immediately and return any weapons seized during jailbreaks. The commission warned that the mass prison breaks have intensified insecurity, undermined victims' rights, and caused widespread psychological distress among the public, particularly women, children, and families of crime victims. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

The unrest triggered a wave of coordinated prison escapes across the country. In Bagmati Province, 440 inmates fled Bhimphedi Prison in Makawanpur district after breaking through cell blocks. Police report that 163 have been recaptured, while 277 remain at large. Thirty-two inmates have voluntarily returned, including 16 on September 15 alone. Seventy-two juveniles also broke out of a correctional facility in Hetauda; 53 have been caught, with 19 still missing. Police confirmed additional recaptures from Kathmandu, Kaski, and Sunsari, including some fugitives intercepted in India and handed back to Nepal.

In Sudurpaschim Province, 1,458 inmates fled facilities in seven districts. By September 15, 608 had either surrendered or been recaptured, leaving 850 at large. Indian authorities have already returned 75 escapees. In Rautahat, two men facing organized crime charges recently surrendered after escaping alongside more than 250 others. In Jumla, 23 fugitives remain missing, though 18 have been recaptured or returned. [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Pakistan: Opposition party plans mass rally as key provincial leader faces renewed arrest warrant

(my) Pakistan's main opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), is preparing a large rally in the northwestern city of Peshawar on September 27, which party leaders say will be decisive for the country's political future. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, one of Khan's closest allies, urged supporters to mobilize in large numbers, calling the province PTI's heartland. Gandapur argued that unity was vital for what he called the struggle for "real freedom," while warning that restrictions on access to Khan in jail were fueling internal tensions.

Imran Khan's sister Aleema Khan accused authorities of deliberately delaying proceedings in the "Toshakhana 2.0" corruption case by producing false witnesses and restricting media access. The Toshakhana case refers to the alleged misappropriation of state gifts and has been at the

center of Khan's legal troubles. Aleema also argued her brother was being denied basic rights, including communication with his children. On broader security issues, she stressed that militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — a province bordering Afghanistan that has faced repeated extremist violence — cannot be resolved by expelling Afghan refugees alone but requires coordinated efforts involving Pakistan, Afghanistan, tribal groups, and security institutions. [Pakistan Today]

At the same time, Gandapur faces renewed legal pressure. An Islamabad District and Sessions Court has reissued a non-bailable arrest warrant for him in a long-running arms and liquor recovery case from 2016. Police at the time claimed they recovered five Kalashnikov rifles, a pistol, six magazines, a bulletproof vest, alcohol, and tear-gas shells from a vehicle linked to him. Gandapur denies the charges, insisting the weapons were licensed and that the item described as alcohol was honey. A previous arrest warrant was withdrawn after his appearance in July 2025, but the latest order requires his arrest and production before the court on September 17. [DAWN] [The Express Tribune]

Pakistan: Journalist rejects charges over tax authority corruption report

(lm) Pakistani investigative journalist Shehbaz Rana, of the *Express Tribune*, a leading English-language daily newspaper, has rejected as "baseless" charges brought against him in an Islamabad court after his report on the dismissal of 25 senior Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) officials over alleged corruption. Rana argued that his article was grounded in official documents and had been publicly acknowledged by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who was also named in the petition but not indicted. He stressed that none of the implicated officers were identified in his report.

Press unions, including the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, condemned the proceedings, warning that the selective indictment undermines fair-trial standards. They noted that despite the petition listing senior government officials as co-respondents, only Rana faces charges, and his office was raided before a fast-tracked trial. Unions urged the Islamabad High Court to intervene, warning that the case threatens both judicial credibility and press freedom in Pakistan. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Gender-based violence and child abuse cases deepen alarm over systemic failures

(lm) Two recent high-profile cases in Karachi have reignited concern over Pakistan's entrenched crisis of gender-based and child sexual violence, highlighting systemic gaps in prevention, protection, and prosecution.

In one case, police arrested a man accused of raping his 19-year-old wife just days after their marriage. The woman, married on June 15, remains in a coma in Karachi's Civil Hospital, with doctors confirming injuries consistent with sexual assault. Authorities registered charges under attempted murder and rape provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code. [Arab News 1]

In another case, police confirmed sexual abuse against at least three girls, with evidence suggesting nearly 100 victims aged five to twelve over a nine-year period. The suspect allegedly lured girls, many from low-income families, into a shuttered shop in the city's Qayyumabad neighborhood. The case came to light when one victim stole a USB drive containing hundreds of abuse videos, which a shopkeeper later discovered. Investigators have recovered over 400 clips and a diary listing more than 85 victims by name and ethnicity. The suspect has been charged under Section 376(3) of the Penal Code, which mandates the death penalty or life imprisonment for raping minors or persons with disabilities. [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3]

Pakistan: New polio cases and kidnapping of vaccinators in northwest

(lm) Tensions around Pakistan's polio eradication efforts deepened as authorities confirmed two new cases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, raising the nationwide tally for 2025 to 26. Hours earlier, unidentified gunmen abducted three health workers in Tank district during the launch of a vaccination drive in high-risk areas. Police have deployed search teams, while provincial authorities stressed the campaign will continue until September 18, targeting more than 1.29 million children across several districts.

The polio program reported that the virus was detected in two infant girls from North Waziristan and Lakki Marwat. This year's cases include 18 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, six from Sindh, and one each from Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan. Nearly 9,000 vaccination

teams are active in the campaign, with close to 11,000 security personnel deployed for protection.

Pakistan and Afghanistan remain the only countries where polio is still endemic. Despite repeated campaigns, eradication efforts face resistance from misinformation, parental refusals, and militant attacks. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bordering Afghanistan, has been hit hardest, with insurgent violence escalating since the breakdown of a truce with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in late 2022. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Largest refiner shifts to exports as domestic fuel oil demand collapses

(lm) Pakistan's largest oil refiner, Cnergyico, plans to increase fuel oil exports by 35–40 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2026, after new taxes effectively priced local refiners out of the domestic market. In June, Islamabad imposed an additional 40 percent levy on fuel oil sales, on top of an existing 18 percent consumption tax, leaving refiners with little choice but to sell abroad.

Cnergyico has already exported 95 percent of its production since July, compared to 55 percent in the previous fiscal year. The company exported 247,000 tons in the year ending June 2025 and now expects to reach 333,000–346,000 tons. Pakistan's overall exports also surged, with August volumes hitting a record 242,000 tons.

The company is upgrading its complex to align with government policy on cleaner fuels. Plans include importing more low-sulfur U.S. crude, expanding diesel and gasoline output, and installing cracking units to reduce fuel oil production. Cnergyico recently booked Pakistan's first purchase of U.S. crude, which yields less high-sulfur fuel oil than Middle Eastern grades.

Fuel oil has historically supplied Pakistan's power plants, but demand has fallen sharply this decade amid rising solar generation and growing nuclear capacity. Exports currently go to southern Europe, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates. While export margins fluctuate with global "fuel oil cracks," Cnergyico's domestic sales were previously more profitable, making the tax-driven market shift a significant challenge for the refining sector. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Central bank holds rate at 11 percent as floods drive inflation risks

(lm) Pakistan's central bank kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 11 percent on September 15, citing mounting risks from floods in Punjab, the country's main agricultural province, that threaten food security, inflation stability, and growth.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said the "temporary yet significant flood-induced supply shock" could push headline inflation above its 5–7 percent target band for much of FY26, while the current account deficit is likely to widen. Real GDP growth was trimmed to the lower end of its 3.25–4.25 percent range.

Punjab's flooding since late August has inundated farmland, destroyed crops, and killed livestock, with floodwaters now moving downstream into Sindh. Economists warn of elevated food inflation and disrupted supply chains in the coming months.

Despite the risks, the SBP noted that the economy is on a stronger footing than during past flood shocks, citing foreign exchange reserves of USD 14.3 billion — projected to rise to USD 15.5 billion by year-end — and fiscal buffers built up over the past two years.

Analysts said the bank's cautious stance reflects concern over both inflation and growth. With recurring inflation limiting the real interest rate to about 2.5 percent, scope for easing remains constrained. Market consensus expects any rate cut of 50–100 basis points only towards the end of the year, depending on the pace of flood-related inflation. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Rice exporters project strong harvest despite flood damage

(lm) Pakistan, the world's fourth-largest rice exporter, expects one of its largest-ever harvests this year despite widespread flooding that damaged farmlands. The Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) rejected claims by the Pakistan Business Forum that 60 percent of the crop had been lost, estimating damage at only around 10 percent, mainly in Punjab province. Sindh, the main hub for non-Basmati rice, was largely unaffected.

According to REAP Chairman Malik Faisal, around 12.2 million acres are under cultivation this season, with healthy yields expected from about 12 million acres. Pakistan harvested 9.7 million acres last year, meaning

that even with partial losses, output will likely surpass the previous season. The country aims to export up to 8 million tons of rice in 2025–26, compared to 6 million tons last year, generating more than USD 3.2 billion in earnings. REAP maintains Pakistan is on track to become the world's third-largest rice exporter within five years.

Flood-driven uncertainty has already pushed Basmati prices higher by about USD 50 per ton. Economists, however, caution that accurate damage assessments will only be possible once floodwaters fully recede, with some estimates placing losses at 600,000–700,000 acres. Farmers in affected districts of Punjab have reported complete destruction of their fields, compounding rural hardship.

Rice is Pakistan's second-most important staple after wheat, contributing 3 percent to agricultural value-added and 0.6 percent to GDP. Exports to the Middle East, Africa, and China continue to expand, with shipments to China rising 84 percent in the first half of 2025. While competition from India, Thailand, and Vietnam remains intense, exporters are optimistic that Pakistan's crop volume and market share will continue to grow despite short-term challenges. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Major copper and gold mining project secures USD 715 million funding

(my) Pakistan has secured USD 715 million (PKR 205 billion) in financing to advance development of a large copper and gold mining project in Balochistan, known as Reko Diq. Reko Diq is one of the world's largest untapped mineral deposits, with reserves estimated to last nearly four decades.

The project is jointly owned by Canada's Barrick Gold (50 percent) and the governments of Pakistan and Balochistan (50 percent). It is expected to generate USD 90 billion over 37 years. State-owned firms Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), and Government Holdings Private Limited (GHPL) are providing guarantees for the financing, while the Reko Diq Mining Company has also committed USD 350 million (PKR 100 billion) to build the ML-3 railway line connecting the site in Chaman to Port Qasim in Sindh.

Phase one of the mine, estimated at USD 5.5 billion, is set to begin production in 2028, targeting 200,000 tons of copper annually. A second phase, expected to cost USD 3.5 billion, aims to double output by 2029.

Authorities describe the project as a flagship initiative to stabilize public finances, reduce reliance on imports and foreign borrowing, and strengthen Pakistan's export base. However, its location in Balochistan underscores persistent security risks, as the province has long faced separatist insurgency and attacks on infrastructure tied to foreign investment. [Arab News] [Radio Pakistan]

Pakistan: Militancy surges in northwest as military kills 31 fighters, government warns Afghanistan

(lm) Pakistan is facing a sharp escalation of militant violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the country's northwestern province bordering Afghanistan that has long been a hub of insurgent activity. Military operations across Bajaur, South Waziristan, Lower Dir, Mohmand, North Waziristan, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat killed more than 90 militants over the past week, including 31 in overnight raids on September 15. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3]

The Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) has intensified attacks since a fragile truce collapsed in late 2022, targeting army convoys, checkpoints, and government officials. In Lakki Marwat, security forces killed a senior TTP commander wanted for targeted killings and ambushes. Weapons and explosives were seized in raids in Bannu and other districts. [Arab News 4]

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, attending the funerals of 19 soldiers in Bannu, accused the TTP of operating from Afghan soil with Kabul's tacit support. He warned Afghanistan's interim rulers to "choose between Pakistan and terrorists" and vowed that Islamabad would eliminate militancy with or without Afghan cooperation. Army Chief Asim Munir joined him in framing the fight as an existential struggle for Pakistan's security. Officials also alleged that Afghan nationals were directly involved in recent cross-border attacks. [Arab News 5]

Against this backdrop, the government has moved to strengthen its non-military response to extremism. On September 10, Islamabad established the National Committee on Narrative Building, a 20-member body chaired by the information minister, to lead information operations and promote counter-extremism messaging through media, communications, and cyber networks. The initiative follows calls from provincial authorities to address violent extremism not only through security operations

but also through comprehensive, long-term strategies coordinated across state institutions. [DAWN]

Pakistan: IED blast and operations in Balochistan kill nine as insurgency intensifies

(lm) Pakistan's security challenges in Balochistan escalated this week with two major incidents that left nine people dead, underscoring the province's role as a persistent flashpoint.

On September 15, five soldiers, including a captain, were killed when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) struck their vehicle during a sanitization operation in Kech district. The military said five militants were later killed in a follow-up sweep.

Separately, four militants were killed in an intelligence-based raid in Mastung district, where security forces seized weapons, ammunition, and explosives. Officials said the raid formed part of broader sanitization operations aimed at dismantling militant networks.

Balochistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, is strategically important as host to major mineral deposits and infrastructure tied to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Yet it remains destabilized by separatist insurgent groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF). These groups accuse Islamabad of exploiting local resources without adequate benefit to residents, while the military insists development projects demonstrate its commitment to the province.

Islamabad regularly alleges that the insurgents receive backing from India — branding such support as *Fitna-e-Hindustan* ("India's mischief") — though New Delhi denies involvement.

Violence has intensified in 2025. In August alone, Balochistan recorded 28 militant attacks that killed 52 people, including 23 security personnel and 21 civilians, according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies. Security forces reported killing 50 militants that month, the highest figure since 2015. High-profile incidents this year include the March hijacking of a passenger train by the BLA and a May suicide bombing in Khuzdar that killed several children. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Seychelles: Presidential candidates face off in first debate without incumbent

(lm) Seychelles held its first televised presidential debate on September 4, featuring seven challengers but not incumbent President Wavel Ramkalawan, who declined to participate. The debate, organized by the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation, gave candidates an opportunity to present their visions ahead of the 2025 general election later this month.

Participants included Patrick Herminie of United Seychelles, Maarco Francis of the Seychelles United Movement, Alain St Ange of Lalyans Nouvo Sesel, Robert Moumou of the Seychelles People's National Movement, and independents Kisna Louise, Charles De Clarisse, and Ralph Volcère. Discussion focused on economic policy, governance, and social issues, with candidates highlighting alternative paths for the island nation's development. [Seychelles Nation 1]

The frontrunners emerging from the contest appear to be Herminie, Francis, and the absent Ramkalawan, who remains a central figure despite skipping the debate. Herminie, a former speaker of the National Assembly, leads the main opposition; Francis brings a business-oriented reform platform; and St Ange, a former tourism minister, also remains a visible contender.

Ramkalawan, elected in 2020 as the first opposition candidate to win since independence, cited scheduling and political strategy in declining the invitation. His absence drew criticism from opponents, who said it deprived voters of a direct comparison. [The Seychelles Independent] [Seychelles Nation 2]

A second debate, this time between vice-presidential candidates, was scheduled for September 12, but no official readout of its proceedings has yet been released.

Sri Lanka: Parliament abolishes perks for former presidents, pensions under review

(lm) Sri Lanka has enacted the Presidents' Entitlements (Repeal) Act, No. 18 of 2025, stripping former presidents and their widows of state-funded residences, vehicles, staff, and secretariat allowances. The legislation, passed by an overwhelming parliamentary majority and certified by the Speaker on September 10, took immediate effect and repealed privileges first introduced in 1986. Pensions remain in

place for now, though Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara confirmed they are under review for possible removal in the forthcoming constitution. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala clarified that the repeal does not affect security arrangements for ex-presidents, which will continue based on threat assessments. He criticized the scale of previous benefits, pointing out that Mahinda Rajapaksa was allocated more than 100 staff, including a dog keeper. [Daily Mirror 3]

Government data shows that between 2017 and mid-2025, nearly LKR 491.2 million (USD 1.7 million) was spent on pensions, vehicles, and allowances for Chandrika Kumaratunga (president from 1994 to 2005), Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005 to 2015), Maithripala Sirisena (2015 to 2019), Gotabaya Rajapaksa (2019 to 2022), Ranil Wickremesinghe (2022 to 2024), and Hema Premadasa, the widow of R. Premadasa (1989 to 1993).

Officials indicated that vacated state residences could be repurposed for commercial or public use, with ruling MPs framing the law as a step toward a “new political culture.” Minister Sunil Handunnetti defended the repeal as the National People’s Power (NPP) fulfilling its election pledge, stressing that people should be concerned only if the promise had not been implemented. [Daily Mirror 4] [Daily Mirror 5]

Mahinda Rajapaksa, forced to vacate his Colombo residence on September 11, denounced the move as “political terrorism” motivated by revenge and vowed never to quit politics. He received a grand welcome on returning to his family home in Tangalle, with his son Namal saying his father had “returned to where it all began.” [Daily Mirror 6] [Daily Mirror 7] [Daily Mirror 8] [Daily Mirror 9] [Daily Mirror 10]

His spokesman argued that the government’s treatment would have pleased the late Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed separatist group that fought a nearly three-decade civil war to establish an independent Tamil state before being defeated in 2009. He cast the government’s move as mistreatment of Mahinda, the president who oversaw the military campaign that ended the conflict. [Daily Mirror 11]

Other former leaders have also been affected. Maithripala Sirisena vacated his Colombo residence, while Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga announced she would leave within two months, citing health problems and arguing she had invested her own funds in renovating the property. She noted that

unlike others, she had not faced corruption allegations. [Daily Mirror 12] [Daily Mirror 13]

In parallel, the Cabinet has terminated a discounted housing scheme for former MPs at Colombo's Viyathpura Housing Complex, which had caused state losses of over LKR 92 million (USD 310,000). Introduced in 2022 after unrest left several MPs homeless, the scheme initially offered 101 units for rent, later expanded to permit sales at concessionary rates of LKR 13.34–18.21 million (USD 45,000–61,000), below market prices of LKR 15.5–22 million (USD 52,000–74,000). The Urban Development Authority confirmed that unsold houses will now be opened to the public. [Daily Mirror 14]

At the same time, the parliamentary opposition has warned of legal action against deputy ministers, accusing them of unlawfully enjoying perks despite Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne's clarification that they are not formally accountable to Parliament. Opposition MP Dayasiri Jayasekera argued that, in such circumstances, they should be treated as ordinary MPs without allowances or additional benefits, and said cases may be filed under the Public Properties Act, which governs misuse of state assets. [Daily Mirror 15]

Sri Lanka: Speaker rejects no-confidence motion against deputy defence minister

(lm) Sri Lanka's Parliament descended into dispute last week after Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne ruled out a no-confidence motion against Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekara in its current form, saying it was procedurally flawed because a deputy minister does not bear the same constitutional responsibility as a cabinet minister. The decision prompted strong protests from opposition MPs, forcing a suspension of proceedings. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

The rejected motion had been submitted on August 12 by opposition parties, including the main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), listing 19 charges against Jayasekara. A retired Major General who previously commanded security forces in the Eastern Province, he is accused of failures in his past role, particularly in connection with lapses linked to the 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attacks, which killed more than 260 people.

Sri Lanka: Judicial Service Commission orders transfer of over 100 officials

(lm) Sri Lanka's Judicial Service Commission has announced a major reshuffle, transferring 106 judicial officials effective September 15. The moves affect District Judges, Magistrates, and Court Registrars across the country.

Those reassigned include magistrates from Maligakanda (a court district in Colombo), Mahara (a suburb north of Colombo known for its large prison), Kurunegala (a major commercial city in the North Western Province), Galle (a key southern provincial capital and port city), and Balapitiya (a coastal town in the Southern Province). [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: President urges stronger central–provincial cooperation as watchdog presses for long-delayed council elections

(lm) Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has emphasized the need for tighter coordination between the central government and provincial administrations, saying development projects must align with a unified national plan rather than being used as political instruments. At a meeting in Colombo, he directed officials to integrate foreign loan- and aid-funded projects into existing administrative structures instead of stand-alone offices, ensure timely completion, and focus on sectors such as education, health, and highways. He also instructed zonal-level school visits and assessments to strengthen the national education system. [Daily Mirror 1]

Meanwhile, the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) has urged the government to expedite long-delayed Provincial Council elections, warning that further postponement undermines democratic rights. The group proposed holding polls early next year under the previous system with a minor amendment and recommended a women's nomination quota in line with the 2017 electoral reforms.

Provincial Councils, established under the 13th Amendment to devolve power to Sri Lanka's regions, have remained inactive since their terms expired between 2017 and 2019. PAFFREL cautioned against leaving them under bureaucratic administration, while the President signaled that closer central–provincial

cooperation is critical to ensure effective delivery of development and services. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Opposition legislator appointed to lead public finance oversight committee

(lm) On September 12, Sri Lanka's Parliament announced that opposition lawmaker Kabir Hashim has been appointed chairman of the Committee on Public Accounts (COPA); he replaces government MP Arawinda Senarath in the role. COPA is one of Parliament's key financial oversight bodies, alongside the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE), and plays a central role in reviewing state institutions' use of public funds. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Parliamentary committee to review security ministry secretary over pending cases

(lm) Sri Lanka's High Post Committee of Parliament has decided to summon Ravi Seneviratne, Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security, for an inquiry into court cases currently pending against him. According to opposition lawmakers, Seneviratne faces several legal cases, including one related to alleged drunk driving. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Rajapaksa family under continued legal and political scrutiny

(lm) Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Namal Rajapaksa, the son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, has denied reports linking him to two containers of raw materials allegedly intended for the production of methamphetamine ("Ice"), which security forces detected after they had left port. Speaking to the media on September 15, he said the accusations were politically motivated, stressing he was prepared to face any investigation and noting his past questioning by the Criminal Investigation Department, the Bribery Commission, and the Financial Crimes Investigation Division. He also urged the government to disclose the individuals actually involved. [Daily Mirror 1]

Separately, the Supreme Court has granted leave to proceed with a Fundamental Rights petition over an

alleged unpaid electricity bill of LKR 2.6 million (USD 9,180) tied to Mahinda Rajapaksa's residence in Weeraketiya. The bill reportedly stemmed from celebrations during Namal's 2019 wedding, and the petition seeks disclosure of records from the Ceylon Electricity Board. [Daily Mirror 2]

In another case, former minister Shashindra Rajapaksa, Mahinda Rajapaksa's nephew, has been remanded until September 19 over allegations of misusing his office to unlawfully secure compensation for property damage during the 2022 public uprising. That mass protest movement, triggered by economic collapse and shortages of essentials, forced both Mahinda, at the time prime minister, and his brother Gotabaya, then the serving president, from office [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Appointment of political activist as deputy envoy to southern India criticized

(lm) The appointment of Kedeeshwaran Ganeshanathan, a supporter of the ruling leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, or People's Liberation Front), as Sri Lanka's Deputy High Commissioner in Chennai has sparked sharp criticism from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the wider diplomatic community.

Ganeshanathan has no prior diplomatic training or foreign service experience. His selection is seen by critics as a clear case of politicization of the foreign service, since President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who also leads the JVP, chose a loyal activist over trained career diplomats. Senior Foreign Ministry officials noted that several qualified officers within the Sri Lanka Foreign Service were bypassed in favor of political loyalty.

The posting is considered one of Sri Lanka's most strategically sensitive. The deputy high commission in Chennai, a major city in southern India, plays a crucial role in managing cross-border ties. Its significance stems from close cultural and political connections with Tamil Nadu, home to tens of millions of ethnic Tamils with deep links to Sri Lanka's Tamil population, as well as its importance as a regional hub for bilateral trade and economic relations. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Deputy minister rejects allegations of luxury property purchase

(lm) Deputy Minister of Public Security Sunil Watagala has rejected allegations circulating on social media that he purchased a high-end residence at Colombo's Cinnamon Life complex, one of Sri Lanka's flagship luxury real estate developments.

In a statement on September 15, Watagala described the claims as false and politically motivated, linking them to his recent initiatives targeting drug trafficking networks. He emphasized that his assets and liabilities are fully disclosed under Sri Lanka's official asset declaration system.

Watagala said he will file a complaint with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and pursue civil legal action against those responsible. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former minister drops appeal in extortion case

(lm) Sri Lanka's former minister Prasanna Ranatunga has withdrawn his appeal against a Colombo High Court ruling that convicted him in the 2015 Meetotamulla extortion case. The decision leaves in place his two-year rigorous imprisonment sentence, suspended for five years, and a fine of LKR 25 million (USD 85,000).

The case stemmed from allegations that Ranatunga threatened a businessman and demanded LKR 64 million (USD 218,000) in relation to land development in Meetotamulla, a Colombo suburb widely known for its large garbage dump and associated land disputes. He was convicted on one of 15 counts under Section 373 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes extortion. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Son of former minister indicted for undeclared assets

(lm) (lm) Sri Lanka's anti-graft body has indicted Ramith Rambukwella, son of former minister Keheliya Rambukwella, a longtime political figure who has held several ministerial portfolios, for failing to declare illegally acquired assets valued at LKR 275 million (USD 930,000). The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) alleges that between January 2022 and November 2023 he accumulated assets worth nearly LKR 297 million (USD 1 million), of which a large portion was not disclosed. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Court grants bail to IT officials accused of erasing ship disaster records

(lm) A Colombo court has granted bail to two IT officials of the local agent of the container vessel *MV X-Press Pearl*. The Singapore-flagged ship caught fire and sank off Sri Lanka's coast in 2021, causing the country's worst marine disaster through chemical leaks and plastic pellet spills. The officials are accused of deleting the vessel's data and email records after the incident.

The Attorney General's office told the court that a forensic probe confirmed their involvement and that Cabinet approval is being sought to commission an independent international forensic audit. Defense lawyers argued that the suspects had cooperated with investigators and noted that others connected to the case had already received bail. The case is scheduled for further hearing on September 24. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former urban development officials granted bail in corruption case

(lm) A Colombo court has granted bail to two former senior officials of the Urban Development Authority (UDA), a state agency responsible for urban planning and development projects, who were arrested on corruption allegations. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) detained them while they were giving statements and produced them before the Colombo Chief Magistrate.

The case relates to the alleged misappropriation of LKR 20 million (USD 72,000) through the temporary leasing of 55.5 perches of state-owned land at Mayura Place in Colombo 05. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Airport security chief arrested for attempted gold smuggling

(lm) Sri Lankan customs officials have arrested the Chief Security Officer of Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) for attempting to smuggle nearly 6 kilograms of gold biscuits, valued at around LKR 215 million (USD 770,000). The 54-year-old official, who also serves as Chairman of the Civil Aviation Security Services Organization—the body responsible for aviation security oversight—was detained early on September 14 while exiting through the airport's business departures window. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court reaffirms strict time limits on fundamental rights petitions

(lm) Sri Lanka's Supreme Court has ruled that petitions alleging violations of fundamental rights must be filed within the strict one-month deadline set by the Constitution, stressing that "the law assists the vigilant, not the negligent."

The case involved a former Sri Lanka Air Force officer who claimed he was assaulted, unlawfully detained, and harassed by superiors in September 2015. He filed his petition on October 30, 2015—outside the one-month limit under Article 126(2) of the Constitution. The Court dismissed the application, finding no evidence that he was prevented from filing on time due to circumstances beyond his control. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Surge in online sex trade raises concerns over regulation and exploitation

(lm) Sri Lankan authorities are grappling with a sharp rise in online sex services facilitated through websites and mobile applications, which now host hundreds of advertisements daily. The trade, which police say frequently involves women aged 18 to 27 and in some cases minors, has expanded through encrypted messaging platforms and anonymous digital payments, complicating regulatory oversight.

Economic pressures are a major driver, with women increasingly turning to online sex work amid high living costs and limited employment opportunities. Police have also identified foreign nationals operating under tourist visas, heightening concerns about cross-border dimensions.

Officials warn that cases of fraud and exploitation are common, but social stigma and fear of exposure discourage victims from filing complaints. Past crackdowns revealed links to political figures and even foreign officials, underscoring the sensitivity of the issue.

The development comes in the wake of Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act (2024), which created an Online Safety Commission empowered to regulate digital content and prosecute offenders. While the law was originally pitched as a tool against online harassment and abuse, its effectiveness in addressing the rapidly

evolving online sex industry remains uncertain. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Court says no arrest decision yet on former MP over allegedly inflammatory remarks

(lm) Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department (CID)—the body that investigates serious crimes including speech-that may incite communal discord—has informed the Court of Appeal that no decision has been made yet to arrest former Member of Parliament Udaya Gammanpila.

The inquiry stems from remarks he made at a media conference in August, which a complaint claims could incite disharmony among different communities. Investigators are considering whether those remarks violate Section 3(1) of the ICCPR Act No. 56 of 2007 or Section 120 of the Penal Code, which criminalize incitement and threats to public order.

Gammanpila has filed a writ petition challenging the possibility of arrest. He is currently abroad in Thailand. Authorities continue to review the matter, but as of the latest court appearance, there has been no formal charge or arrest. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Exporters and business sector push reforms ahead of November budget as economy expands

(lm) Sri Lanka's Parliament will open debate on the 2026 Appropriation Bill on September 26, with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake — who also serves as finance minister — scheduled to deliver the budget speech on November 7. The second reading will run from November 8–14, followed by the committee stage from November 15–December 5, when the final vote is expected. [Daily Mirror 1]

The budget comes amid steady but fragile growth. The economy expanded by 4.9 percent in the second quarter of 2025, slightly above the 4.8 percent growth in the first quarter, bringing first-half growth to 4.8 percent. Industry grew by 5.8 percent, services by 3.9 percent, and agriculture by 2.0 percent, with the reopening of vehicle imports and lower lending rates driving the upturn. This marked the eighth consecutive quarter of expansion, putting Sri Lanka on course for

back-to-back years of around 5 percent growth, though medium-term risks persist. [Daily Mirror 2]

Labour Minister and Deputy Minister for Economic Development Anil Jayantha Fernando told Reuters that growth this year is expected to slow to 4–4.5 percent due to delays in approving the 2025 budget, which stalled capital spending. Only one-fifth of budgeted funds had been spent by July. He projected growth could rebound to 5–6 percent in 2026, supported by an 8 percent increase in capital expenditure to a record LKR 1.4 trillion (USD 4.64 billion). He also said foreign direct investment could more than double to exceed USD 2 billion in 2026, with inflows from China, India, and the United Arab Emirates. Expatriate remittances reached USD 5.2 billion in the first eight months of 2025 and could set a record of USD 8 billion by year-end, compared with USD 6.57 billion last year. [Reuters]

Business groups are using the budget process to push for reforms. The National Chamber of Exporters (NCE) has called for measures to improve competitiveness, including a single-window system for registration, liability insurance, tax incentives for innovation, accreditation of university labs, an Export-Import Bank, and state-run training centers to address labor shortages. The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) has urged reforms to modernize customs law, create a dedicated free trade negotiation team, and establish private investment zones. It also called for expanded 5G and digital ID infrastructure, improved rural connectivity, increased agricultural productivity, and a global tourism campaign tied to airport expansion. [Daily Mirror 3] [Daily Mirror 4]

Fernando emphasized that borrowing will be reserved for critical investments under the IMF framework, which aims to reduce Sri Lanka's debt to 95 percent of GDP by 2032, with a medium-term target of 80–85 percent. The IMF currently forecasts GDP growth of 3.3 percent in 2025 and 5.2 percent in 2026. [Reuters]

Sri Lanka: 42 percent of employed workforce has only lower secondary education

(lm) The Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) has reported that 42 percent of Sri Lanka's 8.1 million employed population — in both public and private sectors — possess no educational qualifications beyond grade 10, equivalent to failing the national Ordinary Level (O/L) examination, the basic secondary school-leaving qualification. By contrast, only 26.7

percent of workers hold qualifications above Advanced Level (A/L), which is the university entrance-level exam. For comparison, just 15 percent of the employed workforce in the European Union falls into the low-qualification category.

The data shows a gradual decline in low-qualification levels since 2019, but highlights structural concerns. Over 62 percent of workers are aged 40 and above, while only 15.3 percent are aged 20–29, underscoring low youth participation in the labor market. Female participation also remains disproportionately low, with women accounting for 72.4 percent of the economically inactive population of 8.6 million.

According to a recent World Bank review, 40 percent of public employees in the secondary sector are classified as "non-specialised," reflecting reliance on general secondary education without professional training. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Central Bank survey shows short-term confidence rising, medium-term risks persist

(lm) The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has published the results of its semi-annual Systemic Risk Survey (SRS) for the second half of 2025, highlighting improved short-term confidence in the country's financial system but lingering concerns about medium-term stability.

Conducted between June 27 and July 20 among 146 institutions—including banks, insurers, stockbrokers, finance companies, and rating agencies—the survey found that 61 percent of respondents were confident in financial system stability over the next year, up from 54 percent in the first half of 2025. Over a three-year horizon, however, confidence slipped to 43 percent, underscoring uncertainty about resilience in the medium term.

The probability of a high-impact disruptive event within one year fell to 35 percent from 41 percent, but expectations of such an event within three years rose slightly to 46 percent. Global macroeconomic shocks were cited as the most significant risk by 66 percent of respondents, followed by fiscal and sovereign risks at 56 percent, then domestic macroeconomic and financial market vulnerabilities.

First introduced in 2017 by the CBSL's Macroprudential Surveillance Department, the survey tracks market perceptions across seven broad risk categories and 46

sub-risks. The CBSL noted that from mid-2025 the survey methodology was updated, splitting the former "domestic macroeconomic risks" category into fiscal/sovereign risks and broader domestic risks, and adding three new sub-risks. [CBSL] [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: State-linked port company defaults on USD 18.82 million loan

(lm) Sri Lanka's Magampura Port Management Company, a state-owned enterprise created to manage operations at Hambantota Port (also known as Magampura Port) in the country's south, has defaulted on a USD 18.82 million (LKR 6.8 billion) loan owed to a private bank, according to findings presented before the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE). The loan was originally taken in 2014 under a corporate guarantee from the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA).

Of the USD 24 million borrowed, the company had repaid only around USD 6 million by December 2023, leaving the bulk outstanding. Legal action was filed in 2019 against both the SLPA and the company, while Sri Lanka's Bribery Commission has launched an investigation.

Company officials told COPE that steps to wind up the entity began in June 2022, but lawmakers insisted the loan must be settled before liquidation. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government denies plans to close state fisheries corporation

(lm) Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister of Fisheries Ratna Dhamija told Parliament on September 12 that there are no plans to shut down the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation, rejecting recent media reports as false. The state-owned enterprise, which manages wholesale and retail fish distribution across the country, is carrying debts of about LKR 1.6 billion (USD 5.4 million). The deputy minister said these liabilities are being gradually repaid and pledged that the corporation will be restructured into a profit-making entity within two years. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Consumer Affairs Authority intensifies crackdown on rice trade violations

(lm) Sri Lanka's Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) reported nearly 3,000 raids this year targeting violations in the rice trade, including price gouging, hoarding, and distribution of substandard rice. Over 1,000 raids involved traders selling above the government's controlled price, with more than 900 individuals already prosecuted. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government plans 50 multimodal transport hubs by 2029

(lm) Sri Lanka's government plans to establish 50 multimodal transport centers nationwide by 2029 as part of efforts to modernize the country's infrastructure and improve connectivity, Transport Minister Bimal Rathnayake announced on September 15. The initiative will see 15 hubs operational in Colombo by 2026. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Arrests of underworld figures include serving and former military personnel

(lm) Sri Lankan authorities have reported multiple arrests connected to organized crime, both internationally and within the country.

Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala told Parliament that 15 underworld members subject to Interpol Red Notices had been arrested in Russia, Oman, Dubai, and India as part of international cooperation efforts. [Daily Mirror 1]

Domestically, police arrested a Lieutenant Colonel serving in the Northern Province, accused of supplying at least 260 rounds of ammunition to criminal groups in return for about LKR 650,000 (USD 2,210) transferred to his bank account. The officer has denied providing weapons, but investigations continue into whether firearms were also diverted. [Daily Mirror 2]

In a separate case, a former army soldier was detained on suspicion of involvement in four murders committed in August, including the killing of a former prison officer and a double shooting in Colombo. At the time of his arrest, police seized more than 10 grams of methamphetamine. Authorities say the suspect deserted the army in 2015 and is believed to have ties to known underworld figures. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Former navy chief further remanded over abduction case

(lm) Former Navy Commander Admiral (Retd.) Nishantha Ulugetenne has been ordered by the Polgahawela Magistrate's Court to remain in custody until September 24 in connection with a high-profile abduction case. He was arrested by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) over the 2010 disappearance of a man in Pothuhera, when Ulugetenne was serving as Head of Naval Intelligence.

The case is tied to allegations that detainees were unlawfully held at a detention site known as "Gun Site," located inside the Trincomalee naval base, where as many as 60 people, including foreign nationals, were reportedly imprisoned. Prosecutors allege Ulugetenne was implicated in abduction, unlawful imprisonment, and possible complicity in murder. [Daily Mirror]

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

Brunei: Government calls for collective action against rising cybersecurity threats

(ga) Brunei hosted the third Cyber Security Conference (CySec) 2025, highlighting emerging digital threats and collaborative efforts to strengthen resilience.

Cyber Security Brunei (CSB) Interim Commissioner Shamsul Bahri noted rising AI-driven attacks, phishing, and IoT vulnerabilities. He announced plans for a Cybersecurity Labelling Scheme for IoT devices by early 2026 and a scam watch portal to streamline reporting.

The Brunei Cyber Security Association (BCSA), with nearly 300 members since 2023, has expanded regional and global partnerships. Several MoUs were signed during the event, including agreements between cybersecurity firm Information Technology Protective Security Services (ITPSS) Sdn Bhd and local institutions to boost skills training. The company lso the operational entity behind Cyber Security Brunei (CSB), the national cybersecurity agency, and manages the Brunei Computer Emergency Response Team (BruCERT), National Digital Forensics Laboratory (NDFL), and Cyber Watch Centre (CWC).

Othe partnerships were concluded with Cybersafe BN, Deloitte, Progresif, and Singapore's Digital Defence Alliance to strengthen workforce skills, compliance frameworks, and AI-related cybersecurity cooperation. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia: Nationwide civil servant census begins

(dql) The Ministry of Civil Service has launched a nationwide census of civil servants, implementing a reform initiative aimed at modernizing public administration and creating a unified digital personnel database. The campaign, to be implemented in three phases—pre-census, census day, and post-census—seeks to correct structural discrepancies, improve payroll accuracy, and strengthen government capacity.

During the pre-census phase, ministries will verify and update personnel records in a centralized system. On census days, civil servants will undergo biometric registration, including physical verification, fingerprint scans, photographs, and ID checks. A final report will consolidate data and address inconsistencies to ensure reliability across institutions.

The operation will begin with the ministry itself before pilot programs in Phnom Penh's education and health sectors. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Exports reach USD 20B, driven by garments and footwear

(gm) Cambodia exported more than USD 20.18 billion worth of goods in the first eight months of 2025, up 14.8 percent year-on-year, according to the General Department of Customs and Excise. The garments, footwear and travel goods sector accounted for USD

10.6 billion of total exports, led by garments at USD 7.73 billion, followed by footwear at USD 1.4 billion and travel goods at USD 1.47 billion. The sector grew by 18.5 percent compared to the same period in 2024. [Khmer times 1] [Khmer Times 2]

The United States remained Cambodia's largest market, with exports reaching USD 8.3 billion, followed by Vietnam at USD 2.7 billion, and China and Japan with over USD 1 billion each.

Officials attributed the growth to improved logistics, customs facilitation and access to new markets through free trade agreements. The country's manufacturing sector currently includes 1,608 GFT factories employing over 913,000 workers.

Cambodia: Garment wage decision deferred to prime minister

(dql) Negotiations over Cambodia's 2026 minimum wage for garment workers hit a stalemate on September 10, with no consensus reached. Decision-making has now been passed to Prime Minister Hun Manet, who is set to announce the final ruling on September 17.

Labour Minister Heng Sour, chairing the National Minimum Wage Council, noted that both sides refrained from proposing new wage levels. He cited the need to maintain labor market stability and ensure opportunities for young workers entering the workforce, as well as for Cambodians returning from Thailand. The minister also stressed that global trade pressures—especially US tariffs on Cambodian exports—are influencing the government's considerations.

National Trade Unions Coalition President Far Saly described the talks as particularly difficult, pointing to economic uncertainty, the 19 percent US export tariff, border tensions with Thailand, and the influx of returning migrant workers as complicating factors. [Khmer Times]

So far, twenty-seven trade unions, federations, and civil society organizations have jointly demanded that the country's minimum wage for garment, footwear, textile, and travel goods workers be raised to USD 232 per month in 2026. They argue that the current wage structure leaves workers unable to meet basic living costs, forcing many into debt.

The coalition stresses that workers who sustain Cambodia's most vital export sector remain trapped in

poverty despite the industry's profitability and foreign investment inflows. While acknowledging that USD 232 still falls short of a full living wage, unions describe the figure as a realistic and urgent step forward.

The joint appeal called on the National Minimum Wage Council, the Labour Ministry, the government, and employers' associations to approve the proposed increase, framing the demand as essential to both social justice and the long-term sustainability of Cambodia's garment-driven economy. [fibre2fashion]

Cambodia: New USD 1.5 billion international airport opened

(dql) Cambodia inaugurated operations at its new USD 1.5 billion Techo International Airport (KTI) on September 9, marking the largest aviation project in the country's history. Located 20 kilometers south of Phnom Penh, the airport welcomed its first commercial flight from China.

The facility is designed to handle 13 million passengers annually in its first phase, with future expansions expected to raise capacity to 30 million. Long-term projections include a potential third phase by 2050.

Techo International Airport becomes the country's fourth international gateway, alongside facilities in Siem Reap, Preah Sihanouk, and the now-decommissioned Phnom Penh international airport. [Cambodianess]

In a separate development, Air Cambodia has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China's Commercial Aircraft Corporation (COMAC) to acquire 20 C909 regional aircraft, confirming the purchase of ten and expressing intent for ten more. The deal is part of broader bilateral cooperation in aviation, covering aircraft acquisition, operational support, and industrial development.

The C909, a Chinese-designed regional turbofan airliner seating 78–97 passengers, has been gradually introduced across Southeast Asia since 2023, with airlines in Indonesia, Laos, and Vietnam operating seven aircraft on 15 routes.

The national carrier, Air Cambodia, is jointly owned by the Cambodian government (30 percent), China's Xing Gang Investment Group (28 percent), Seven Trip International (28 percent), and Vietnam Airlines (14 percent).

Recently, discussions were held with the United States over potential Boeing 737-800 MAX purchases, highlighting the country's strategy to modernize its fleet and expand connectivity. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Court charges two journalists over alleged entry into restricted military zone

(dql) The Siem Reap Provincial Court has charged two journalists, Pheap Pheara (34) of TSP 68 TV Online and Phan Sopheap (45) of Battambang Post TV Online, for allegedly entering a restricted military area in Oddar Meanchey province between July 25–31. Authorities say their actions could have compromised national defense.

The Prosecutor's Office filed charges for "provision of information undermining national defence" and referred the case to the investigating judge of the Siem Reap Provincial Court for further inquiry. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Low scores in regional green banking index

(gm) Cambodia scored just 7 out of 130 in the *East and Southeast Asia Green Central Banking Scorecard 2025*, reflecting limited progress in green finance, according to UK-based group Positive Money. The Kingdom ranked above only Brunei, Laos and Myanmar. It received five points for research and advocacy, and two for 'leading by example', but scored zero in monetary and financial policy. [Khmer Times]

The report noted Cambodia's efforts remain at a framework stage. The National Bank of Cambodia is developing a Sustainable Finance Roadmap with UN ESCAP and drafting a green taxonomy with the IFC, due in 2025.

Voluntary ESG guidelines introduced by the Association of Banks in Cambodia in 2016 were acknowledged but excluded from the score, as they are not issued by a financial regulator and remain non-binding. Positive Money called for stronger enforcement and policy ambition to drive meaningful change in Cambodia's financial system. China topped the index with 50 points, followed by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

Indonesia: President Prabowo reshuffles cabinet, replaces finance chief and creates Hajj Ministry

(ms/gp) President Prabowo Subianto carried out a sweeping cabinet reshuffle on September 8, removing five ministers, appointing loyalists to key portfolios, and creating a new Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati was replaced by economist Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa, while Budi Gunawan, Budi Arie Setiadi, Abdul Kadir Karding, and Dito Ariotedjo were also dismissed. Their successors include Ferry Juliantono at Cooperatives and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), Mukhtarudin at Migrant Workers Protection, and Mochamad Irfan Yusuf at the new Hajj ministry, with Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin temporarily overseeing political and security affairs. Coming less than a year into Prabowo's presidency and days after violent protests, the changes sidelined figures tied to former presidents and elevated religious and labor posts, signaling a bid to consolidate power while shifting policy toward pro-growth, loyalty-driven execution.

The most striking decision was the dismissal of long-serving Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati, replaced by economist Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa, previously head of the Indonesia Deposit Insurance Corporation. Sri Mulyani, widely respected for her role in maintaining fiscal discipline and credibility with international investors, formally handed over the finance portfolio on September 9. Purbaya, in his first remarks, acknowledged that the task would not be easy but insisted it was "not impossible" to achieve Prabowo's ambitious 8 percent growth target, aiming first for 6–7 percent. He also ruled out new taxes, pointing to a shift away from the fiscal restraint associated with his predecessor toward policies that lean on higher spending and private sector engagement.

To achieve his ambitious growth targets, Sadewa has highlighted his plans to steadily increase the investment contribution of the country's sovereign wealth fund, Danantara, so that investment acceleration does not rely solely on the State Budget. According to him, Danantara's strategic investments will be directed toward supporting productive sectors with high added value, creating more jobs, and improving public welfare.

On fiscal matters, it appears that Sadewa will largely fall in line with the Prabowo administration. The new finance minister has vowed to make no major changes to Prabowo's draft 2026 state budget and to "maintain

fiscal discipline", promising to keep the budget deficit below 3 percent of gross domestic product, in accordance with state finance law. This eager compliance with Prabowo's agenda has raised concerns with Sadewa's appointment may have been part of an effort to consolidate power. [Antara 1] [The Jakarta Post 1] [The Jakarta Post 2]

Markets reacted nervously. The rupiah fell more than 1 percent against the dollar in offshore trading before Bank Indonesia intervened, while the Jakarta Composite Index dropped by over 1 percent and international bonds softened. Analysts cautioned that Sri Mulyani's departure removed a safeguard against fiscal slippage, raising the risk of wider deficits as Prabowo pursues costly programs such as his free school meals scheme and expanded defense outlays. For now, investors are awaiting signals on whether the government will maintain the 3 percent-of-GDP deficit ceiling or move toward a more flexible fiscal rule.

The reshuffle went far beyond finance. Budi Gunawan, Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, was dismissed and replaced on an interim basis by Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, concentrating significant authority over both security and defense in a single military figure until a permanent appointment is made. Youth and Sports Minister Dito Ariotedjo was also removed without an immediate successor. At the Cooperatives and SMEs Ministry, Gerindra politician Ferry Juliantono replaced Budi Arie Setiadi, a close ally of former president Joko Widodo. Abdul Kadir Karding was dismissed as Migrant Workers Protection Minister and replaced by Mukhtarudin, a Golkar legislator. Finally, Prabowo elevated pilgrimage management by creating a dedicated Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, appointing Nahdlatul Ulama–linked figure Mochamad Irfan Yusuf as its first minister.

Observers see the reshuffle as a calculated response to political pressures. Sri Mulyani had become a lightning rod for discontent, with her home attacked by demonstrators in late August. Removing her may have been intended to redirect public anger while keeping the leadership of the police force intact despite criticism of its handling of the protests. The sidelining of Budi Gunawan, a close confidant of PDI-P chair Megawati Sukarnoputri, and Budi Arie, aligned with Jokowi, also highlights a deliberate narrowing of space for rival factions inside the governing coalition. By elevating loyalists and allies, Prabowo appears to be tightening his grip while recalibrating the balance of power away from Jokowi-era figures.

Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka described the reshuffle as the result of "thorough calculations" intended to improve public services, citing the new appointments at SMEs, migrant protection, and religious affairs. Yet questions remain over how quickly the new team can reassure markets and manage unrest. The interim overlap of defense and internal security portfolios has raised concerns about creeping militarization, while the replacement of technocrats with political loyalists could complicate relations with investors. For now, the reshuffle reflects Prabowo's dual-track strategy: consolidate authority within the coalition and pursue ambitious growth, even at the cost of unsettling markets and altering the balance of Indonesia's post-Reformasi governance. [Antara 2] [CNA] [Fulcrum] [Indonesia Business Post]

Indonesia: Prabowo backs police reform commission, launches independent probe into August riots

(gp) President Prabowo Subianto has taken twin steps in response to mounting public anger after last month's protests in Jakarta, which left at least ten people dead and hundreds injured. He has expressed support for establishing a commission on police reform while also authorizing an independent investigation into the August unrest.

During a September 11 meeting at the presidential palace with leaders of the National Conscience Movement (GNB), Prabowo said their calls for reform resonated with him: "What the National Conscience Movement aspires to is also in my conscience." The GNB pressed him to create a police reform commission that would set safeguards against excessive force and ensure protection of Indonesians' human rights and constitutional freedoms. The movement also demanded the release of activists and students still held following the August demonstrations. Supporting this call, Religious Affairs Minister Yaqut Cholil Qoumas said, "We hope they can be released as soon as possible … they should not be in such a position." [Antara] [Jakarta Globe] [Tempo]

At the same time, Prabowo signed off on the formation of an independent fact-finding committee to investigate the riots. The six-member panel brings together key human rights bodies, including the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM), the National Commission on Violence Against Women, and the Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK). Komnas HAM chair Anis Hidayah said the team will examine casualties, injuries, socio-economic losses,

and damage to public facilities. It will also assess victims' conditions, review government responses, and put forward recommendations "to promote truth, justice, and recovery."

The committee has emphasized its independence from the administration, pledging to operate "objectively and impartially, with input from civil society and experts." It will investigate alleged violence and arbitrary arrests not only by protesters but also by police. LPSK deputy chair Sri Suparyati urged law enforcement to provide access and protection for the team's work.

The panel is also expected to trace responsibility for organizing the unrest, including the role of so-called "buzzers" who mobilized demonstrations online. Together with the proposed reform commission, the inquiry marks the government's most significant effort to confront both the causes and consequences of the August riots. [Antara 2] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Bali moves to ban land conversion after deadly floods

(ms) Bali's provincial government will begin drafting a bylaw this year prohibiting the conversion of farmland and productive land into hotels, restaurants, and other commercial facilities. Governor Wayan Koster confirmed the move on September 14, following instructions from the Ministry of Environment, which identified land conversion as a key factor behind the severe flooding that struck the island last week.

The measure is set to take effect in 2025 and will align with the Bali New Era 100-Year Development Plan (2025–2125). Under the draft, no new commercial projects will be allowed on rice fields or other productive land, while permits for private housing will be strictly limited to landowners building their own residences.

The announcement comes just days after flash floods killed at least 17 people and caused widespread destructio. Environment Minister Hanif Faisol Nurofiq said deforestation in upstream watershed areas and the unchecked spread of tourism infrastructure had weakened Bali's natural defenses. He warned that the island "is no longer strong enough to withstand natural calibrations" if development continues without limits.

Bali's rapid expansion of hotels, villas, and restaurants has fueled tourism and economic growth but also eroded farmland, strained water resources, and

increased flood risks. Since 2015, more than 400 hectares of forest have been cleared for commercial use, leaving only around 1,500 hectares of forest cover. Environmental groups such as Walhi Bali have reported steady land degradation in the metropolitan area covering Denpasar, Badung, Gianyar, and Tabanan.

The debate over land use has long been tied not only to environmental protection but also to food security. Scholars have warned that the steady loss of farmland reduces local food production, forcing greater reliance on imports and raising prices. With Bali's population exceeding four million and millions more visiting each year, the coming bylaw represents an attempt to balance tourism, ecological resilience, and food security for the long term. [Antara] [Channel News Asia] [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: Health Ministry to spend USD 592 million on tuberculosis eradication and mass check-ups

(ms) Indonesia's Health Ministry has earmarked 9.7 trillion rupiah (around USD 592 million) from its proposed 2026 budget to finance "quick-win" programs aimed at rapidly improving public health.

Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin told lawmakers on September 15 that the package will cover facility upgrades at 10 hospitals, tuberculosis eradication measures, and a nationwide free health check-up program. The check-up initiative alone is expected to reach 130.3 million people next year.

For tuberculosis, the ministry plans to secure sufficient drug supplies, expand case detection, and raise treatment success rates, alongside preventive campaigns.

The quick-win projects are part of the ministry's broader health transformation agenda aligned with the 2026 Government Work Plan. Out of the ministry's total proposed 114 trillion rupiah (about USD 6.96 billion) budget, the largest share — 23 trillion rupiah (USD 1.4 billion) — would go to the Secretariat General to fund free health insurance and advanced care at state-run hospitals. [Antara]

Indonesia: State-run energy supplier to merge refinery, shipping, retail operations

(gp) On September 11, Pertamina CEO Simon Aloysius Mantiri announced that the state-run energy firm will merge the operations of its refinery, shipping and retail units to improve efficiency. According to his testimony before a parliamentary committee, "We will carry out a downstream integration, by merging the operations of Pertamina Patra Niaga, Kilang Pertamina Internasional and Pertamina International Shipping, which we are targeting to be completed by the end of 2025." All of Pertamina's non-core businesses will be merged with similar state companies. For instance, Pelita Air — currently under Pertamina's control — will be merged with Garuda Indonesia, the country's state-owned airline. [Reuters] [Tempo 1]

This latest merger has only raised further monopolization concerns amid a widespread fuel shortage throughout the country. At the same parliamentary hearing, Mantiri refuted these claims, stating that Pertamina is "absolutely no monopoly". To affirm this, he highlighted that the government is currently drafting regulations to reform the mechanism through which private gas stations can purchase fuel from Pertamina, which is seen as a crucial step in alleviating the country's current shortage. [Tempo 2]

Indonesia: Electric grid reaches 16 percent renewable

(gp) On September 11, Indonesia's Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry announced that the country's electrical grid has reached 16 percent, up one point from earlier this year. According to the ministry's director general for renewable energy, much of this growth was attributed to a rise in geothermal plants and several small-scale solar projects. The director also highlighted a growing push for micro-hydro plants to begin operation by the end of 2025. [Jakarta Globe]

Although Indonesia has so far lagged behind its renewable energy targets, President Prabowo Subianto unveiled his administration's Electricity Supply Business Plan (RUPTL) 2025-2034 earlier this year, a plan to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2035. However, many have raised doubt about this goal's feasibility, especially as the plan in question is set to significantly increase the country's fossil fuel capacity in the coming years. Regardless, the government has expressed optimism following this 16 percent achievement, and is aiming for renewables to make up 23 percent of the national energy mix by 2030. [Indonesia Business Post]

Indonesia: Consumer confidence hits three-year low, spending power likely to drop

(gp) According to a Bank Indonesia survey release September 10, the consumer confidence index (CCI) fell to 117.2 in August, down 0.9 points from July, marking the worst such index since September 2022. Although the central bank has tried to downplay this drop, stating that consumer confidence in the economy remained intact, it should be noted that the current economic conditions index fell 1.5 points to 105.1, and the consumer expectations index dropped 0.4 points to 129.2. While all three of these indices remain above 100, marking general optimism, it is clear that Indonesians' positive economic sentiments are waning.

However, the current job availability index fell further into pessimistic territory at 93.2, reflecting widespread uncertainty in the country's job market. The Ministry of Manpower recorded about 42,000 layoffs in the first six months of this year, up 32.1 percent from the same period last year. Many have speculated that this will lower Indonesia's spending power, with one economist highlighting, "When people are unsure about the continuity of their jobs, they reduce non-essential spending, postpone purchases of durable goods, and choose to save as a financial buffer." [The Jakarta Post] [Tempo]

Meanwhile, the proportion of installment/debt payment to income ratio in August 2025 was 11.4 percent, up 0.5 points from the month prior, while the proportion of consumer income stored (savings to income ratio) remained stable at 13.7 percent. [VOI]

Indonesia: Government to use state funds to boost banking liquidity

(gp) President Prabowo Subianto has approved the government's plan to withdraw IDR 200 trillion (USD 12.2 billion) from its funds deposited in Bank Indonesia (BI), and move them to commercial banks to alleviate tight liquidity in the banking system. These funds constitute nearly half of the central bank's reserves of IDR 425 trillion. According to Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa, this injection of liquidity will spur economic activity and accelerate growth, stating, "The goal is for banks to suddenly have a lot of cash, and

they can only channel it through credit. This way, we are forcing the market mechanism to function."

This move follows a campaign of aggressive interest rate cuts, with BI having slashed such rates by 125 basis points since September last year. Since Prabowo assumed office in October 2024, his administration has made accelerated economic growth a key priority, but these rate cuts do not seem to have had a sufficient impact in their eyes. As such, it is not entirely surprising that the administration is now seeking alternative methods to spur such growth, and this liquidity injection may be the first of many such initiatives to come. [Reuters] [Tempo]

Indonesia: Government rolls out USD 1 billion stimulus package

(gp) On September 15, Indonesia's economic affairs minister announced a USD 1 billion (IDR 16.23 trillion) stimulus package for the final quarter of 2025 to bolster growth and job creation amid slowing momentum. The plan, called the "8+4+5 package," includes eight short-term acceleration programs to run through the end of the year, four extensions into 2026, and five longer-term initiatives targeting labor absorption.

Key measures include rice assistance for 18.3 million households, a USD 324 million (IDR 5.3 trillion) "cash-for-work" scheme expected to employ over 600,000 people, and internships for 20,000 university graduates. To support businesses, the government will remove personal income tax for the tourism sector, freeze the small business turnover tax at 0.5 percent until 2029, and subsidize workplace insurance premiums for ride-hailing drivers and couriers.

State banks will channel USD 8.04 billion (IDR 130 trillion) in construction loans with interest subsidies, alongside subsidized mortgages for Indonesians. These efforts align with President Prabowo Subianto's target of creating three million affordable homes annually.

Longer-term components include replanting 870,000 hectares of plantations for commodities such as sugar cane, cocoa, coffee, cashew, nutmeg, and coconuts; urban renewal pilot projects; and fishery modernization. Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa stressed that the measures will not affect the 2025 budget deficit forecast of 2.78 percent of GDP. [Channel News Asia]

Indonesia: Government to expand Special Economic Zones following first semester report

(gp) On September 8, the National Council for Special Economic Zones revealed Indonesia's SEZs booked IDR 40.48 trillion (USD 2.45 billion) in investments during the first half of 2025. Although this only accounts for 48.2 percent of this year's target of IDR 84.1 trillion, the SEZs have also created 28,094 since the beginning of the year, more than half of the government's 2025 target of 49,779 jobs. This marks an increase of 43.5 percent in investment and 41.7 percent in employment compared to the same period last year.

As such, the government has decided to establish six new SEZs in addition to its existing 25 — 13 industrial, and 12 service-oriented. Secretary to the Coordinating Economic Minister Susiwijono Moegiarso has so far revealed details on two of the anticipated SEZs. The first, located in Sidoarjo, East Java, will focus on the halal products industry. According to Moegiarso "The halal SEZ in Sidoarjo will [...] offer vast potential to integrate Indonesia into global halal industry supply chains." The second, located in West Java, is set to augment the country's electric vehicle industry, likely drawing on Indonesia's vast nickel deposits. Chinese investors like EV manufacturer BYD interested in investing in the area. [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Police Commissioner appeals dismissal over death of civilian

(ms) Police Commissioner Kosmas K. Gae has filed an appeal against his dishonorable discharge from the Indonesian National Police, imposed after a Brimob tactical vehicle under his command ran over and killed motorcycle taxi driver Affan Kurniawan during protests in Jakarta on August 28.

The National Police Code of Ethics Commission dismissed Kosmas on September 3, ruling that as commander of Battalion A, Regiment IV of the Mobile Brigade Corps, he acted unprofessionally in handling the unrest. In addition to dismissal, he received an ethical sanction and a week-long administrative placement at the Provost Bureau.

Kosmas was seated beside the vehicle's driver, when the incident occurred. Five other Brimob personnel were also in the car. He later admitted he only learned of the fatality when a video went viral online. In his defense, Kosmas said he was carrying out orders to

maintain security and insisted the incident was unintentional. He has apologized to Kurniawan's family and to the police institution. [Antara]

Indonesia: First Rafale fighter jets to arrive in early 2026

(ms) Indonesia will take delivery of its first three Rafale fighter jets from France between February and March 2026, Air Force Chief of Staff Marshal Mohamad Tonny Harjono confirmed on Saturday. The aircraft, produced by Dassault Aviation, mark the beginning of Indonesia's largest modern airpower procurement in decades.

The second batch of three jets is scheduled for April 2026, with phased deliveries continuing until all 42 units are completed. Jakarta signed contracts in three stages: six units in September 2022, 18 units in August 2023, and a final 18 units following the activation of the third-phase deal.

The Rafale, a twin-engine multirole fighter capable of air-to-air and air-to-ground operations, will join Indonesia's existing fleet of F-16s, Sukhoi Su-30s, Hawk 100/200s, and T-50 trainers. Maintenance facilities and technical staff are already in place, according to the Air Force.

Officials emphasize the acquisition as a significant boost to Indonesia's air defense capability and a step toward modernizing its military. The deal was part of broader defense cooperation agreements first negotiated in 2022 between then-Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto—now president—and French counterpart Florence Parly. [Antara] [Tempo]

Laos: One in three girls married before 18, UNICEF warns

(ms) One in three girls in Laos is married before the age of 18, giving the country one of the highest child marriage rates in Southeast Asia, UNICEF reported this week. Despite laws prohibiting marriage below the legal age, the practice remains widespread, with the sharpest impact on poor, rural, and ethnic minority communities.

Data from the Lao Statistics Bureau shows that in 2023, 30.5 percent of women were married before turning 18. Rates climb above 50 percent among girls with little schooling or from the poorest households. Regional disparities are stark: Huaphanh Province

recorded the highest incidence at 46 percent, while Vientiane Capital reported the lowest at 13 percent. Rural girls are more vulnerable, with 36 percent married before 18 compared with 17 percent in urban areas.

The consequences are severe. Early marriage often forces girls out of school, curtails economic opportunities, and exposes them to early pregnancies that heighten health risks. Although child marriage among women aged 20–24 declined from 37 percent in 2011 to 30.5 percent in 2023, progress has been slow. Education data reflects this strain: the number of students sitting secondary final exams in 2025 fell to 110,922, down from over 115,500 a year earlier.

The costs extend beyond families. UNICEF estimates that eliminating child marriage could save Laos USD 41 million annually by reducing child mortality, stunting, and school dropout. The World Bank links the practice to high under-five mortality—39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2023—as well as maternal complications and social isolation. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Asian Development Bank approves USD 41 million for climate-resilient healthcare

(ms) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a USD 41 million package to strengthen primary health care in Laos, focusing on rural and climate-vulnerable areas. The Green Primary Care Project aims to upgrade facilities, train medical staff, and improve resilience against floods, droughts, and other climate shocks that disrupt care delivery.

ADB Country Director Shanny Campbell said the initiative “puts people and prevention first” by ensuring communities can withstand climate impacts while protecting gains in universal health coverage.

The project will cover 51 districts in Champasak, Luangprabang, Oudomxay, Savannakhet, and Xiangkhouang, with 14 identified as highly vulnerable. Measures include improving water systems, developing community adaptation plans, and training local leaders, women, girls, and ethnic groups in climate strategies.

The effort aligns with Laos’ Health Sector Reform Strategy and 2024 National Adaptation Plan, reinforcing commitments to universal health coverage and sustainable development. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Agreement signed for pumped-storage hydropower

(ms) Laos is advancing its clean energy ambitions with a new pumped-storage hydropower (PSH) project in Sekong Province. On September 1, Électricité du Laos Generation Public Company (EDL-Gen) signed an agreement with private firms from Singapore to develop the project, which aims to boost generation efficiency and provide long-term grid stability.

Pumped-storage hydropower stores and releases energy by transferring water between reservoirs at different elevations, helping balance intermittent renewable sources such as wind and solar.

The deal follows EDL-Gen's May 2025 partnership with PSG Corporation to study retrofitting existing hydropower plants for pumped storage, alongside solar and wind integration. Laos is also exploring a large-scale PSH project near the Nam Theun 2 plant in Khammouane, with potential capacity of up to 2,000 megawatts, agreed with France in 2024.

Laos: Country on track to exit least developed status by 2026, according to UN

(ms) Laos remains on course to graduate from least developed country (LDC) status in 2026, despite ongoing financial strains and global uncertainties, according to UN Assistant Secretary-General Kanni Wignaraja.

Speaking in Vientiane during her official visit, Wignaraja expressed optimism that Laos could transition to middle-income status and urged the country to view graduation as an opportunity rather than a risk. She suggested that Laos, which will lose preferential aid and trade terms post-graduation, should focus on attracting foreign direct investment, negotiating new trade deals, and leveraging its hydropower resources to become a renewable-energy hub aligned with green growth policies.

The UNDP official also stressed the importance of reinvesting in education and health to build a skilled workforce, noting that current budget allocations remain too low.

Her visit coincided with preparations for Laos' 10th five-year development plan (2026–2030), which will

guide the transition and financing of Sustainable Development Goals. [The Nation]

Laos: Fuel price shifts squeeze households and workers

(ms) Fuel prices in Laos have seen modest year-on-year changes, but the impact is being felt by commuters, families, and delivery riders.

As of September 11, diesel stood at LAK 19,530 (USD 0.92) per liter, Regular 91 at LAK 23,880 (USD 1.12), and Premium Super 95 at LAK 28,600 (USD 1.34). Compared with 2024, diesel rose by LAK 150 (USD 0.01), Regular 91 by LAK 760 (USD 0.04), while Premium Super 95 dipped by LAK 200 (USD 0.01).

The increase in Regular 91, the most commonly used fuel, has pressured household budgets. Families are cutting unnecessary trips, turning to public transport, or ride-sharing to save costs. Delivery workers, who rely on motorbikes, say the higher prices eat into already slim earnings, while students report tightening their spending and travel habits.

Diesel's small increase has kept trucking and shipping costs steady, while the drop in Premium Super 95 offered limited relief for high-end vehicle users.

Analysts highlight that these changes mirror global oil market movements, since Laos imports nearly all of its fuel. Although the shifts appear minor on paper, they underline the vulnerability of urban households and workers to even slight price fluctuations, with rising transport demand likely to push costs higher. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: New incentives highlight wider push to grow tourism sector

(ms) Laos is intensifying efforts to expand tourism as a key driver of growth, launching new incentives to attract private investment in nature-based projects inside forests and protected areas. Announced on September 12 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, the regulation will allow small companies to develop eco-tourism ventures that create jobs, preserve biodiversity, and partner with local communities.

Backed by the World Bank's Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods Project, the program will provide advisory

services and three types of financing: feasibility support, challenge funds for priority zones, and matching funds for product development and marketing. Eligible projects can be developed in five national parks and three protected areas. Officials say regulated tourism can generate employment and give local communities an economic incentive to conserve natural resources.

The initiative fits into a broader national strategy. Laos aims to diversify away from hydropower dependency by positioning itself as a sustainable adventure and cultural tourism hub. Authorities are targeting a recovery to pre-pandemic visitor levels, when tourism contributed around 10 percent of GDP. The World Bank estimates nature-based tourism alone could eventually generate a similar share of the economy and create jobs for 75,000 women. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Police seize nearly 13 million meth pills in major drug bust

(ms) Police in Xayabouly Province seized almost 13 million methamphetamine pills on 10 September, one of the country's largest drug hauls this year.

The drugs were found in a truck that refused inspection at a checkpoint and was later abandoned. The driver was arrested and confessed he was transporting the shipment to Vientiane Capital.

Laos sits at the heart of the Golden Triangle, a hub for the regional narcotics trade. Despite crackdowns, traffickers continue to exploit porous borders and rural transport routes, moving massive volumes of meth across the country.

Methamphetamine is also the most widely abused drug in Laos, with addiction rising among youth and low-income groups. Authorities report tens of thousands of drug-related arrests each year, while experts warn of growing health, social, and economic costs. [The Laotian Times]

Malaysia: High court rejects former Prime Minister Najib's request to recuse judge in judicial review

(tl) The High Court has turned down former Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak's application to remove Justice Alice Loke Yee Ching from his judicial review

case concerning a document that could allow him to complete his prison term under house arrest. Justice Loke ruled that claims of apparent bias were unfounded.

Najib is also seeking to amend his judicial review by submitting a supporting affidavit from his son, which includes a letter purportedly verifying the authenticity of the disputed Addendum Order. The court will decide on this amendment request on 19 September, with the main hearing of the judicial review set for 24 November.

Najib has been serving a six-year prison term following his 2020 SRC International conviction, which initially carried a 12-year sentence and USD 49.7 million (MYR 210 million) fine but was reduced to six years and USD 11.8 million (MYR 50 million) after a royal pardon in January 2024. He is seeking an order to confirm the document and enforce house arrest if verified. [Malay Mail]

Najib's SRC International conviction stems from his role in the misappropriation of funds from SRC International Sdn Bhd, a former subsidiary of the state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). Between 2011 and 2014, SRC International received deposits from government funds, which Najib was accused of misusing for personal gain. He faced multiple charges, including criminal breach of trust for misappropriating MYR 42 million (USD 9.9 million), money laundering for transferring the funds into personal accounts, and abuse of power for using his position as prime minister to facilitate the transfers.

The disputed addendum order centers on an alleged royal decree that would permit him to serve the remainder of his prison sentence under house arrest. This addendum is claimed to have been issued alongside a royal pardon in January 2024.

Najib's legal team argues that this addendum exists and should be recognized, while the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) acknowledges its existence but disputes its authenticity and legal standing. The Malaysian law ministry has stated it has no record of such a document, and both the home and communications ministers are unaware of it. However, the former king's office has confirmed its issuance.

Last month, Malaysia's Federal Court allowed Najib to proceed with a judicial review to determine the validity and enforceability of the addendum. [The Straits Times]

Malaysia: Health ministry unveils national healthcare reform agenda

(tl) Malaysian Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad has announced a comprehensive healthcare reform plan aimed at strengthening the country's healthcare system. Key initiatives include healthcare financing reforms, such as upgrading public hospitals and clinics, introducing the Diagnosis-Related Group (DRG) payment system by 2026 to curb medical inflation, and revamping the Medical and Health Insurance/Takaful scheme in collaboration with Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM)—the country's central bank—particularly to benefit middle-income groups.

The plan also emphasizes digital transformation, expanding the use of digital health tools. Over 200 clinics are already implementing Cloud-Based Clinic Management Systems (CCMS), and more than 30 hospitals are set to adopt Electronic Medical Records (EMR) by 2026.

Dzulkefly highlighted ongoing challenges, including retaining healthcare professionals, addressing an ageing population, and managing rising medical costs.

In parallel, amendments to the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 1998 are currently under review. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Sabah State pushes autonomy agenda

(tl/dql) Sabah has requested to increase the number of its parliament seats during the Malaysia Agreement 1963 Implementation Action Council (MTPMA63) meeting in Kuching, chaired by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

Sabah's Chief Minister Hajiji Noor said the proposal aligns with the spirit of MA63 to protect the state's interests. Anwar signaled support but said constitutional amendments would require further technical review.

The meeting also addressed placing tourism under the concurrent list, which will be reviewed by a technical committee. [Bernama]

The Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) was the treaty that formed Malaysia in September 1963, uniting Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore (left in 1965). It outlined constitutional, political, and administrative

arrangements to safeguard the rights and autonomy of Sabah and Sarawak.

Over the decades, Sabah and Sarawak leaders have often raised concerns that their rights under MA63 were eroded or not fully honored. To address this, the federal government established the MA63 Implementation Action Council in 2018, chaired by the Prime Minister and joined by Sabah and Sarawak leaders. The council resolves MA63 issues and monitors the implementation of agreements. [Daily Express]

In a separate move, a coalition of four NGOs and a think tank has urged the government to negotiate a "Malaysia Agreement 1963 Plus" (MA63+) with Sabah and Sarawak, aiming to restore the states' autonomy and decentralize federal powers. The groups warned that residents of Sabah and Sarawak increasingly feel that the federal government has failed to uphold the commitments of the original MA63.

The proposed MA63+ would extend constitutional recognition and grant the Bornean states greater control over key areas such as education, health, labor, fiscal policy, and parliamentary representation—rights that were initially afforded only to Singapore when Malaysia was established in 1963.

The organizations also recommended forming a dedicated inter-governmental committee to negotiate the constitutional revisions. They noted that some Peninsular states are seeking similar decentralization and could collaborate with Sabah and Sarawak to advance a broader national agenda. Nonetheless, the coalition emphasized that Sabah and Sarawak should retain a higher degree of autonomy than the Peninsular states. [Free Malaysia Today 1]

Meanwhile, Sabah's push for a larger stake in the oil and gas (O&G) sector is not aimed at undermining Petronas, Armizan Mohd Ali—deputy secretary-general of the ruling Gabungan Rakyat Sabah coalition—clarified, but at securing a more meaningful role in the industry. The initiative began following an August 2021 meeting between Chief Minister Hajiji Noor and Petronas leaders, which paved the way for the signing of a commercial collaboration agreement (CCA) in December 2021.

The CCA has allowed Sabah to expand beyond royalty and sales tax earnings to hold equity interests in O&G projects and to involve over 1,000 local contractors. State-owned SMJ Energy Sdn Bhd now manages Sabah's engagement across the O&G value chain, including a 50 percent stake in the Samarang

production-sharing contract, a 25 percent interest in the Sabah Ammonia Urea (Samur) petrochemical facility, and a 25 percent share in the nearshore ZLNG floating LNG project in Sipitang.

Chief Minister Hajiji emphasized that Sabah's high O&G revenues, which accounted for roughly half of the state's MYR 6.7 billion income in 2023, reflect direct negotiations with Petronas and the state's clearly defined objectives. Armizan framed the strategy as creating a new "golden goose" for Sabah, prioritizing greater decision-making power, active participation, and enhanced revenue sharing rather than challenging Petronas' national role. [Free Malaysia Today 2]

Malaysia: Senate approves landmark Gig Worker Bill

(ga) In a landmark move for labor rights protection, the Senate on September 9 formally approved the Gig Worker Bill 2025, granting legal safeguards to Malaysia's nearly 1.2 million gig workers, who until now operated outside existing labor laws.

The legislation provides a clear legal definition of gig workers, recognizing their flexible freelance or self-employed status while extending essential protections. It establishes a Consultative Council where the government, gig workers, and platform companies can address pay, contracts, and work conditions. A dedicated tribunal offers a mechanism for resolving disputes, and mandatory contributions to the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) ensure enhanced social security coverage.

The bill also strengthens gaps in existing labor laws, particularly in enforcement, by enabling automatic contribution deductions via an API with platform companies. Gig workers in the e-hailing and p-hailing sectors will now have 1.25 percent of their net earnings —after commissions and tips—automatically contributed to the SOCSO.

Having passed both the House of Representatives last month, and now the Senate, the bill positions Malaysia as a regional leader in progressive gig economy legislation, setting a benchmark for ASEAN and beyond.

Initiated by the Prime Minister in March 2024, the bill is the culmination of a two-year consultative process involving more than 4,000 stakeholders, including state governments, platform companies, gig worker associations, trade unions, academics, and civil society.

Its development drew on international best practices and was presented at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, ensuring alignment with global standards. [Business Today] [Free Malaysia Today]

In addition, the Senate also approved the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025, which raises penalties for fisheries-related offences, including fines of up to MYR 1 million (USD 213,000) for violations in marine parks. It introduces new provisions empowering the Fisheries director-general to control fishing in polluted areas and penalizes false statements under the Act, while also tightening enforcement coordination and banning convicted offenders from reapplying for licenses for up to five years. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Senate approves bills on electricity, energy trade, and cross-border insolvency

(ga) The Senate has passed the Electricity Supply (Amendment) Bill 2025, the Energy Commission (Amendment) Bill 2025, and the Cross-Border Insolvency Bill 2025.

The energy-related amendments aim to regulate electricity import and export as well as green attributes, supporting Malaysia's target of achieving 70 percent renewable energy capacity by 2050 and facilitating cross-border trade under the ASEAN Power Grid project.

Deputy Minister of Energy Transition and Water Transformation Akmal Nasrullah stated only surplus energy would be exported to ensure domestic security, with revenue channeled into the Electricity Industry Fund and Green Energy Fund. He highlighted last year's pilot sale of 50 megawatts to Singapore through Energy Exchange Malaysia (ENEGEM) as an example of successful market-based trading.

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) M. Kulasegaran said the Cross-Border Insolvency Bill, drafted based on the UNCITRAL Model Law, provides a legal framework for foreign representatives and creditors to access Malaysian courts. He noted that while the bill currently applies to corporate entities, future consideration may extend it to personal insolvency.

The bill also includes safeguards such as a public policy exemption to protect national interests and affirms the

High Court's authority in handling cross-border insolvency cases. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Aerospace industry projects to hit over USD 7 billion revenue in 2025

(tl) Malaysia's aerospace sector is projected to generate USD 7.11 billion (MYR 30 billion) in revenue this year, up from USD 5.95 (MYR 25.1 billion) in 2024, supported by strong project pipelines and growing investments.

The sector's rapid growth currently supports 30,000 skilled workers and has attracted expansions from global players like Airbus and Boeing, as well as lead the composite manufacturing with CTRM (Composites Technology Research Malaysia). [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Defence ministry unveils defense white paper review

(ga) Malaysia has unveiled the Mid-Term Review of the Defence White Paper, outlining new strategic directions to address emerging security challenges, including advanced technological threats, rising tensions in the South China Sea, and non-traditional risks requiring broader roles for the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF).

Defense Minister Khaled Nordin said the review highlights the need for continuous reform of the Future Force and inclusive defence strategies that place personnel and the public at the center. He warned of potential military clashes and provocations in Malaysia's Exclusive Economic Zone caused by major power activities and non-military strategies.

Alongside the review, Khaled announced the forthcoming launch of the National Defence Industry Policy (DIPN), approved by Cabinet, which will strengthen the local defense industry through technological innovation and greater self-reliance.

The policy will empower the Science and Technology Research Institute for Defence (STRIDE) to lead research and development, supported by a new Defence Science and Technology Advisory Council, and will prioritize key areas such as autonomous systems, weaponry, cyber-electromagnetic capabilities, and aerospace.

The minister further stressed the importance of building a resilient supply chain through collaboration

between government, academia, and industry to reduce dependence on external sources. [Bernama 1] [Bernama 2]

Myanmar: Four political parties dissolved

(dql/anl) The Union Election Commission (UEC), Myanmar's national electoral authority, has disbanded four parties—the National Democratic Force (NDF), Democratic Party of National Politics (DNP), Women Party (Mon), and the Union Farmer-Labor Force Party—for not fulfilling the junta's strict party registration requirements within the given timeframe.

The law, imposed in early 2023, obliges national parties to enlist at least 50,000 members and establish offices in over 100 townships, while regional parties must meet smaller but still demanding thresholds.

The most notable case is the NDF, whose leadership includes junta advisor Khin Maung Swe. The move caught many off guards given the NDF's reputation for being close to the regime. Two former leaders now serve on the junta's National Defence and Security Council, while current vice chair Daw Sandar Min only recently defected from the NLD.

The NDF denounced its sudden dissolution as "a slap on the nose," framing the move as a setback for democratic participation. The party accused the Commission of inflicting political injustice with its decision, noting more than 80,000 members had been submitted. The NDF likened the process to an unfair examination, where answers were arbitrarily marked wrong.

The party will not appeal, instead pledging to remain active through re-registration, non-parliamentary initiatives, or individual candidacies. [The Irrawaddy] [Mizzima 1]

Constituencies excluded from planned election

In a separate statement, the UEC announced that the election will not be held in about one in seven national parliament constituencies, citing "conditions not conducive to free and fair elections."

Polls will be excluded in 56 constituencies for the lower house and nine for the upper house—65 in total, nearly 15 percent of Myanmar's 440 parliamentary seats.

The announcement did not provide details on the cancellations, but most affected areas are active conflict zones where the military has lost control to pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic armed groups. [Mizzima 2]

Myanmar: Junta generals line up for parliamentary seats ahead of December election

(anl) At least six senior Myanmar generals are preparing to contest parliamentary seats in the upcoming election, with more than two dozen other military and ex-military figures expected to follow, according to a junta source.

The six lieutenant generals reportedly seeking seats are: Lt-Gen Tayza Kyaw, Commander of Bureau of Special Operations 3; Lt-Gen Soe Tint Naing, Defense Services Inspector and Auditor; Inspector General of Defense Services Lt-Gen Thet Pon; Adjutant General Lt-Gen Phone Myat; Military Appointments General Lt-Gen Lin Aung; and Chief of Defense Industries Lt-Gen Kan Myint.

Also tipped as a military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) candidate is ex-general Aung Lin Dwe, a close confidant of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing. Although he retired last month, Aung Lin Dwe still holds positions in both the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC) and the junta's interim government.

In total, around 30 military-linked figures—including serving generals, retired officers, and regime appointees such as ministers and directors-general—are preparing to run. Most are expected to contest "safe" USDP constituencies in Naypyitaw and other military strongholds.

The junta has announced that the first phase of voting will take place on December 28 across 102 townships. So far, 57 political parties have registered, though most are small, pro-military groups with little public support. Only six—including the USDP—plan to field candidates nationwide. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Regime grants amnesty to Arakan Front Party Chairman, clears path for election bid

(anl) On 11 September, the military regime granted amnesty to Arakan Front Party (AFP) chairman Aye Maung, removing his previous convictions and sentences to allow him to contest in the upcoming election.

Aye Maung has pledged to uphold the military's "Three Main National Causes"—non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national unity, and consolidation of sovereignty—as he prepares to re-enter politics. The junta stated that the pardon was granted in recognition of his commitment to these principles and his pledge to help build "a Union founded on genuine, disciplined democracy and a federal system."

In March 2019, during the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, Aye Maung was sentenced to 20 years in prison for high treason and Section 505(b) for incitement. He was released in February 2021, shortly after the coup, on condition that any future offense would reinstate his remaining sentence.

Legal barriers had also prevented him from re-entering politics. Under the 2020 Election Law, he was barred from contesting future elections, and Section 88(a) of the junta's election law prohibited his candidacy. These restrictions have now been lifted by order of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Aye Maung is a veteran politician in Rakhine State. First elected to the National Assembly in 2010, he lost his seat in 2015 but returned in a 2017 by-election to represent Ann Township in the Pyithu Hluttaw. He was later arrested for speeches delivered in 2018 at a ceremony marking the fall of the Rakhine monarchy in Rathedaung Township, which led to his conviction.

Rakhine-based media report that Aye Maung plans to contest the National Assembly seat for Constituency No. 3 in Sittwe District in the upcoming election. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: NUG expresses conditional openness to political dialogue with military

(anl) Union Minister U Yee Mon of Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) stated that revolutionary forces would be open to political dialogue if coup leader Min Aung Hlaing and the military genuinely committed to systemic change.

In an interview with PVTV, a NUG-affiliated media outlet, he stressed that Myanmar's people have long sought to end military involvement in politics through peaceful means, but the Spring Revolution has forced a new generation into armed struggle, viewing resistance as preferable to oppression.

He warned that the military risks total collapse if it continues to cling to absolute power, emphasizing that responsibility lies primarily with top commanders rather than ordinary soldiers. U Yee Mon urged the junta to reconsider its course, calling for unity instead of internal division. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: First conviction under controversial election law

(dql) Myanmar's new election law, introduced in July, has seen its first conviction. As announced by state-run media, Ko Nay Thway was sentenced to seven years of hard labor for criticizing the upcoming parliamentary election. In online footage of a car robbery, the convicted criticized the junta for urging voter participation without ensuring safety in urban areas.

His comments directly attacked the election law, which imposes severe penalties for dissent or interference with the voting process. They range from 3-20 years in prison to the death penalty for offenses causing death. [Jurist] [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: National League for Democracy warns members against participation in elections

(anl) The National League for Democracy (NLD) has issued a warning to its members, stating that anyone who takes part in the military-organized elections—whether as a candidate or in any other role—will face disciplinary action under party rules.

Reiterating its stance to both the public and the international community, the NLD stressed that it neither accepts nor recognizes the junta's proposed electoral process. Instead, the party continues to call for the restoration of democratic governance in Myanmar and urges both domestic and international actors to reject what it views as an illegitimate bid to maintain power. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: UNICEF condemns deadly attack on Rakhine boarding school

(su) UNICEF has expressed alarm over an overnight airstrike on September 12 that struck a boarding school in Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State, reportedly killing and injuring students as they slept. In its press release, the agency said the attack reflected a wider pattern of "relentless" violence in Rakhine, where children and families are bearing the brunt of escalating conflict.

The statement noted that civilians are losing their lives in spaces meant to protect them, including homes, schools, and dormitories — while displacement, food shortages, and the collapse of education and healthcare systems compound the suffering. UNICEF urged all parties to uphold international humanitarian law by safeguarding civilian infrastructure, protecting children, and allowing humanitarian assistance to reach affected communities. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: UNHCR chief urges wider aid access and funding amid deepening crisis

(su) Following his recent three-day mission, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi warned of extensive suffering in Myanmar, driven by ongoing conflict, widespread displacement, and the aftermath of the March earthquake. He cited aerial strikes, destruction of homes, and forced recruitment as key factors pushing communities into repeated cycles of displacement, emphasizing that "civilian men, women and children must be shielded from violence" and allowed to return to their homes "safely and with dignity."

During his visit, Grandi met with internally displaced and stateless people and toured communities affected by the earthquake. In Naypyidaw, he called for broader humanitarian access and urged all parties, with international support, to pursue durable solutions for those forcibly uprooted, particularly the Rohingya.

Grandi also highlighted severe funding gaps: UNHCR's Myanmar operations require USD 88.3 million this year but have received only 33 percent, while the UN-wide Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, including earthquake relief, is funded at just 22 percent of its USD 1.4 billion target. He plans to carry these concerns to a high-level meeting in New York later this month, focusing on the Rohingya and other minority groups. [UNHCR] [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Heavy fighting continues in Bhamo

(anl) The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has reported the military regime has recaptured two more bases in Bhamo, Kachin State, though clashes continue in and around the town.

On September 11, junta forces retook the headquarters of the 236th Infantry Battalion and the 5014th Tank Battalion. The KIA said the military has relied heavily on artillery and drone strikes, but no ground clashes have been reported in recent days.

Despite these gains, fighting has not subsided, with clashes ongoing in Washawng and nearby villages. Control of these areas would bring the junta closer to advancing on Chipwi, a key rare-earth mining hub, as well as Kanpiketi, a border town with China.

The junta has claimed to have regained all military bases in and around the town after eight months of resistance to the KIA offensive. It reported 506 clashes since the offensive began, while admitting that some KIA units remain in the area.

Bhamo is strategically located on the Irrawaddy River and National Highway 31, just 65 kilometers south of Laiza, the KIA headquarters. The ethnic army launched its offensive last December, seizing most of the town's military positions. The tide shifted in early August, when a flotilla of 17 junta vessels brought reinforcements. Within days, the regime recaptured the 366th Artillery Battalion, sparking intense back-and-forth fighting in which several outposts repeatedly changed hands.

Meanwhile, the junta has expanded its counteroffensive to Waingmaw Township, close to the Kachin State capital Myitkyina, where clashes remain fierce. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Military regains key strongholds near Myawaddy in Southern offensive

(dql) The military has retaken key outposts on Lakhat Mountain, the highest peak near the strategic border town of Myawaddy, in its renewed offensive to reassert control over southern Karen State. The positions, seized in July 2023 by the Karen National Liberation

Army (KNLA) and allied People's Defense Force (PDF), had withstood repeated assaults until now.

The recapture follows the regime's recent advances on the Asian Highway between the town of Kawkareik—30-40 kilometers north of Myawaddy—and Myawaddy and the retaking of the operational command base at Thingannyinaung, with support from the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF). Junta troops are now advancing south, reclaiming resistance-held areas with little direct fighting, as some zones are already under BGF influence.

Local sources say resistance forces have partially withdrawn, though fighters remain in parts of Lakhat Mountain. The junta is also believed to prepare a 400-strong offensive to seize remaining strategic positions, including Swe Taw Gone artillery base near Lay Kay Kaw, south of Myawaddy, and Falu camp near Myawaddy. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Regime troops raid villages in Wetlet Township

(anl) On September 11, regime troops raided upper and lower Taik villages in Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, killing one man and setting fire to around 50 houses in Upper Taik Village, according to the Wetlet Information Network, a grassroots organization documenting and reporting on the ongoing conflict. The network's leader reported that about 100 soldiers took part in the operation.

The raid comes amid escalating junta operations in Wetlet Township. On September 10, a 300-pound bomb struck a school in Thitseint village. A day earlier, airstrikes targeted at least six villages. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta conducts airstrike on Rakhine boarding school

(anl) On September 12, a military airstrike on a private boarding school in Thayat Tabin Village, Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State, killed 22 people, most of them schoolchildren.

Local Rakhine media reported that the death toll rose to 22 in the evening after four more children succumbed to severe injuries, adding to the 18 students and neighborhood children initially confirmed dead by the Arakan Army (AA).

Residents said no ground clashes were taking place in the area when the bombing occurred. Meanwhile, pro-junta social media accounts alleged that the AA had been training troops in the village.

Kyauktaw town has been under AA control since January 2024. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Arakan Army reports deadly clash with Bangladeshi fishing boats in Rakhine water

(su) The Arakan Army (AA) announced on September 11 that a confrontation with Bangladeshi fishing boats illegally operating in Myanmar's territorial waters near Yathedaung Township, Rakhine State, had left two of its coastal security personnel dead. According to the AA, around 80 boats crossed six kilometers into Myanmar waters on September 10 near Koetankauk and Chainkhali villages. AA coastal forces intercepted the vessels and seized five of them, but one crew allegedly attacked escorting officers later that evening, killing two and fleeing back across the border with stolen weapons.

The AA described the incursion as a violent escalation, noting that in previous cases intruding vessels had been released with warnings. In a statement, the group warned that it would "respond effectively" to the killings and theft. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Five tons of narcotics bound for Malaysia seized

(dql) Police have seized more than five tons of narcotics in Yangon, including 4.4 tons of methamphetamine, one ton of ketamine, 14 kilograms of heroin, and over four million stimulant tablets, in raids conducted between September 5 and 7.

Authorities arrested at least a dozen suspects and confiscated several vehicles, including one used to arrange maritime transport of the drugs to Malaysia. [Free Malaysia Today]

Philippines: Marcos creates independent commission to probe infrastructure

corruption, cancels 2026 flood control projects

(ghd/ms) As part of his administration's crackdown on corruption, President Marcos issued Executive Order No. 94, creating the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI). This order was released on September 11. The ICI is tasked with investigating all government infrastructure projects from the past ten years, including but not limited to the allegations of corruption in flood control projects. The ICI shall be headed by former Supreme Court Justice Reyes. The members are former Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) secretary Rogelio Singson and Rossana Fajardo, country managing partner of the Philippine member firm of Ernst & Young. Due to his investigatory expertise, Mayor Magalong has been named the ICI's special advisor and investigator.

While it is only a recommendatory body, the ICI has been granted broad powers to carry out its investigations. It can investigate, hear evidence, and gather information against individuals involved in anomalies related to the planning, financing, and implementation of projects. Specifically, it has the authority to issue subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents. As part of its proceedings, the ICI can recommend the admission of state witnesses, request asset seizures, recommend the immediate preventive suspension of any public official when necessary to preserve evidence, and recommend the issuance of hold departure orders for the subjects of investigations. Based on its findings, the ICI can recommend the filing of criminal, civil, and administrative cases with the appropriate bodies. [Inquirer1][Inquirer2][Inquirer3]

In the days following the creation of the ICI, President Marcos toughened his rhetoric, warning that "no one will be spared" from accountability — including political allies — if evidence links them to irregularities. He further announced that all flood control projects in the proposed 2026 budget would be cancelled, redirecting funds toward education, health, and agriculture. The move signaled a major shift in government spending priorities and an effort to prevent future misuse of infrastructure allocations.

One of the contractors implicated in the corruption scandal is now facing administrative proceedings initiated by the Commission on Elections (Comelec). The Comelec has issued a show-cause order to Lawrence Lubiano of Centerways Construction and Development Corp., based on Lubiano's admission during a congressional hearing that he donated USD

524 thousand to Senator Escudero's senatorial campaign. A similar action against Escudero is forthcoming. Section 95 of the Omnibus Election Code specifically prohibits government contractors from making political contributions, and any person from soliciting or receiving contributions from government contractors. [Inquirer4][Inquirer5]

The Discayas, who are also implicated in the scandal, are facing hurdles in their bid to be named state witnesses and granted immunity. Both justice secretary Remulla and senate president Sotto declined their request. According to Remulla, the primary condition for the consideration of their request is the restitution of the money they allegedly obtained illegally from the government. Sotto stated that it would be unjust to the public to provide protection to people who have stolen a significant amount of public funds. Senator Lacson also cited the couple's doubtful credibility, considering their inconsistent statements, as another hindrance to the grant of immunity. [Inquirer6] [Manila Bulletin1]

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) has now filed charges for graft and malversation through falsification, among others, with the Office of the Ombudsman against 25 individuals, including several DPWH officials, and four construction companies, including a firm owned by the Discayas. Three officials – namely Brice Hernandez, Jaypee Mendoza, and Juanito Mendoza – have also been dismissed and banned for life from public office due to their involvement in this scandal. [Inquirer7][Manila Bulletin2][Manila Bulletin3]

Congressional hearings concerning the corruption scandal are still ongoing. During an infrastructure committee hearing, the license lending scam was discussed in depth. Under this scheme, licensed contractors which managed to secure contracts for infrastructure projects subcontract the work to unqualified parties, bypassing government qualification standards and requirements. Despite being illegal, this practice is allegedly widely used. [Inquirer8]

Lacson has also publicly presented evidence of alleged budget insertions, linking these to DPWH Undersecretary Cabral. During his privilege speech, Lacson displayed a screenshot of a message Cabral sent to Senator Sotto shortly after his election, inviting him to submit a list of his priority projects for inclusion in the budget. Sotto declined to do so. Lacson asserted that this was proof that Cabral was actively soliciting budget insertions. [Manila Bulletin4]

In a separate instance, Lacson confirmed that a USD 6.2 million budget insertion for Bulacan was made in either the senate or bicameral version of the 2025 budget, as this was not present in the house of representatives' version. He is currently investigating who proposed this insertion, and whether any projects have been awarded from this amount. [Inquirer9]

Meanwhile, given the number of items and documents that need to be reviewed to ensure a diligent and prudent submission, the house committee on appropriations extended the deadline for the DPWH to submit its revised budget for 2026 to September 15. The committee also rescheduled the next budget hearing from September 16 to 18. [Inquirer10]

Adding to political tensions, Senators Jinggoy Estrada and Joel Villanueva were directly implicated in alleged kickback schemes during the most recent hearings, though both lawmakers have firmly denied wrongdoing, and signaled willingness to "open" there bank accounts for investigation. [Inquirer 11]

Philippines: Anti-corruption protests swell ahead of September 21 rallies, Marcos cancels UN trip

(ms) Protests over alleged corruption in government projects are escalating across the Philippines, with major demonstrations planned for September 21 — the 53rd anniversary of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s declaration of martial law in 1972. The growing unrest has prompted President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to cancel his scheduled trip to New York for the United Nations General Assembly, saying he will "focus on local issues."

The latest wave of protests began on September 12, when thousands of students dressed in black walked out of classes at universities across Metro Manila. At the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman and Manila campuses, along with De La Salle University and others, demonstrators linked the country's current social problems — from overcrowded classrooms to poor public health services — to the misuse of funds in multi-billion peso flood-control projects. Investigations have found that many of these projects were either substandard or never built, despite being reported as complete.

The student actions, dubbed "Black Friday," received official backing from UP administrators and spread quickly to other groups. Networks such as the Taumbayan Ayaw sa Magnanakaw at Abusado Alliance

and the Panatang Luntian Coalition have joined forces with church leaders and advocacy groups, calling for nationwide participation in rallies on September 21. In Manila, two major events are planned: a march to Luneta Park and the so-called “Trillion Peso March” at the EDSA People Power Monument, where religious leaders have described corruption as a moral and spiritual crisis.

The planned mobilizations draw on the symbolism of martial law’s anniversary. On September 21, 1972, Marcos Sr. signed Proclamation 1081, placing the Philippines under military rule. The move dissolved democratic institutions, muzzled dissent, and centralized power in Malacañang. It also entrenched a system of patronage and corruption that drained public coffers while poverty deepened. For organizers of today’s protests, recalling that era is a way of framing present scandals not as isolated anomalies but as part of a recurring pattern of abuse.

The scale of the alleged corruption has heightened the sense of urgency. Finance Secretary Ralph Recto recently estimated losses of USD 2.07 billion (PHP 120 billion) over just two years due to incomplete or fraudulent infrastructure projects. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered an independent body to investigate, while the Senate has launched its own inquiry. Both processes have been accompanied by public skepticism, especially as some lawmakers themselves face allegations.

Authorities have so far allowed the demonstrations to proceed peacefully. Police have placed 2,500 officers on alert in Metro Manila, mindful of unrest in Indonesia and Nepal where anti-corruption protests turned deadly. Officials have promised “maximum tolerance” to avoid escalation, though traffic disruptions and temporary road closures have already been reported.

With students, churches, and civic groups coalescing around a shared demand for accountability, the September 21 rallies are expected to be the largest protest actions in recent years. [ABS-CBN] [PhilStar 1] [PhilStar 2]

Philippines: ICC pushes back on former President Duterte trial delay

(ms) The International Criminal Court (ICC) is pressing ahead with its case against former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, rejecting his defense team’s request to indefinitely suspend proceedings on grounds of

poor health. The move reflects growing frustration in The Hague over repeated attempts to stall one of the Court's most consequential prosecutions, while raising questions in Manila about the political and legal implications of Duterte's detention abroad.

In filings released this week, ICC Deputy Prosecutor Mame Mandiaye Niang argued that the defense's medical reports claiming Duterte suffers from memory loss and severe cognitive decline do not provide sufficient basis for halting proceedings. Duterte's lawyers had sought an indefinite adjournment, claiming the 80-year-old is unable to recall key facts or even recognize close family members. The prosecution countered that only the judges can determine fitness and urged the chamber to commission further examinations by independent forensic experts familiar with courtroom standards. While conceding that a short delay may be appropriate, the prosecution insisted that a ruling on Duterte's condition must be reached before the end of 2025 to allow the confirmation of charges hearing to move forward.

That hearing, originally scheduled for September 23, will decide whether there is enough evidence to proceed to a full trial. Duterte faces accusations of crimes against humanity linked to thousands of extrajudicial killings during his nationwide war on drugs and earlier anti-crime campaigns in Davao City. More than 300 victims have registered to participate in the case, making it one of the ICC's largest victim-backed proceedings to date.

The health claims have fueled skepticism among observers. Joel Butuyan of the Center for International Law said Duterte's own children have publicly described him as alert and even joking during visits. He suggested that the defense strategy is part of a pattern of delays after earlier motions to challenge the Court's jurisdiction and disqualify judges and prosecutors failed. Victims' groups have expressed similar frustration, warning that continued postponements risk denying justice nearly a decade after the killings began. [PhilStar 1] [PhilStar 2] [PhilStar 3]

Prosecutors also highlighted the political context, pointing to Vice President Sara Duterte's public rejection of the Court's legitimacy. In a filing, they cited her remarks that her father had been "kidnapped" by the ICC and her suggestion—albeit in jest—that supporters should plan a "jailbreak." She also repeated her father's alleged vow to "double" killings if allowed to return as mayor of Davao City. Prosecutors argued that these statements show a refusal to accept the proceedings and reinforce the need to keep Duterte in detention to prevent interference. [Inquirer]

Meanwhile, in Manila, the Office of the Ombudsman dismissed complaints filed by Senator Imee Marcos against Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla over the government's role in Duterte's handover to the ICC earlier this year. Imee Marcos had accused Remulla and others of arbitrary detention and graft, arguing that transferring Duterte violated Philippine sovereignty given the country's 2019 withdrawal from the Court. The Ombudsman's dismissal clears a significant obstacle for Remulla, who is seeking to become the next Ombudsman after the retirement of Samuel Martires in July. Without clearance from the Ombudsman, he would have been ineligible for nomination by the Judicial and Bar Council. Imee Marcos has since filed a motion for reconsideration, signaling that the case remains politically charged. The episode illustrates how Duterte's detention continues to shape Philippine politics: while the ICC proceedings unfold abroad, debates over cooperation with the Court and the legacy of the drug war remain deeply divisive at home. [PhilStar 5] [PhilStar 6]

As judges weigh Duterte's medical fitness, the prosecution is pushing to ensure a confirmation hearing takes place before year's end. The outcome will determine not only the fate of the former president but also the ICC's credibility in pursuing accountability for alleged crimes committed at the highest levels of power.

Philippines: Budget clash puts Vice President Duterte under fresh scrutiny

(ms) On September 16, Vice President Sara Duterte appeared in person—alone—before the House appropriations committee and waived the tradition of "parliamentary courtesy," opening herself to direct questioning on the Office of the Vice President's (OVP) proposed 2026 budget. Minority lawmakers queued to interpellated Duterte on spending priorities and program justifications. [Philstar 1]

The OVP is seeking PHP 902.8 million (USD 15.9 million) for 2026, about 21 percent higher than this year's PHP 744 million (USD 13.1 million), though still its lowest allocation since Duterte took office. Scrutiny also extends to travel: as of July 31, the OVP reported PHP 20.68 million (USD 364,000) in total trips, including PHP 7.47 million (USD 132,000) for foreign missions. Upcoming September visits to Japan follow several trips to Europe tied to former president Rodrigo Duterte's detention at the International Criminal Court. [GMA News] [PhilStar 2] [Politiko]

Background: The hearing was originally deferred on September 12 after the OVP initially designated Assistant Secretary Lemuel Ortonio to stand in, which lawmakers said violated House practice that agency heads—or at least undersecretaries—defend budgets. The OVP denied "snubbing" the process, saying Duterte was ready to appear when her chief-of-staff Zuleika Lopez fell ill, but that sponsor Rep. Jose Alvarez advised them not to proceed; the office released text messages to support its account. The rescheduling set the stage for Duterte's September 16 appearance and her decision to forgo parliamentary courtesy, ensuring full questioning at the committee level.

Philippines: Court delays ruling on pork barrel graft cases against President Marcos' chief legal counsel Enrile

(ms) The Sandiganbayan – which handles corruption cases against public officials – on September 12 postponed its ruling on 15 graft charges against Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Juan Ponce Enrile, his former chief of staff Gigi Reyes, and businesswoman Janet Lim Napoles, citing the need for further deliberation. One of the division's justices submitted a "reflection" on the case, prompting the court to move the promulgation to October 24.

Enrile, now 101, attended the hearing via Zoom, while Reyes appeared in person and Napoles — already serving time for an earlier graft conviction — joined as co-accused. The cases are tied to the multibillion-peso Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) scandal, also known as the pork barrel scam, in which lawmakers allegedly funneled public funds into fake NGOs controlled by Napoles. Enrile is accused of misusing PHP 172 million (USD 2.9 million), with Reyes and Napoles said to have facilitated the diversion.

The "pork barrel scam" first broke in 2013 and triggered widespread outrage over systemic corruption. Then-Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales charged Enrile and others with plunder and graft. While Enrile was acquitted of plunder in 2023 after prosecutors reportedly failed to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt, the graft charges remained. Testimonies from municipal agriculturists in Pangasinan, Davao Oriental, and La Union revealed that projects supposedly funded by Enrile's PDAF never materialized.

The case carries political weight because of Enrile's current position as Chief Presidential Legal Counsel under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. In this role, he

serves as the government's top lawyer, advising the president on constitutional issues and representing the executive in sensitive legal matters. Critics argue that his ongoing trial undermines the credibility of the administration's anti-corruption stance, while supporters frame him as a political survivor unfairly entangled in decade-old controversies. [GMA News] [Inquirer] [The Manila Times]

Philippines: Ethics complaint filed over lawmaker's posts, coup claims

(ms) Representative Kiko Barzaga is under fire from his former party, the National Unity Party (NUP), the second-largest bloc in the House of Representatives, which announced plans to file an ethics complaint against him for social media activity it described as offensive, reckless, and potentially seditious.

Deputy Speaker and NUP chair Ronaldo Puno detailed the complaint on September 15, citing Barzaga's Facebook posts that alluded to setting Congress on fire and making light of violent protest. One post read: "Don't burn down the House of Representatives tomorrow, I still have a privilege speech on Monday." Others contained lewd content, attacks on women, and criticism of Speaker Martin Romualdez under the hashtag #PhilippinesVsRomualdez. Puno said the behavior was a "willful degradation of standards" for a public official.

The controversy escalated after Barzaga, 27, reportedly barged into the office of House Majority Leader Sandro Marcos and declared his intent to run for Speaker. According to Puno, Barzaga asked Marcos and his staff to support him, even offering deputy speakerships in exchange. He has since been observed campaigning inside Congress and talking of declaring all seats vacant — actions Puno called "out of place and inappropriate."

Barzaga denied plotting to oust Romualdez, but resigned from NUP last week after rumors circulated that he was soliciting signatures for a coup. Upon resigning, he called for Romualdez himself to be investigated over alleged corruption in flood control projects, particularly in Cavite.

The complaint also raises questions about whether NUP vetted Barzaga before supporting his 2022 candidacy. Puno noted that Barzaga's mother, Dasmariñas Mayor Jenny Austria-Barzaga, had previously warned party leaders not to assign her son too many responsibilities.

Barzaga has dismissed the allegations, saying Puno "is mistaken" and insisting he is "calling for peace," not sedition. [GMA News] [Inquirer] [Rappler]

Philippines: Remulla faces new detention and graft complaints over Alice Guo arrest

(ms) Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla is facing another complaint of arbitrary detention — this time linked to the arrest of dismissed Bamban, Tarlac mayor Alice Guo — just days after a similar case tied to Rodrigo Duterte's detention was dismissed (see article above).

Lawyer Ferdinand Topacio filed the complaint on September 15 before the Office of the Ombudsman, naming Remulla and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Director Jaime Santiago. He alleged that both officials unlawfully arrested and detained Guo and businesswoman Cassandra Ong, who are linked to alleged illegal Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator (POGO) operations in Bamban and Porac.

Guo became a controversial figure in 2024 after Senate hearings connected her to Chinese-backed POGO hubs in northern Luzon that were allegedly involved in fraud, human trafficking, and espionage. She was later removed from office for misrepresenting her citizenship and residency, but remains under investigation for her role in the operations.

Topacio argued that Guo and Ong were detained at the NBI headquarters on August 22, 2024 without a warrant, and that agents neither caught them in the act of committing a crime nor had personal knowledge of one. He claimed Santiago admitted he acted "on Remulla's orders."

Alongside the detention complaint, Topacio also filed graft charges, accusing Remulla and Santiago of abusing their authority and causing "undue injury" by depriving Guo and Ong of liberty without legal grounds. [PhilStar]

Philippines: Former mayor acquitted of graft charges

(ghd) The Sandiganbayan, the Philippines' anti-graft court, acquitted former Pangasinan mayor Camacho and a private individual, Willy Chua, of two graft charges due to the prosecution's failure to prove the specific charges as originally filed.

The charges stemmed from an alleged irregular land transfer in 2013 which caused a claimed loss of USD 150 thousand to the government. The court held that while a land exchange with a private individual was not a valid method of property disposal, the accused could not be convicted as the only irregularity cited in the charges was the difference in market values. Convicting the accused based on other proven irregularities, such as Camacho's failure to determine the public land's fair market value and his failure to obtain the approval of the audit commission, would violate their constitutional right to be informed of the nature of the charges against them. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Conviction of former councilor affirmed

(ghd) The anti-graft court, Sandiganbayan, affirmed the conviction of former Quezon City councilor De Guzman on multiple counts of graft and malversation. The charges were related to the hiring of fictitious employees, which resulted in the misuse of USD 6 thousand in public funds for salaries and bonuses. De Guzman was sentenced to six to eight years in prison for each of the 16 counts of graft, and six to ten years for each of the 16 counts of malversation. Additionally, he was permanently disqualified from holding public office, and was ordered to repay USD 6 thousand to the government. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Party-list seats increased

(ghd) The Commission on Elections (Comelec) announced that the Gabriela party-list will be getting the 64th seat in the House of Representatives. This was the result of a Comelec resolution which increased the number of seats, in compliance with the 1987 Constitution which mandates that party-list representatives must comprise 20 percent of all House members. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Literacy program launched

(ghd) On September 13, the Department of Education launched the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. This initiative aims to strengthen literacy and address learning gaps for Filipino students by providing tutorial support in reading, mathematics, and science for learners from

kindergarten to grade ten. The department is also conducting nationwide tutor training, providing learners with learning recovery kits, and holding orientations for parents and guardians. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: President Marcos signs E-Governance Act

(ghd) On September 5, President Marcos signed Republic Act No. 12254, or the E-Governance Act, into law. This law aims to institutionalize the government's transition to an e-governance system primarily by implementing a secure and transparent information and communication system that will facilitate online services for citizens. This law applies to all branches of government, covering both public-facing and internal government operations. The law also mandates the creation of an electronic payment facility and encourages the use of digital certificates to reduce bureaucracy and simplify processes.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) has been appointed as the lead agency in the implementation and administration of the law. The DICT shall formulate a national policy, establish a project management office within a year, and draft a masterplan that will guide the digital transformation of the bureaucracy. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Jobless rate rises to 5.3 percent in July as labor force shrinks

(ms) The Philippine job market weakened in July 2025, with the employment rate slipping to 94.7 percent and the unemployment rate climbing to 5.3 percent, the highest in three years. The latest Labor Force Survey (LFS) showed 2.59 million Filipinos were jobless, up from 2.38 million a year earlier and 2.06 million in April.

Labor force participation — the share of the working-age population (15 years and older) that is either employed or actively looking for work — also declined. In July 2025, it dropped to 60.7 percent, or 48.64 million people, down from 63.5 percent or 50.06 million a year earlier. This means fewer Filipinos were engaged in the job market, whether by choice, due to discouragement, or because of schooling and household responsibilities. The number of employed

fell to 46.05 million, compared to 47.68 million in July 2024.

Underemployment also rose to 14.8 percent, translating to 6.8 million workers who said they wanted longer hours, an additional job, or better employment conditions.

By sector, services continued to dominate with 62.8 percent of total jobs, while industry and agriculture accounted for 18.7 percent and 18.5 percent respectively. Yet agriculture and retail trade were hit hardest, losing 1.38 million and 897,000 jobs. Growth came in administrative support, transport, health, manufacturing, and education.

The LFS also highlighted weaknesses in youth employment. Among those aged 15 to 24, labor force participation fell to 29.5 percent from 34.2 percent the year before. The share of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) rose to 15.9 percent, while youth underemployment climbed to 13.7 percent. These figures point to growing barriers for new entrants to the job market and highlight the persistent gap between education and employment.

Officials partly blamed the overall labor market downturn on multiple tropical cyclones that disrupted agriculture, construction, fishing, and retail. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) said its employment and livelihood programs aided over 1.4 million workers and emphasized the need for reskilling and sustainable jobs, especially as the Philippines prepares to chair ASEAN in 2026.

Analysts, however, cautioned that the July setback may reflect more than weather disruptions. Pantheon Macroeconomics noted fading corporate hiring plans amid weaker business confidence and U.S. trade tensions, warning that the labor market is "likely to wobble" in the months ahead despite possible near-term improvements. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin] [Philippine Statistics Agency]

Philippines: Navy commissions new frigate

(ms) The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has inducted its newest guided-missile frigate, the BRP *Diego Silang*, in a ceremony at the Naval Operating Base in Subic, Zambales. The vessel is the second Miguel Malvar-class frigate acquired from South Korea's HD Hyundai Heavy Industries under a 2021 contract.

The *Diego Silang* is a 3,200-ton multi-role warship measuring about 114 meters in length, with a crew capacity of roughly 120. It is equipped with a Vertical Launch System for surface-to-air missiles, a Close-In Weapon System for short-range defense, and upgraded communications and electronic warfare systems. Compared to the earlier Jose Rizal-class frigates, it has greater displacement, endurance, and range, allowing longer deployments and more expansive operations.

Designed for versatility, the ship can conduct anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare missions. Its induction gives the Philippine Navy a significant boost in maritime defense capability, particularly in contested waters of the West Philippine Sea. [PhilStar]

Philippines: Navy conducts successful missile launch

(ghd) On September 9, during a live-fire exercise in the waters of Zambales, the Philippine Navy successfully conducted its first aerial launch of a Spike Non-Line of Sight (NLOS) missile. The Spike NLOS missile is a precision-guided missile system from Israel that can be launched from both air and surface platforms. Due to its advanced technology, it can even engage targets outside visual range. For this exercise, an AgustaWestland AW159 Wildcat anti-submarine warfare helicopter launched the missile, which successfully hit its target.

This marks a step in enhancing the country's maritime defense capabilities, as this technology improves the navy's ability to defend maritime chokepoints. [Manila Bulletin]

Singapore: Tax receipts and housing sales surge as economy shows resilience

(ms/nl) Singapore's economy is gaining strength in 2025, with government revenues, household incomes, and property transactions all on the rise. Tax receipts jumped 10.7 percent to SGD 88.9 billion (USD 69.2 billion) in the financial year ending March, while private home sales in August hit a nine-month high at 2,142 units. Together, these indicators point to a city-state benefiting from stronger corporate earnings, robust consumer demand, and intergenerational wealth transfers, even as authorities maintain cooling measures and global conditions remain uncertain.

Tax collection for the financial year ending March 2025 rose 10.7 percent to SGD 88.9 billion (USD 69.2 billion), according to the Inland Revenue Authority. The increase was driven by stronger corporate earnings, rising wages and household consumption, pushing tax revenue to 12.2 percent of GDP and covering more than three-quarters of government operating revenue. Corporate income tax remained the largest source of revenue at SGD 30.9 billion (USD 24.0 billion), though its share eased slightly to 34.8 percent. Goods and services tax collections expanded sharply to SGD 20 billion (USD 15.6 billion), supported by robust consumption and a rate adjustment, while property tax and stamp duties also rose in line with stronger real estate activity. Individual income tax revenue climbed to SGD 19.1 billion (USD 14.9 billion), reflecting higher salaries and a growing taxpayer base.

At the same time, the private housing market has seen a notable rebound. In August, developers sold 2,142 new homes, the highest monthly sales in nine months and the strongest since November 2024. The surge was fuelled by multiple new projects launches in both suburban and prime districts, with the River Valley area drawing interest from expatriates and wealthy local buyers. The bulk of transactions were concentrated in units priced between SGD 1 million and SGD 2 million (USD 780,000–1.6 million), which has emerged as the sweet spot for middle-class households seeking private housing as resale prices for government-built flats continue to climb.

Analysts note that easing borrowing costs has been a key driver of this momentum. Benchmark interest rates closely watched by homebuyers have halved since the beginning of 2024, making financing more affordable. Alongside this, intergenerational wealth transfers are fueling real estate purchases as families channel long-term savings into property as a store of value. [Bloomberg] [Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore] [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Carbon tax allowances spark debate

(nl) Singapore's government has defended its carbon tax allowances for major emitters, saying the measure helps trade-exposed industries adapt to higher costs while still pushing them to cut emissions. The National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS) noted that allowances are pegged to global best practices and cover only part of a facility's emissions, with the rest taxed at SGD 25 (USD 19) per ton. Officials argue the policy is needed to prevent companies from relocating

to jurisdictions with looser climate rules, which would shift emissions abroad and undermine local jobs.

Environmental groups, however, contend that the system lacks transparency and may not ensure companies adopt credible decarbonization plans. Civil society organizations, including youth-led initiatives, have called for detailed disclosure of allowances granted to each facility, pointing to international examples where such information is made public. They argue that without robust reporting and independent verification, it is unclear whether large emitters are genuinely moving toward net-zero commitments.

The discussion unfolds as Singapore's carbon tax is set to rise to SGD 45 (USD 35) in 2026–27 and could reach up to SGD 80 (USD 62) by 2030. While the government has pledged to release aggregated data on allowances, it maintains that firm-level details could expose commercially sensitive information. At the same time, authorities highlight measures to buffer households from higher utility bills, including enhanced U-Save rebates and climate vouchers, framing the policy as part of a balancing act between climate ambition and economic competitiveness. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Expanded grants and credits to ease costs for large families in Singapore

(nl) From September 10, households in Singapore with three or more children will receive annual credits of SGD 1,000 (USD 780) for each third or subsequent child aged one to six. The support, channeled through the LifeSG app, is expected to cover about 33,000 children this year. The credits, which are valid for 12 months, can be used for a range of household needs such as groceries, transport, utilities, and healthcare-related purchases.

In addition to the credits, families with children born on or after February 18 this year are eligible for higher government contributions. The Child Development Account First Step Grant has been doubled to SGD 10,000 (USD 7,800), while each eligible child will also receive a MediSave Grant of SGD 5,000 (USD 3,900). The funds are intended to offset preschool and healthcare costs and will be disbursed automatically once families are enrolled in the Baby Bonus scheme.

The measures form part of the new Large Families Scheme, introduced at Budget 2025. Alongside state funding, more than 50 organizations are offering discounts under a related initiative called "Large Families Deals", which covers items such as diapers,

groceries and ride-hailing services. Authorities have encouraged more firms to join, positioning the program as both financial relief for households and an effort to promote family support in Singapore. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: New patrol planes and F-35 jets to expand military reach

(gp/ms/nl) Singapore is set to modernize its air power with two major acquisitions: four Boeing P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and 20 Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets. The moves are part of a long-term strategy to enhance surveillance and combat capabilities as the regional security environment grows more complex.

On 10 September 2025, the Ministry of Defence announced that the P-8As will replace the ageing Fokker-50s, which have been in service since 1993. Deliveries are expected before the end of the decade, with the full fleet projected to enter service by the early 2030s. The P-8A, widely operated by US allies, is designed for anti-submarine warfare, reconnaissance, and maritime surveillance—capabilities central to safeguarding Singapore's sea lanes.

The F-35 program is further along. Singapore finalized contracts for 20 aircraft in earlier phases, and production has already started. The first jets are scheduled for delivery by the end of 2026. A new Republic of Singapore Air Force squadron will be established to operate them, with pilot training based at Ebbing Air National Guard Base in Arkansas alongside partner nations.

The decision was conveyed by Defense Minister Chan Chun Sing during his visit to Washington, where he met U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth.

Alongside the aircraft deal, the ministers discussed regional security developments and agreed to expand collaboration in areas such as joint research, development and advanced training. During the remainder of his visit, Chan is also scheduled to hold talks with senior U.S. defense and security leaders, including officials from the Air Force, Navy, the National Security Council, and members of Congress. [Ministry of Defence, Singapore] [The Straits Times 1]

At the same time, the SAF is testing new unmanned aerial systems at Exercise Forging Sabre in Idaho, where the large training space allows for advanced trials. Three types of drones, the Ascent Spirit, Skydio

X10 and Neros Archer, are being deployed to assess their ability to operate autonomously, withstand communication disruptions and support missions alongside manned platforms. The exercise also marks the first participation of the SAF's new drone unit, tasked with rapidly integrating such systems into operations. [AsiaOne] [Reuters] [The Straits Times 2]

Thailand: Court ruling triggers competing proposals for constitutional rewrite

(lm) Thailand's constitutional reform debate has once again intensified following a Constitutional Court ruling on September 10 that any new charter to replace the 2017 military junta-drafted constitution requires three referendums and bars direct election of members to a Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA). The Court specified that the first referendum must ask voters both whether a new charter should be written and whether they approve the principles and methods guiding its drafting. A second referendum would approve the completed draft. Judges confirmed parliament holds the authority to initiate the process but emphasized that CDA members can only be indirectly selected. [Thai Enquirer 1]

Newly-appointed Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul reaffirmed that charter reform is a priority for his Bhumjaithai-led coalition, which has signed a memorandum of agreement with the main opposition People's Party. He pledged to dissolve parliament after the next general election, expected within four months, and aims to align the first referendum with that vote. [Bangkok Post 1]

The People's Party welcomed the ruling, noting it allows the first referendum to proceed alongside the election if parliament swiftly amends Chapter 15 of the constitution, which governs amendment procedures and the creation of mechanisms like a CDA. The party argued that even without direct CDA elections, parliament could still design an indirect appointment system to ensure citizen participation in drafting. [Thai Enquirer 1]

The Pheu Thai Party, which was running the government until the Constitutional Court recently removed its leader Paetongtarn Shinawatra from the post of prime minister, has set up a committee to prepare its own amendment proposals under Section 256(8). Party leaders said their draft will focus on clear referendum questions while considering CDA selection through parliament or a parliamentary-appointed body. Pheu Thai has also raised doubts about the four-

month timeline agreed between Bhumjaithai and the People's Party, warning that securing three readings in parliament, Senate approval, and nationwide referendums may not be feasible within that window. [Thai Enquirer 2] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

The Election Commission has indicated it is ready to organize referendums but is awaiting formal government instructions. Legal experts caution that completing the required process before the government's planned dissolution of parliament will be difficult, given the time needed to organize even a single nationwide vote.

Meanwhile, the Senate has begun shaping its own approach. The Senate Standing Committee on Political Development, Public Participation, Human Rights, Liberties, and Consumer Protection has presented models for a CDA based on indirect mechanisms, such as citizens electing groups of representatives who could then be nominated for final parliamentary selection. Senators stressed the need for public engagement and education ahead of a referendum, expected early next year. Senator Premsak Piayura separately urged the Upper House to debate next steps, suggesting a model inspired by the 1997 CDA, which combined provincial nominations with expert appointments. [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5]

Thailand: Cabinet reshuffle advances as polls question stability of minority government

(bk/lm) Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul is finalizing his cabinet lineup amid persistent doubts about the durability of his minority government, which relies on support from the main opposition People's Party (PP).

On September 15, three new MPs were sworn in to fill party-list vacancies created by resignations tied to cabinet appointments. Rungruang Pitayasiri entered parliament from Pheu Thai, while Tipanan Sirichana and former Bangkok governor Aswin Kwanmuang joined from the United Thai Nation Party (UTN). The vacated seats came from Suchart Chomklin, a former labor minister, and Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana, a former minister in the prime minister's office, both expected to serve in Anutin's cabinet.

Key appointments under review include Gen Nattaphon Narkphanit, the caretaker deputy defence minister, who is expected to continue handling defense and play a leading role in the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC) with Cambodia, where border

disputes remain unresolved. Auttapol Rerkpiboon, former head of the state-owned oil and gas company PTT, is tipped to become energy minister, while Borwornsak Uwanno, a legal scholar and former constitution drafter, is expected to take the post of deputy prime minister overseeing charter reform. Vetting of nominees is still ongoing. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The political reshuffle comes against the backdrop of public skepticism about government stability. A National Institute of Development Administration (Nida) poll (September 8–9) found that 36 percent of respondents consider the government unstable due to its reliance on PP negotiations, while 30 percent saw a minority government as the best option for now. Over half (56 percent) said they expect the government to last only four months, reflecting the timeline tied to constitutional reform and a possible general election.

A separate Suan Dusit University survey (September 9–12) of 1,232 voters emphasized expectations for transparency and effectiveness: more than 75 percent called for proactive action, 65 percent urged cross-party cooperation, and 64 percent prioritized integrity in government performance. Looking ahead to the next election, 24 percent of respondents said they would support the PP, 14 percent backed Anutin's Bhumjaithai Party, and another 24 percent remained undecided. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Shinawatra dynasty faces political reckoning

(bk/msz/lm) Thailand's Shinawatra political dynasty is seeking to reorganize its influence after a dramatic fall from power that saw former prime minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra dismissed for an ethics violation and her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, returned to prison. The Pheu Thai Party — long synonymous with the family name — now faces questions over whether to remain under the Shinawatra brand or pursue reforms to survive in a shifting political landscape.

Paetongtarn was removed from office on August 29 after the Constitutional Court ruled that a leaked audio conversation with Cambodian strongman and incumbent Senate President Hun Sen constituted misconduct. The Court later reaffirmed the ruling's legality, but the Election Commission clarified that she can remain Pheu Thai leader under party regulations. Senior figures such as former deputy prime minister and Pheu Thai heavyweight Phumtham Wechayachai

stressed that her leadership will continue as long as members retain confidence in her. The party is also preparing internal reforms and competing in upcoming by-elections, including a September 28 vote in Si Sa Ket [Thai Enquirer] [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Meanwhile, Thaksin — the billionaire tycoon and former prime minister who reshaped Thai politics with populist policies in the early 2000s — is serving a one-year prison term at Klongprem Central Prison. Rights groups and critics have urged authorities to prevent any special treatment, with the Network of Students and People for Thailand's Reform threatening legal action if he is allowed to serve his sentence outside prison facilities. While the Election Commission has dismissed allegations that Thaksin illegally influenced six political parties during his daughter's administration, a separate probe into his influence over Pheu Thai remains active. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5]

At the same time, the party's 2023 campaign pledge — a digital wallet program distributing THB 10,000 (USD 290) in digital currency to every Thai citizen aged 16 and above — faces scrutiny. Estimated at THB 35 billion (USD 1.01 billion), the scheme was designed to inject demand into local economies by requiring recipients to spend funds within a defined period and in their communities. Critics allege the program was partly financed by reallocating budget lines earmarked for debt servicing, potentially breaching Section 144 of the 2017 Constitution, which prohibits diverting funds legally committed to obligations such as loan repayments. Violations carry severe penalties, including removal from office, political bans, and repayment of state funds. The National Anti-Corruption Commission is investigating whether the Srettha and Paetongtarn governments crossed this line. [Bangkok Post 6]

These overlapping crises have intensified debate inside Pheu Thai over its dependence on the Shinawatra brand. Senior members such as Sutin Klungsang and Prasert Jantararuangtong call for unity and reform, while critics warn the party could shrink into a medium-sized bloc as rivals like Bhumjaithai expand. Party spokesman Danuporn Punnakanta admitted that analysts project Pheu Thai could win fewer than 100 seats in the next election [Bangkok Post 7] [Bangkok Post 8] [Bangkok Post 9]

Still, the party has shown resilience at the ballot box. On September 14, it decisively retained its Chiang Rai stronghold, with candidate Sanga Phrommueang securing nearly 46,000 votes against 20,000 for his People's Party rival. Party leaders argue that despite

legal setbacks and leadership turmoil, the Shinawatra name continues to command loyalty, particularly among grassroots supporters in the north and northeast. [Bangkok Post 10]

Thailand: Evidence of Senate vote-buying in northeastern province to be sent to court

(lm) Thailand's Election Commission (EC) says it has gathered substantial evidence of vote-buying in the 2024 Senate election in Roi Et, a province in the country's northeast, and is preparing to submit the case to the Supreme Court. The investigation, covering candidates from the Administration and Security professional group, uncovered chat logs, bank transfers, and video evidence showing payments of between THB 15,000–50,000 (USD 405–1,350) offered to secure votes.

The EC said the alleged scheme involved multiple candidates and intermediaries coordinating through messaging apps and cash handovers. The Department of Special Investigation (DSI), Thailand's counterpart to the U.S. FBI that handles complex financial and organized crime cases, is separately probing potential money-laundering linked to the vote-rigging network, interviewing hundreds of individuals.

The June 2024 Senate vote produced controversial results, with more than half of the chamber's 200 seats reportedly going to figures tied to the Bhumjaithai Party, which is led by newly-appointed Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Education minister vows to advance stalled national education bill

(lm) Thailand's Education Minister Narumon Pinyosinwat has pledged to push forward the long-delayed national education bill during the current parliamentary session, describing it as essential to modernizing the country's education system.

The proposed legislation, intended to replace the 1999 National Education Act and its 2019 revision, has repeatedly stalled in parliament and is widely referred to as a "cursed law." Narumon said several outdated provisions in the current framework obstruct decentralization, which she views as critical to reducing regional inequality in education.

The minister noted that the previous administration submitted seven draft versions of the bill — six from political parties and one from the Education Ministry and affiliated groups — but progress halted because the Finance Ministry has yet to provide feedback. She said she has contacted the ministry's permanent secretary to expedite the review so that the bill can advance before the end of the current parliamentary term. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Democrat Party leader resigns, leaving oldest party at a crossroads

(lm) Thailand's Democrat Party, the country's oldest political party, has entered a period of transition following the resignation of its leader Chalermchai Sri-on. Elected the party's ninth leader at an extraordinary congress on December 9, 2023, with a mandate to revive a shrinking electoral base, Chalermchai stepped down citing health concerns. His departure, effective immediately, comes amid internal tensions after four of the party's 25 MPs defied an order to abstain from the September 5 prime ministerial vote and instead backed Bhumjaithai Party leader Anutin Charnvirakul, who has since become Thailand's 32nd prime minister. Deputy leader Pramual Pongthavaradet has been appointed interim leader.

Observers note that Chalermchai's resignation underscores the party's long-standing difficulties in regaining electoral strength and managing finances in opposition. The Democrats are now split between veteran figures —including former prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who retains political weight despite stepping back from leadership in 2019, and elder statesman Chuan Leekpai— and a younger faction led by Dech-it Khaothong and Chaichana Detdacho. Analysts argue that the Democrats' survival will hinge on whether they can unify under ideology and reassert their conservative brand, with some speculating that Abhisit could return to leadership.

As elections are expected within months, the Democrats' ability to rebuild support in their traditional strongholds of Bangkok and the South will determine whether they stage a modest comeback —with targets of up to 50 seats— or remain sidelined in Thailand's shifting political landscape. [Bangkok Post] [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Ombudsman under pressure as new appointment confirmed

(lm) Thailand's Ombudsman Songsak Saichue has defended his handling of the case surrounding former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's hospitalisation at the Police General Hospital, amid growing criticism. Songsak said his review was conducted strictly within the law, noting that inmate medical transfers are determined by licensed physicians under the Medical Profession Act, with oversight by the Medical Council, while health records are protected by national privacy laws. He emphasised that his office did not endorse or validate Thaksin's medical condition, since enforcement of sentences lies with the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions.

To address concerns about transparency, Songsak has proposed amending regulations so that any inmate treatment lasting more than 120 days requires formal review and written documentation by prison officials. His remarks come as the Network of Universities for Reform submitted a petition with over 730 signatures calling for his removal, following a Medical Council finding of insufficient evidence that Thaksin was critically ill and disciplinary measures against three doctors involved. [Bangkok Post 1]

Meanwhile, Thailand's Senate has appointed former assistant national police chief Sarayut Sanguanphokhai as a new national ombudsman. Sarayut, who previously headed the Narcotics Suppression Bureau and Provincial Police Region 4, is known for his work in narcotics suppression in the Northeast. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Parliament advances pollutant disclosure law to strengthen environmental transparency

(lm) Thailand's Parliament has unanimously approved the draft Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) law in its first reading, with 434 votes in favor, four abstentions, and four members not voting. The bill, originally proposed through a public petition endorsed by over 12,000 citizens, is designed to improve transparency on pollution and strengthen public health protections.

The law enshrines the "community right-to-know" principle, requiring the creation of a national open-data platform that will track pollutant releases into air,

water, and soil from factories, power plants, mining operations, vehicles, and chemical-intensive agriculture. A 39-member special committee will be appointed within 15 days to review and refine the bill before it moves forward. [Greenpeace]

Thailand: Appeals Court rejects petition to declare disappeared pro-democracy activist legally missing

(bk) The 7th Regional Court of Appeal has upheld the dismissal of a petition by the family of Siam Theerawut, a Thai political exile and pro-democracy activist, seeking a legal declaration that he is missing under Section 61 of the Civil and Commercial Code. The court ruled that Siam still has outstanding arrest warrants and may be evading authorities, finding the evidence insufficient to grant the petition. Despite this setback, the family intends to continue pursuing legal avenues to manage his affairs.

Siam, who fled Thailand after the 2014 military coup due to lèse-majesté charges, disappeared in May 2019 in Vietnam alongside fellow activists. Reports suggest they were detained by Vietnamese authorities for using fake passports and possibly deported to Thailand, though the government denies this. His family has repeatedly sought information from Thai authorities without success.

Human rights organizations, including the Cross-Cultural Foundation and Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, continue to support the family, emphasizing that Siam's disappearance may constitute an enforced disappearance under Thailand's 2022 Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act. The family has stressed that the petition is focused solely on managing civil affairs, not presuming Siam's death. The case underscores broader challenges for families of forcibly disappeared persons in Thailand, where legal recognition is complicated by outstanding warrants, limited transparency, and few avenues for justice, while advocates maintain that the state has a responsibility to investigate and provide remedies in line with international human rights obligations. [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Appeal Court suspends jail terms of protest activists

(lm) Thailand's Appeal Court has suspended the prison sentences of Natthanon "Frank" Chaimahabut and four other members of We Volunteer (WeVo), a protest group formed during the 2020 anti-government demonstrations. WeVo, largely composed of young activists, provided organizational support and security during rallies.

The case stemmed from an incident on October 30, 2020, when the group gathered at Bangkok Remand Prison and later blocked a police van transporting protest leaders Parit Chiwarak and Panupong Jadnok to a station. The activists used motorcycles to surround the van, striking it with helmets and other objects, which shattered windows. Four prison officials were injured, though the detainees were still delivered to the station. The group later protested outside without notifying authorities, in violation of the Public Assembly Act.

In 2023, the Court of First Instance sentenced the defendants to four years and six months in prison and fines of THB 50,000 (USD 1,380) each. Following guilty pleas, the sentences were reduced to two years and three months and suspended for two years.

The Appeal Court has now revised the punishment to two years in prison and fines of THB 20,000 (USD 550) each, with the sentences suspended for two years. It also acquitted the defendants of the illegal assembly charge. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Civil society pushes for stronger domestic violence protection law

(lm) Civil society groups in Thailand are intensifying efforts to advance a new domestic violence victims protection bill, arguing that current laws prioritize reconciliation over accountability and leave victims inadequately protected. At a public forum convened by the Coalition Against Gender-Based Violence Thailand, participants highlighted the persistence of domestic abuse, sexual harassment, assault, and online harassment, with women, LGBTQ+ and transgender individuals particularly at risk.

Data presented by the Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation showed that in 2023, nearly 40 percent of reported domestic violence cases involved physical assault, while 35.7 percent involved murder, often within marital relationships. Alcohol and drug use were contributing factors in more than half of all incidents. Sexual violence within families accounted for over 4 percent of cases, often involving close relatives,

while young victims were especially vulnerable in sexual assault cases.

Activists stressed that the existing Domestic Violence Protection Act emphasizes reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, undermining deterrence and safety. The proposed new bill seeks to close these gaps by prioritizing victim protection, ensuring criminal accountability for abusers, and aligning Thailand's legal framework more closely with international human rights standards. It accompanies pending legislation such as the Sexual Harassment Bill, now under Senate review. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Study finds widespread workplace sexual harassment in private sector

(lm) More than 40 percent of employees in Thailand's private sector report experiencing sexual harassment, according to a study by Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research, conducted with support from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. Surveying 603 workers across 67 companies in export-oriented industries such as automotive, electronics, textiles, food processing, and tourism, the research found that LGBTQ+ employees (60.2 percent) and women (45.9 percent) were most affected, with harassment particularly prevalent among workers aged 20–24.

The most common forms reported included mocking physical appearance, sexual jokes or teasing, unwanted touching, and sexually suggestive remarks. The study underscored weak corporate safeguards: nearly half of respondents said their companies had no clear anti-harassment policy, and over 40 percent had never received training or awareness programs. Many victims avoided perpetrators rather than using formal complaint mechanisms, citing fear of retaliation and lack of trust in company processes.

Researchers stressed that despite the existence of the Gender Equality Act (2015) and Labor Protection Act, enforcement in the private sector remains limited. They warned that harassment poses not only risks to individual dignity but also significant economic and reputational risks for firms engaged in global supply chains. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Experts call for justice reform to ease overcrowded prisons and align with international standards

(lm) Thai legal experts have renewed calls to overhaul the country's justice and corrections system, warning that its punitive orientation continues to drive prison overcrowding and weak rehabilitation outcomes. As of July 2025, the prison population stood at 296,480, of which 211,138 were convicted prisoners — the majority incarcerated for drug-related offenses. This has drawn international concern, as Thailand now ranks among the countries with the world's highest incarceration rates.

At a forum marking the 110th anniversary of the Department of Corrections, government adviser Tongthong Chandransu stressed that entrenched policies prioritizing punishment over rehabilitation have limited reintegration opportunities, raising recidivism risks and posing long-term social and economic challenges.

Thailand has introduced partial reforms, including adoption of the United Nations' Nelson Mandela Rules on humane treatment and the Bangkok Rules, which it pioneered in 2010 to strengthen protections for women prisoners and non-violent offenders. Correctional facilities now incorporate vocational training, education, and psychosocial support, but experts argue implementation remains uneven and systemic reform is needed.

Royal-backed initiatives — such as agricultural training programs, drug-prevention campaigns, and learning schemes — have gained attention, yet reform advocates say they cannot substitute for deeper legal and institutional changes. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Regulator warns over harmful media content targeting vulnerable groups

(lm) Thailand's National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) held talks with media associations and state agencies on September 15 following controversy over derogatory remarks made in a YouTube broadcast by a prominent former television host against a member of parliament who has spoken publicly about depression.

The case, which triggered backlash on social media, has been used by regulators to highlight broader risks

of harmful content in the Thai media landscape. While licensed broadcasters are generally cautious, regulators noted that unregulated online platforms are amplifying such content. The NBTC said it is considering measures to address the problem and stressed that mental health awareness remains a recognized national priority. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government probes surge in gold exports to Cambodia amid money-laundering concerns and currency appreciation

(lm) Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has ordered an investigation into a sharp rise in Thailand's gold exports to Cambodia, amid fears that the flows may be linked to money laundering and are contributing to the rapid appreciation of the Thai baht.

Data from the Customs Department show that shipments to Cambodia surged 19 percent year-on-year in the first seven months of 2025, reaching THB 71.3 billion (USD 2.25 billion). This puts Cambodia on track to rival Switzerland and Singapore—traditional hubs for Thailand's gold trade—in terms of volume. For comparison, Thai gold exports to Cambodia totaled THB 106 billion (USD 3.1 billion) in 2024, a dramatic increase from just THB 12 billion (USD 350 million) in 2023.

The Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) has warned that the surge may be linked to Cambodian casinos and scam networks using gold as a channel for illicit financial flows. The unusual trade is also seen as a driver of the baht's nearly 8 percent rise in 2025, which has made it Asia's second-strongest currency after Taiwan's dollar and raised concerns about competitiveness in Thailand's export and tourism sectors. Business groups say the trend is straining baht liquidity, compounded by large-scale remittances from migrant workers.

The Bank of Thailand (BoT) held talks with the Gold Traders Association and major gold manufacturers on September 15 to assess the situation. The central bank is exploring measures to reduce the impact of gold trading on the exchange rate, including encouraging the use of U.S. dollars in domestic transactions. The Gold Traders Association has also been urged to improve monitoring of baht-denominated purchases.

YLG Bullion International, one of Thailand's largest wholesale traders, said its operations remain normal,

with long-standing clients subject to strict Know Your Customer checks. However, it acknowledged that some shipments have been rerouted through Singapore due to partial border closures with Cambodia, offering easier payment processing.

Separately, Sonthiya Sawasdee, a well-known political activist and former adviser to parliamentary committees, petitioned the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) to trace transactions and investigate whether Cambodian gambling operations and scam networks are converting Cambodian riel into Thai baht via gold purchases. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Government considers co-payment program relaunch to boost domestic consumption

(bk) The Thai government is set to relaunch the "Khon La Khreung" (Let's Go Halves) co-payment program, offering around 11 million personal income taxpayers a special 60 percent subsidy on daily purchases, while the general public, including state welfare cardholders, will receive a 50:50 subsidy. The program will be managed through the existing 'Pao Tang' app, which allows flexible adjustments to co-payment ratios, participating merchants, product categories, and monthly spending limits.

The initiative aims to ease household expenses and stimulate domestic consumption by injecting cash directly into the economy. Spending will be capped daily or monthly, and participating merchants include small businesses, restaurants, and retail outlets nationwide. New merchants must register, while verified previous participants can join immediately. The Bhumjaithai Party is considering the program to help counter Thailand's slowing economy, with public support strong, especially on social media.

Small businesses and restaurants have voiced strong support, as a survey by the Thai Restaurant Association showed average sales declines of 25–50 percent compared with last year, forcing closures, layoffs, and reduced operating hours. The program is expected to boost household purchasing power, support local supply chains, and circulate money regionally. The initial budget is THB 25 billion (USD 789 million), sourced from remaining funds of a prior THB 157 billion (USD 5 billion) stimulus, with additional allocations potentially coming from the 2026 fiscal budget. Previous phases of Khon La Khreung were estimated to contribute around THB 90 billion (USD 2.8 billion) to GDP. Using the existing app platform

ensures familiarity for users and enables efficient policy adjustments, such as the new 60:40 subsidy ratio for taxpayers. [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Authorities face backlash over wrongful bank freezes in scam crackdown

(lm/acs) Thai authorities have expanded the temporary suspension of bank accounts suspected of links to "mule accounts" used in online scams, but mounting cases of wrongful freezes are drawing concern from lawmakers, businesses, and ordinary citizens.

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (DES), the Bank of Thailand (BoT), commercial banks, the Thai Bankers' Association, the Anti-Money Laundering Office (Amlo), and the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB) have created a joint "war room" to coordinate investigations. Suspensions typically last three days under bank orders or up to seven days under police authority, and are lifted once no evidence of criminal activity is found. Reviews assess transfer routes, transaction patterns, and whether account activity matches a holder's financial history.

The BoT has acknowledged technical errors and rigid enforcement, with some freezes exceeding actual holdings and creating negative balances. Banks have been told to compensate affected clients and improve communication. Authorities stressed that most cases can be resolved quickly once verified, but admit scammers are increasingly sophisticated, sometimes exploiting legitimate purchases and even minors' accounts. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Parliamentary committees have warned that innocent citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are being severely disrupted. Vendors in Khon Kaen, Uthai Thani, and Nakhon Ratchasima have switched to "cash only" sales to avoid freezes. In Bangkok, a doctor reported that nine of his accounts — including salary accounts — were suspended after fraudsters used his ID to open a digital wallet linked to illicit transfers.

Lawmakers have proposed standardized nationwide criteria for identifying mule accounts, a unified appeals mechanism for wrongly affected account holders, and a central database of suspicious accounts. They also urged stronger coordination between state agencies, banks, and private sector actors, alongside long-term development of a central platform for reporting and

verifying suspected fraudulent activity. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Fourth-largest lender restructures retail banking as household debt and digital shift reshape sector

(lm) Siam Commercial Bank (SCB), Thailand's oldest bank and currently the fourth-largest lender, is scaling back its retail operations in response to elevated household debt and the rapid adoption of digital banking. Since May, SCB has reorganized its retail division into a broader "consumer banking" unit covering retail, branch networks, and employees.

The bank, which employs about 18,000 staff across 651 branches, expects workforce and branch numbers to shrink gradually, targeting around 500 outlets in the near term as transactions migrate online. SCB's branch activity has halved from 120 million annually pre-pandemic to about 60 million, while its mobile app now counts 17 million users. The bank aims to shift 20 percent of branch transactions to digital channels by year-end.

To manage the transition, SCB has launched a voluntary early retirement program for staff over 55 and is retraining employees as virtual financial advisors. Around 1,000 staff are expected to complete reskilling programs this year. Branches are being converted into "smart branches," integrating artificial intelligence to streamline operations and deliver tailored financial services.

SCB is also rebalancing revenue between corporate and retail banking, with retail no longer expected to dominate as in the pre-pandemic years. The bank is targeting a return on equity of 10 percent, a cost-to-income ratio below 40 percent, and digital revenue rising to nearly 25 percent of total revenue by the end of 2025. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Senate committee urges suspension of land bridge project over lack of local input

(lm) A Senate committee has called on the government to pause its land bridge project, valued at THB 1.1 trillion (USD 30.7 billion), citing inadequate consultation with affected communities. The initiative, led by the Bhumjaithai Party of newly-appointed Prime

Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, seeks to connect the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea through deep-sea ports in Chumphon and Ranong, supported by double-track rail and expressway links.

The Senate's panel on political development and public participation said villagers were largely excluded from the consultation process and that information released differed from earlier studies. It recommended a strategic environmental assessment by the National Council for Economic and Social Development to properly evaluate economic, social, and ecological impacts.

Concerns include massive land reclamation, as the proposed Ranong seaport would be nearly the size of Koh Phayam — a small Andaman island about 35 square kilometers known for fishing and eco-tourism — while the Chumphon port would be 3.5 times larger than Koh Lipe — a tourist island of around 4 square kilometers near the Malaysian border. Local groups warn this could threaten marine life, damage fishing and tourism livelihoods, and impact indigenous sea gypsy communities. Up to 13 reservoirs are also planned by the Royal Irrigation Department to supply water, raising fears of conflict over resources.

Critics argue the draft Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) bill, designed to provide the legal framework for the project, gives disproportionate power to its management committee and could favor investors at the expense of local interests. The Senate panel suggested that the project should be included in party manifestos at the next election so that voters can directly decide whether to endorse it. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Debate grows over expansion of flagship investment zone

(lm) Thailand is considering whether to expand its flagship Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) — a government-backed special economic zone designed to attract advanced industry, logistics, and foreign investment — to include Prachin Buri, a province in eastern Thailand known for agriculture and manufacturing. The EEC currently covers Rayong, Chon Buri, and Chachoengsao provinces along the country's eastern seaboard.

A feasibility study led by the EEC Office and Thammasat University is ongoing, but public consultations have revealed sharp divisions. Opponents, including local environmental and community groups, argue that inclusion would allow

national EEC laws to override local land-use protections, turning Prachin Buri into an industrial dumping ground. They cite existing problems with illegal recycling and smelting plants operated by Chinese companies, warning of risks to agriculture, tourism, and public health.

Supporters — notably business leaders, local officials, and chambers of commerce — counter that joining the EEC would modernize infrastructure, boost employment, and raise household incomes. They argue that the zone's focus on high-tech industries, digital services, and medical hubs could bring long-term benefits. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Army launches online campaign for military enlistment

(lm) The Royal Thai Army has opened its 2026 online recruitment cycle, running from September 1, 2025, through January 25, 2026, inviting Thai men aged 18–20 and 22–29 to enlist via its official portal.

The drive is being led by Lt Gen Boonsin Padklang, Commander of the 2nd Army Area, which oversees Thailand's northeastern region bordering Cambodia. Boonsin has risen to national prominence for his role in managing the ongoing Thai-Cambodian border conflict, marked by recent deadly clashes, skirmishes, and heightened nationalist sentiment along the frontier. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Anti-corruption body urges review of vague prison rules on off-site detention

(msz) Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) has urged the incoming cabinet to order a review of the Department of Corrections' 2023 regulations on detention outside prison, warning that vague definitions could be stretched to allow convicted individuals to serve sentences at private residences. The NACC, exercising its authority under the 2018 organic law on corruption prevention and suppression, said clearer criteria and stronger safeguards are needed to prevent preferential treatment and restore public trust.

The commission noted that the ambiguity over what constitutes a "detention facility" has fueled speculation that the rules might benefit high-profile figures, most

notably former prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Yingluck, who governed from 2011 to 2014, was ousted by a coup and later convicted in absentia of negligence over a controversial rice-pledging scheme; she has since remained in exile. Critics fear that under the current rules she could return under lenient conditions instead of serving time in prison, though the government has repeatedly dismissed such claims.

The debate comes against a backdrop of public protests over perceived impunity for political elites, intensified by the recent early release of former commerce minister Boonsong Teriyapirom, who was convicted in a rice-pledging corruption case. The NACC further recommended clearer public communication and the development of a long-term inmate classification system to ensure transparency and effective prison management. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Insurgents evade capture after clashes in southern village

(lm) Thai security forces are pursuing suspected insurgents who escaped after armed clashes in a village in Songkhla province on September 11. The suspects fled into nearby mountains despite a blockade and negotiations mediated by community leaders. Evidence recovered at the scene suggests some were injured.

Songkhla, in Thailand's deep south bordering Malaysia, is part of a region affected by a two-decade insurgency led by Malay-Muslim separatist groups. [Bangkok Post]

Vietnam: Politburo resolutions set agenda on energy, education, health, and diplomacy

(ms) Vietnam's leadership convened a series of high-level conferences in mid-September, outlining new priorities in foreign policy, energy security, education, healthcare, and digital transformation.

On September 16, a national conference in Hanoi brought together over 1.2 million delegates nationwide to discuss four new Politburo resolutions. These include strategies for international integration, ensuring national energy security through 2030 with a vision to 2045, accelerating education and training reform, and improving public health systems. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh presented the core content

of Resolution 71 on education, stressing implementation measures. Exhibitions alongside the event showcased recent achievements in health and education.

The same day, Party General Secretary To Lam held a working session with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, directing officials to strengthen the research and advisory role of Vietnam's diplomatic service and coordinate foreign affairs with defense and security policies. He emphasized the importance of multilateral diplomacy, maintaining a peaceful external environment, and expanding partnerships while navigating rising global competition. Ministers of Defense and Public Security underlined defense diplomacy and security cooperation as essential to safeguarding national development.

Separately, on September 13, the National Assembly hosted a thematic conference on digital literacy with 10,000 participants. To Lam called digital skills a core task tied to administrative reform and socio-economic development, urging a "mass digital literacy" campaign across state institutions. The initiative aims for all deputies and NA staff to achieve basic digital skills by 2026, integrated into the VNeID national digital ID system.

Taken together, the conferences highlight Vietnam's effort to link domestic reforms—education, health, energy, and digital transformation—with external strategies on foreign policy and security, reflecting an integrated approach to development in a rapidly shifting global environment. [Vietnam Law Magazine 1] [Vietnam Law Magazine 2] [Vietnam Law Magazine 3]

Vietnam: Government launches gold trading inspections as prices hit new highs

(hn) Vietnam has launched inspections into gold trading after sharp price volatility, tasking multiple ministries and the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) with monitoring compliance, anti-money laundering rules, and tax obligations. Any violations uncovered will be transferred to the Ministry of Public Security, with findings due to the Prime Minister by month's end.

Authorities vowed tough action against smuggling, speculation, tax evasion, and market manipulation. The SBV urged consumers to trade only through licensed entities and obtain e-invoices for protection.

The move follows the enactment of Decree 232/2025/NĐ-CP, which ended the state monopoly on Saigon Jewelry Company (SJC) gold bars, opening the market to qualified players to ease supply shortages and narrow domestic-global price gaps.

Despite these measures, gold prices surged to record highs, with SJC gold reaching VND 135.8 million (USD 5,148) per tael (1 tael = 37 gram) as global prices climbed past USD 3,640 per ounce (1 ounce = 28 gram). The cause has been attributed to a surge in international prices, with expectations that gold will surpass the USD 3,600 per ounce threshold, coupled with the State Bank of Vietnam's temporary suspension of SJC gold sales amid the transition to a new regulatory framework.

The crackdown comes as the Supreme People's Procuracy indicted former SJC CEO Lê Thúy Hằng and 15 associates for embezzlement and abuse of power, tied to losses during SJC's period of monopoly. [Vietnamnews] [Dantri, in Vietnamese]

In detail, Vietnam's Supreme People's Procuracy has issued an indictment against Hằng, former CEO of SJC, and four accomplices for embezzlement and abuse of power. An additional 11 individuals have also been charged with related offenses tied to gold processing and trading at SJC.

The indictment alleges that during SJC's execution of tasks assigned by the State Bank of Vietnam-including the production of SJC gold bars, gold rings, and price stabilization sales-Hằng and her associates manipulated regulations and diverted gold for personal gain. Total damage to SJC is estimated at over VND 107 billion (approximately USD 4.2 million), with VND 11.6 billion (USD 440,000) from embezzlement and VND 95.8 billion (USD 3,6 million) from abuse of power. [Tuoitre, in Vietnamese] [see AiR, No. 35. September/2025] [Vietnamnet, in Vietnamese]

Vietnam: New crypto trading framework targets institutional capital

(hn) Vietnam's government has greenlit a five-year pilot program for cryptocurrency trading, signaling a significant policy shift. The initiative seeks to harness the growth of the nation's digital asset market. Vietnam's annual digital asset transaction volume is estimated to surpass 100 billion USD, highlighting the need for a clear legal framework. [Vietnamplus]

Under the new rules, only Vietnamese companies are allowed to operate platforms and issue crypto assets, and all transactions must be conducted in the Vietnam dong. Issuance is restricted to foreign investors, while providers are required to have at least VND 10 trillion (about USD 379 million) in capital, with 65 percent coming from institutional investors. Foreign ownership in any trading provider will be capped at 49 percent.

Vietnam already ranks fifth globally in crypto adoption, with an estimated 17 million people holding digital assets worth more than USD 100 billion. Starting in 2026, digital assets will be formally recognized under a new law. Vietnamese and foreign investors will be able to open accounts under the pilot, but any trading on unlicensed platforms will be deemed illegal six months after the first license is issued, although penalties have not yet been specified.

The government has identified blockchain as one of 11 key technology sectors driving growth in the coming years. Last month, Vietnam's Military Bank signed a memorandum of understanding with South Korea's Upbit, the country's largest digital asset exchange, to help establish a local cryptocurrency exchange and transfer technology.

Despite these steps, Vietnam has not changed the legal status of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, which remain illegal as tender. However, the government is exploring special mechanisms, such as sandboxes, as part of its broader plan to develop international financial centers in Danang and Ho Chi Minh City. [Bloomberg] [Vnexpress]

Vietnam: Stock market set for upgrade and launch of new stock futures covering 100 leading firms to enhance market diversity

(hn) Vietnam aims to upgrade its stock market to a "secondary emerging market" status by 2025, while also expanding its derivatives market with the upcoming launch of VN100 index futures in October. The VN100, which includes the 30 largest firms and 70 mid-cap companies, is expected to offer broader market representation and reduce concentration risks compared to the VN30. On September 12, Deputy Prime Minister Hồ Đức Phớc approved a plan to develop the stock market as a key medium- and long-term capital-raising channel integrated regionally and internationally.

In the short term, Vietnam seeks to move from a frontier to a secondary emerging market according to FTSE Russell in 2025. Long-term goals include meeting MSCI emerging market criteria and achieving FTSE Russell advanced emerging market status by 2030. To meet the 2025 criteria, the plan addresses issues such as pre-funding securities purchases, transparency of foreign ownership, and equal access for foreign investors.

Measures to maintain the ranking include simplifying account opening for foreign investors, improving custodian-depository connectivity, implementing omnibus trading accounts (OTA), stabilizing the forex market, upgrading trading and settlement infrastructure, and enhancing inter-agency supervision. Long-term initiatives involve expanding foreign ownership limits, developing advanced payment and central clearing mechanisms (CCP), and gradually introducing controlled securities lending, short-selling, and risk-hedging tools for indirect investment.

Additional reforms focus on modernizing trading systems, increasing market liquidity, promoting market makers, applying IFRS and OECD governance standards, and diversifying investors through professional funds and new products such as infrastructure bonds, green bonds, derivatives, fund certificates, and green financial instruments. Vietnam's stock market is among the fastest-growing globally, with total capitalization projected at 103.75 percent of GDP in 2024, and the VN-Index up 33 percent from the end of 2024.

Another noteworthy event is that Vietnam will launch a new VN100 index futures contract in October, breaking the VN30 futures monopoly on the derivatives market. The VN100 futures, the second stock index derivative product in Vietnam, will have trading and settlement features similar to the VN30 futures to ensure easy investor access.

The VN100 index includes all VN30 stocks plus leading VNMidcap stocks (70 mid-cap companies), offering broader market representation, strong growth, and good liquidity. Unlike VN30, the VN100's top 10 stocks account for only 47.62 percent of the index, reducing concentration risk and better reflecting the overall market.

Key features of the VN100 futures include contract size of VND 100,000 x index point (VND 100,000 is about USD 3,79), trading via order matching and negotiation, multiple monthly expiry cycles, a daily price fluctuation limit of ±7 percent, and a maximum of 500 contracts

per order. The last trading day is the third Thursday of the month, adjusted if it falls on a holiday.

The SSC and Hanoi Stock Exchange (HNX) have already tested the product with market participants and banks. Experts note that the VN100 futures address limitations of VN30 futures, such as lower market representation and concentration in financial and real estate sectors, providing a more diversified derivative product for investors. [Vnexpress1] [Vnepxress2]

Vietnam: Central bank intervenes to stabilize national currency

(ab) The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) sold around USD 1.5 billion through short-term forward contracts on August 25–26 to ease pressure on the Vietnamese dong, according to MB Securities (MBS). While the move briefly calmed markets, the currency still ended August down 3.5 percent against the US dollar since the start of the year.

MBS attributed continued pressure to several factors: higher import demand ahead of the year-end production cycle, slower exports, cooling foreign investment inflows, and persistent dollar and gold hoarding. The brokerage projects the dong to average VND 26,600–26,750 per USD in 2025, implying further depreciation of 4–5 percent.

Domestic interest rates remain stable. Despite volatility in interbank lending, deposit rates have held near 4.9 percent as ample liquidity has kept funding costs low. However, MBS cautioned that stronger credit growth toward year-end could create mild upward pressure on rates. [The Investor]

Vietnam: Ratification of WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies

(ms) Vietnam has officially ratified the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, depositing its instrument of ratification at the WTO General Council in Geneva on September 15. The move makes Vietnam one of the final four countries — alongside Brazil, Kenya, and Tonga — needed to activate the accord.

Adopted at the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference in 2022 after more than two decades of negotiations, the agreement is the first multilateral trade pact focused on marine environmental protection. It prohibits

subsidies for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as for overexploited stocks and unregulated high-seas fishing.

Domestically, the agreement is expected to drive sectoral reforms, promote sustainable fisheries management, and protect the livelihoods of 1.45 million fishers and coastal communities. [Vietnam Law Magazine]

Vietnam: Schools to add Lao, Cambodian, Thai and Indonesian to language programs

(ms) Vietnam will expand foreign language education by introducing several Southeast Asian languages into school curricula over the next decade, the Ministry of Education and Training announced.

Lao will be taught starting in 2026, followed by Cambodian in 2028, and Thai and Indonesian from 2030. The plan, part of a 2026–35 language program, aims to strengthen ties with neighboring countries under existing bilateral agreements. Lao will first be piloted in provinces bordering Laos before nationwide expansion once enough teachers are trained.

Vietnam currently has more than 14 million students in grades one to 12, with English mandatory nationwide and other languages such as French, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, German, and Korean offered in selected provinces. French has the largest enrollment among these, with around 30,700 students.

To support the rollout, the ministry will recruit more teachers, including native speakers, and expand technology and AI-based platforms for language learning. [VnExpress]

Vietnam: Government seeks to diversify rice exports amid market halts

(ab) Vietnam is pushing to diversify export markets and raise the value of its rice amid temporary suspensions from key buyers, including the Philippines and Indonesia. Officials stress that while such pauses are not unusual, they highlight the risks of overreliance on a few markets.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade reaffirmed Vietnam's export target of 8 million tons for 2025, with

nearly 80 percent already achieved, and emphasized developing brand recognition, higher-quality varieties, and green farming standards. Efforts are also under way to expand exports to Africa, the Middle East, and South America, alongside upgrading trade agreements and easing domestic financial procedures for exporters.

The push reflects Vietnam's broader strategy of reducing dependence on traditional partners, strengthening its reputation as a responsible supplier, and aligning agricultural policy with its wider multilateral economic and trade diplomacy. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Trade with US and China slips after tariffs

(ab) Vietnam's exports to the US and imports from China both dipped 2 percent in August from July, according to customs data, as new US tariffs took effect. Shipments to the US totaled USD 13.94 billion, while imports from China—Vietnam's key source of manufacturing inputs—also eased.

Despite the monthly drop, Vietnam's exports to the US rose 26.4 percent in the first eight months of 2025 to USD 99.05 billion, underscoring the centrality of the American market. But reliance on Chinese materials remains high, with imports up 27 percent year-on-year to nearly USD 118 billion.

Economists warn that tariffs are likely to slow export momentum, with Oxford Economics flagging further easing and the World Bank trimming its 2025 GDP forecast to 6.6 percent. Hanoi, however, continues to target growth of over 8 percent, positioning trade resilience as part of its wider economic reform and growth agenda. [Reuters]

Vietnam: Government considers exemptions on global minimum tax for coal plants

(ab) Vietnam is weighing a proposal to exempt foreign-invested coal power plants, including those operated by Mitsubishi, Kepco, Marubeni, and others, from the OECD's 15 percent global minimum tax, according to a finance ministry document. The move, aimed at preserving investor confidence, could cost the state an

estimated USD 426 million in forgone revenue over two decades.

While the ministry argues the measure aligns with OECD guidelines and prevents potential compensation disputes, it highlights Vietnam's delicate balance between safeguarding its reputation as an attractive investment hub and meeting global commitments on tax reform.

Additionally, the plan raises questions about how such incentives square with the government's green energy ambitions. With parliament set to review the proposal, it highlights the tension between short-term investor confidence and long-term commitments to a sustainable energy transition. [Reuters]

Vietnam: Auto-motorcycle association sets 2035 EV goal, raising questions over motorbike ban timeline

(ab) The Vietnam Automobile, Motorcycle and Bicycle Association has announced plans for all members to produce at least one electric vehicle line by 2027, with the aim of transitioning fully to environmentally friendly EVs by 2035. The roadmap includes expanding charging stations, cutting emissions by half compared to 2020, and aligning with Vietnam's net-zero 2050 target.

While the strategy reflects Vietnam's wider green transition, it also casts doubt on the government's recently announced one-year timeframe for banning motorbikes in central Hanoi. If the industry itself requires until 2035 to shift fully to EVs, observers question why the ban was introduced without closer consultation and whether such a rapid rollout is feasible.

The mismatch between long-term industry planning and short-term government ambition highlights the challenges of coordinating Vietnam's green transformation. Without clearer standards, regulatory frameworks, and transitional support, the gap risks undermining both the credibility of the ban and Vietnam's broader climate and transport goals. [The Investor]

Vietnam: First domestically developed naval drone unveiled

(ms) Vietnam has tested its first domestically developed naval kamikaze drone. Footage aired on state broadcaster VTV1 showed the drone, designed by the Vietnam Institute of Naval Ship Design, equipped with machine vision, a satellite dish for long-range control, and an optical station for target acquisition in case of signal loss.

The system was developed under the General Department of Defense Industry, which also produces the BXL.01 strike UAV and QXL.01 reconnaissance quadcopter at the state-owned Z131 factory. Officials said the naval drone meets “modern military standards,” though detailed specifications were not disclosed.

Hanoi’s investment in unmanned systems reflects a push for cost-effective tools to monitor contested waters and deter larger adversaries. Vietnam and China have faced repeated confrontations at sea over competing territorial claims, making autonomous naval platforms increasingly valuable for surveillance and precision strikes.

Additionally, the move aligns with Vietnams efforts to diversify its military, as most recently seen in its participation at the International Defense and Security Equipment Exhibition in London (see more in the international section). [Militarnyi]

Vietnam: Credit database breach under investigation after hacker attack

(hn) Vietnam’s National Credit Information Center (CIC), managed by the State Bank of Vietnam, has been hit by a cyberattack targeting sensitive data, including personal details, credit payments, risk analysis, and credit card information according to a statement on September 11, 2025.

Authorities confirmed that hackers gained unauthorized access in an attempt to steal personal data, though the full extent of the breach is still under investigation. The international hacker group Shiny Hunters, previously known for attacks on Google, Microsoft, and Qantas, is suspected of orchestrating the incident. Despite the breach, CIC stated that operations remain functional with no service disruption reported, and the number of affected accounts has not yet been disclosed.

The breach comes against a backdrop of rising data leaks in Vietnam, with Viettel reporting 14.5 million

leaked accounts in 2024, making up 12 percent of the global total. [Reuters] [Business Times] [Vnexpress]

Vietnam: Police dismantle nationwide online military-grade gun network

(hn) Vietnamese police have dismantled a criminal network that manufactured and sold military-grade firearms through social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Telegram, Viber, and Zalo.

The operation involved assembling and modifying guns using machinery in two rented workshops in Hải Dương and fulfilling orders via courier. In early 2025 alone, the network processed over 3,500 orders worth around USD 380,000.

Police seized 58 firearms, including PCP rifles, shotguns, and a hunting rifle, along with thousands of gun parts, 130,000 bullets, and heavy machinery. Buyers in several provinces voluntarily surrendered additional rifles.

All seized items are classified as military-grade weapons under Vietnamese law, and the suspects face charges of illegal production, trafficking, and possession of military weapons under Article 304 of the Penal Code. Authorities continue to investigate to prosecute all individuals involved. [Vietnamnews]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

EU reaffirms readiness to face China economically, geopolitically

(dql) In her September 11 State of the Union address, held shortly after Russian drones had entered the Polish air zone the same day, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen addressed China with a focus on economic and geopolitical considerations. She emphasized the necessity for Europe to assert its position in the global arena, particularly in the face of challenges posed by major powers, including China. While specific details on China's role were limited, the context suggested a call for Europe to navigate its relations with China strategically, balancing economic interests with broader geopolitical objectives. [EU Commission] [Reuters]

In her speech, which opened with “Europe is in a fight,” and was dominated by the Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine, she linked Beijing’s growing influence to its close ties with Moscow, particularly in energy and defense, and highlighted the geopolitical risks posed by China’s dominance in critical sectors such as steel and battery production. Von der Leyen emphasized the need for Europe to reduce dependence on external powers, accelerate local production, and strengthen trade instruments to counter foreign overcapacity and influence, implicitly targeting China’s near-monopoly in these industries.

She also framed Europe’s commercial and technological policies as a means to defend its strategic autonomy, stating that the EU must develop “made-in-Europe” standards and supply chains to prevent China from dominating emerging markets like electric vehicles and cleantech.

By referencing China’s military parade and its alignment with Russia and North Korea, von der Leyen underscored the broader geopolitical challenges Europe faces, concluding that “Europe must fight …. in a world in which many major powers are either ambivalent or openly hostile to Europe,” and “dependencies are ruthlessly weaponized.”

Overall, her address positioned China as a central strategic competitor in trade, technology, and geopolitics, urging the EU to assert its economic and regulatory sovereignty while preparing to counter China’s growing influence through targeted industrial, trade, and regulatory initiatives. [SCMP] [Atlantic Council]

China rejects U.S. call for tariffs over Russian oil imports

(ask) Tensions between Washington and Beijing flared again this week over trade and geopolitical issues linked to the Russia–Ukraine war. China has strongly opposed U.S. calls for G7 and NATO countries to impose tariffs of 50 to 100 percent on Chinese goods over Beijing's purchases of Russian oil. The Ministry of Commerce denounced the proposal as unilateral bullying and economic coercion, warning that it violates the recent consensus reached between the two heads of state and could destabilize global trade and supply chains.

The ministry added China would take "all necessary measures" to safeguard its rights and urged Washington to resolve differences through dialogue while calling on other countries to uphold the international trade order. [Global Times] [Xinhua]

The U.S. pressure campaign reflects a broader effort to limit revenues from Russian oil. President Donald Trump has accused NATO allies of weakening the alliance by continuing imports, calling their purchases "shocking."

He has urged members to halt Russian oil imports altogether and threatened China with tariffs of up to 100 percent, arguing that Beijing's trade gives it "a strong grip" over Moscow. India has already been targeted with 50 percent tariffs, while other NATO states such as Turkey, Hungary, and Slovakia remain among Russia's key buyers.

Trump has framed tariffs as a tool to "break" Russia's reliance on Chinese trade and force progress toward ending the war in Ukraine. [Al Jazeera] [Euronews]

China condemns U.S. and British warships sailing through Taiwan Strait

(efg) China has condemned the United States and Britain for sending warships through the Taiwan Strait, describing the passage as "harassment and provocation" that undermines regional peace and stability. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) monitored the USS Higgins and HMS Richmond on September 12, while similar warnings were issued last week when Canadian and Australian warships transited the strait (see AiR No. 36, September/2025, 2). [People's Daily]

Simultaneously, China's third and most advanced aircraft carrier, the Fujian, departed Shanghai for exercises in the South China Sea. Beijing framed the deployment as routine training and scientific research, asserting it complied with domestic and international law.

The tensions reflect broader strategic messaging. Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun warned his U.S. counterpart against supporting "Taiwan independence," stressing that any foreign interference would be thwarted. The U.S., while emphasizing it does not seek conflict or regime change in China, reaffirmed its commitment to protecting its vital interests in the Asia-Pacific and to supplying Taiwan with defensive arms.

These developments highlight the ongoing strategic friction in the Taiwan Strait, underscoring China's determination to assert sovereignty claims over Taiwan and the U.S. and its allies' continued navigation operations, which Beijing views as a challenge to its regional influence. [Channel News Asia] [Hong Kong Free Press] [SCMP]

Japan sends fighter jets on first long-range mission to Europe, North America

(dql) Japan's Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) will dispatch F-15 fighter jets on a historic mission to the United States, Canada, Britain, and Germany starting September 14, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani announced. The two-week deployment, covering unprecedented distances, aims to showcase Japan's commitment to deepening defense cooperation with like-minded nations and strengthen ties with NATO allies.

Four F-15s will make the journey accompanied by four support aircraft, including a transport plane.

The deployment underscores Japan's integrated security perspective, linking the Indo-Pacific with the Atlantic and European theaters. Although joint training was initially considered, it was canceled due to the risks of operating in unfamiliar territory over such long distances.

The mission also represents a symbolic return of courtesy, following NATO allies' recent deployments to Japan, including British and German fighter jets and coverage for a British aircraft carrier. [The Asahi Shimbun]

South Korea, NATO explore deepened cooperation

(dql) South Korean Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back met with NATO's top military official, Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, on September 9 to discuss expanding collaboration in defense and arms production. Speaking on the sidelines of the Seoul Defense Dialogue, Ahn welcomed NATO's engagement in the security of the Korean Peninsula and the wider Indo-Pacific, emphasizing rising global tensions and interlinked security challenges.

Dragone, for his part, expressed interest in broadening cooperation across military exchanges, intelligence sharing, cyber operations, space, and artificial intelligence, with both sides committing to maintain high-level dialogue.

Ahn also conducted inaugural discussions with defense leaders from Croatia and South Africa. Talks with Croatian counterpart Anusic focused on boosting bilateral defense ties and exploring advanced technologies, including drones and unmanned systems. In discussions with South Africa's Motshekga, Ahn highlighted the historical contribution of South African troops during the Korean War.

Further, Ahn met Mongolian defense chief Batlut Damba to explore ways to expand exchanges, including participation in the Mongolia-led Khan Quest peacekeeping exercise.

Vice Defense Minister Lee Doo-hee held parallel meetings with officials from Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, and Sweden. Discussions covered military intelligence collaboration, defense industry partnerships—including FA-50 aircraft exports—maritime security cooperation with Singapore, and defense science and technology initiatives with Sweden. [Yonhap News Agency]

Pacific Islands Forum reaffirms Taiwan's role as development partner

(yl) The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) has reaffirmed Taiwan's status as a "development partner" during its recent five-day summit in the Solomon Islands. PIF Secretary-General Baron Waqa said leaders agreed to maintain the status quo, adding "there's nothing changed."

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) welcomed the communique, thanking PIF members for supporting Taiwan's continued participation in PIF mechanisms, such as the Taiwan/ROC–Forum Countries Dialogue. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan]

Unlike previous years, partner countries including Taiwan, China, and the US were not invited to this year's summit due to the host's review of partnership arrangements. Media reports suggested the Solomon Islands, which recognized China in 2019, had sought to block Taiwan's participation under Beijing's pressure.

Three PIF members, the Marshall Islands, Palau, and Tuvalu, maintain formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan. [Taipei Times] [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan pledges USD 3 Million to Pacific Resilience Fund

(dql) Despite being excluded from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting (see above), Taiwan has pledged USD 3 million to the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF), a regional climate and disaster fund. The donation, announced on Taiwan's behalf by Tuvalu during the September 8–12 meeting in the Solomon Islands, will be paid over three years.

Launched at the 54th PIF meeting, the PRF aims to help Pacific communities access global financing, targeting USD 500 million in initial capital and a long-term goal of USD 1.5 billion. Other pledges include USD 64 million from Australia, USD 25 million from the U.S., and USD 3 million from Japan.

Taiwan has been a PIF partner since 1993 and has a history of contributions, but this year's forum limited participation to the bloc's 18 member states, excluding partner countries such as Taiwan, the U.S., and China. [Focus Taiwan]

Rally in support of Taiwan's inclusion as a UN member held in New York

(acl) On September 13, overseas Taiwanese and lawmakers from Taiwan participated in a rally in New York City calling for Taiwan's inclusion in the United Nations (UN). Taiwan has been excluded from the UN since 1971.

Ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators Wang Cheng-Hsu and Lai Hui-Yuan, along with opposition Taiwan People's Party (TPP) legislator Mach Ngoc Tran, joined expatriates marching through the city, chanting "UN for Taiwan" and "Keep Taiwan Free."

The rally aimed to draw international attention to what participants regard as the UN's unfair treatment of Taiwan and to press for its inclusion as a UN member.

Members of the civil society organization Taiwan United Nations Alliance (TAIUNA) also travelled from Taiwan to New York for the event. The alliance stressed that public rallies are necessary to raise awareness of Taiwan's international isolation and reaffirmed its commitment to advocating for Taiwan's admission into the UN and other international organizations.

Prior to the rally, Taiwanese lawmakers joined representatives from Tuvalu and Belize—two of Taiwan's diplomatic allies—as well as US congressional representatives at a ceremony in front of UN headquarters to launch Taiwan's annual promotional campaign. This year's slogan, "Chip in with Taiwan, Better Together" highlights Taiwan's strength in semiconductor technology and underscores its efforts to deepen diplomatic ties through technological cooperation. [Taipei Times] [CNA in Chinese]

Global press freedom reaches lowest point in 50 years, study finds

(lm) A new study by the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has found that global press freedom has declined to its lowest level in half a century. Covering the period from 2019 to 2024, the report highlights significant deterioration in democratic indicators worldwide, with press freedom emerging as the most severely affected.

Freedom of the press declined in 43 countries across all continents, including 15 in Africa and 15 in Europe. The steepest declines were observed in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, and Myanmar, with South Korea ranking fourth due to increased defamation cases and government raids targeting journalists.

IDEA's Secretary General warned of a "toxic brew" behind the decline, combining government overreach —some of it a legacy of pandemic-era controls—and the misuse of disinformation narratives to justify crackdowns on the media. The report also raised concerns over the consolidation of traditional media

and the collapse of local journalism in many regions, undermining democratic debate.

While the study does not cover events beyond 2024, IDEA expressed alarm over political developments in the United States in early 2025, suggesting that actions there could have global consequences for democracy. [Dhaka Tribune]

European Parliament delegation to assess Bangladesh's human rights and reforms

(lm) A five-member delegation from the European Parliament is currently visiting Bangladesh from September 16 to 18 to assess the country's human rights situation and ongoing reform efforts. The delegation includes members from various parliamentary groups, among them the Chair of the Human Rights Subcommittee, with representatives from France, Luxembourg, Poland, Estonia, and the Netherlands.

During the visit, the group is holding meetings with representatives of the interim government, civil society, labor groups, NGOs, and multilateral organizations. The agenda also includes a field visit to the Rohingya refugee camps.

The mission follows Bangladesh's political transition after the 2024 protest crackdown and the departure of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Since then, the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus has launched institutional reforms, including changes to the judiciary and electoral system. The EU and Bangladesh have also resumed negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. [The Daily Star 1]

In parallel, the 3rd Bangladesh–EU Migration and Mobility Dialogue took place in Dhaka from September 8 to 10, with discussions centered on legal pathways for labor migration, implementation of return procedures, and mechanisms to prevent irregular migration. Bangladesh formally called for the expansion of the EU Talent Partnership and proposed the creation of EU-funded skills training and certification programs aligned with European labor market standards. The proposals are aimed at channeling Bangladesh's young labor force—over half the population is under 30—into safe and regulated migration routes.

The EU side reviewed progress in the use of the Returnee Case Management System and discussed the

outcomes of recent technical meetings on return and readmission procedures held in Brussels. Migration cooperation is a core component of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) currently under negotiation between the EU and Bangladesh, alongside democratic reform and rule-of-law commitments. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh secures USD 100 million fertilizer import financing from ITFC

(lm) Bangladesh has signed its first fertilizer financing agreement with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), a member of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group, to support fertilizer imports.

The deal, signed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, includes a master Murabaha financing agreement and a syndicated Murabaha financing facility, under which USD 100 million will initially be provided. *Murabaha* is an Islamic financing structure where a financier purchases goods and sells them to the client at a marked-up price, with payment deferred, thereby complying with Shariah principles that prohibit interest. [The Daily Star]

India sends 65 troops to Russian ZAPAD-2025 exercise

(ms) India has joined the Russian-led ZAPAD-2025 military exercise, dispatching a 65-member tri-service contingent to the Mulino training ground in Russia's Nizhny Novgorod region. The drills run from 10 to 16 September and bring together troops from multiple countries under a Russian–Belarusian framework.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the Indian contingent comprises 57 Army personnel, seven from the Air Force, and one Navy officer. Army officials said the group is led by a battalion from the Kumaon Regiment. The ministry described the participation as part of India's commitment to multilateral military engagement and interoperability.

The deployment is noticeably smaller than India's last presence at ZAPAD in 2021, when a 200-strong force took part. Analysts suggest the limited scale points to a largely symbolic role this year, as a commitment to the Indo-Russian relations in the wake of the US sanctions based on the continued Indian imports of Russian oil.

ZAPAD is one of Russia's largest recurring strategic exercises, held every four years in coordination with Belarus. [The Times] [WIO News]

EU and U.S. split over India importing Russian oil while pursuing trade deals with New Delhi

(lm) India is simultaneously negotiating trade deals with Washington and Brussels while facing intensifying scrutiny for its continued purchases of discounted Russian oil.

The United States has broken with the European Union (EU) on sanctions strategy: under President Donald Trump, Washington has demanded that India halt Russian imports entirely, doubling tariffs on Indian goods to 50 percent as leverage. By contrast, the EU has tightened its price-cap mechanism, lowering the ceiling to USD 47.60 per barrel in October—a move the US declined to support. The divergence has created uncertainty in energy markets, with Indian refiners pushing Moscow for wider discounts and October crude flows expected to slip to around 1.4 million barrels per day. [Reuters 1]

Washington has gone further by urging its G7 partners —Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom—to impose tariffs on India and China as "enablers" of Moscow's war effort. [Reuters 2]

Yet in a striking paradox, Washington continues to court New Delhi on trade even as it ratchets up pressure over energy. Senior officials, including Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Trump's ambassador-designate to India, have suggested that tariff disputes could be resolved within weeks if India signals flexibility on oil, describing the bilateral relationship as too strategically important to be derailed. Both Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have publicly committed to resuming dialogue, with a leaders' call expected soon. [Reuters 3] [Reuters 4] [Reuters 5]

Meanwhile, India and the EU are accelerating efforts to conclude a free trade agreement by year-end. Negotiators are addressing persistent sticking points: Brussels is seeking sharp tariff cuts on cars, wine, and dairy, while New Delhi is pressing for expanded access for textiles, pharmaceuticals, and steel. The EU's urgency reflects its push for trade diversification in response to Trump's tariff policies, with India identified as a priority partner. [Reuters 6]

For New Delhi, the central challenge is balancing energy security against geopolitical pressures, while advancing trade agreements that could secure its place in global supply chains. With EU–India trade already valued at USD 137.5 billion in 2023/24 and US–India trade at USD 129 billion in 2024, the outcomes will be pivotal for India's economic resilience amid shifting alignments.

Adding to the scrutiny, shipping data showed that a sanctioned tanker, *Spartan*, offloaded 1 million barrels of Russian Urals crude at the HMEL terminal in Mundra on September 16, despite a recent ban by Adani Group on blacklisted vessels at its ports. Another sanctioned ship, *Noble Walker*, also redirected toward India carrying Russian oil for HMEL, casting doubt about the effectiveness of the western sanctions. [Reuters 7]

Pakistan assumes chairmanship of SCO counterterrorism body

(as) Pakistan has assumed the rotating chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SCO-RATS), the bloc's platform for counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and intelligence-sharing. It also spearheads joint initiatives against the "three evils": terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

For Islamabad, the role provides both visibility and influence within a multilateral forum increasingly shaped by China and Russia. It also allows Pakistan to position itself as a regional security player at a time when it faces intensifying militant violence at home, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

The chairmanship overlaps with Pakistan's current tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2025–26), giving Islamabad an additional platform to push its security agenda. [The Nation] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan]

US and Kazakhstan eye investments in Pakistan's ports to expand regional trade links

(as) Pakistan's port sector is drawing new interest from the United States and Kazakhstan, with both countries signaling plans to explore investment opportunities to expand trade and connectivity across South and Central Asia.

A US delegation met officials at the Ministry of Maritime Affairs on September 9 for a detailed briefing on port infrastructure. Karachi Port, which handles 54 percent of Pakistan's trade with an annual capacity of 125 million tons, was highlighted for its growing profile, now ranked 61st among 405 global container ports. The facility recently handled Pakistan's largest-ever vessel at 400 meters in length. US officials showed interest in Port Qasim's expansion projects, particularly new LNG and multipurpose cargo terminals, dredging of navigation channels, and a planned coastal economic zone.

Kazakhstan's transport minister, Nurlan Sauranbayev, also met with Pakistani officials to discuss maritime cooperation and multimodal transport corridors linking Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. Discussions emphasized the role of Karachi, Port Qasim, and Gwadar as access points for Central Asian trade, especially under the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistani officials pointed to available spare capacity for Central Asian cargo and stressed opportunities in container handling, logistics, and off-dock terminals.

The parallel engagement of Washington and Astana underscores Pakistan's ports as strategic hubs for LNG supply chains, bulk cargo flows, and regional connectivity. With investment talks underway, the sector is increasingly positioned as a key node in shifting trade networks between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Gulf. [DAWN] [The Truth International]

Cambodia ratifies Additional Protocol to Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty

(dql) The parliament has unanimously approved a draft law ratifying the Additional Protocol to the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty, aimed at strengthening regional and global peace and security.

The two-article draft law allows Timor-Leste to become a State Party to the treaty and outlines the accession process. According to the National Assembly, ratifying the protocol will reinforce Southeast Asia's nuclear-free status, enhance Cambodia's international standing, support ASEAN integration with Timor-Leste as its 11th member, and contribute to global security.

Cambodia signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2019 and enacted national legislation in 2020. The SEANWFZ, or Bangkok Treaty,

signed in 1995, established a nuclear weapon-free zone in Southeast Asia, reaffirming the Non-Proliferation Treaty and contributing to regional and international peace. Southeast Asia joins four other global Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones in Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Africa, and Central Asia. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Prabowo to address UN general assembly

(gp) President Prabowo Subianto is set to deliver his first-ever speech at the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 23, 2025. Prabowo will be the third head of state to speak at this year's UNGA, following Brazilian President Lula da Silva and US President Trump. According to Indonesia's foreign ministry, the president will have 15 minutes to deliver his speech, during which he will largely focus on "recent global dynamics" — namely, the issue of Palestinian statehood and Israel's recent attacks against Qatar. One senior official also stated, "We will bring up our country's priority programs in our national statement," but refused to elaborate on which specific programs he was referring to. [The Jakarta Post]

Prabowo's upcoming trip to New York has raised questions on whether he will have separate bilateral talks with Trump. Not long after the two countries announced a tariff deal, Prabowo claimed that Trump wanted to have the talks in September or October. However, the Foreign Affairs Ministry has neither confirmed nor denied whether any such meeting has been planned. [Jakarta Globe] [Tempo]

China holds talks with law enforcement chiefs from Laos, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and Armenia

(ms) Chinese State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong met with senior law enforcement officials from Laos, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and Armenia during a series of bilateral talks in Beijing. The meetings took place on the sidelines of the Lancang-Mekong ministerial session on law enforcement and the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum held in Lianyungang.

With Laos, Wang met Deputy Prime Minister and Public Security Minister Vilay Lakhamfong, pledging deeper

cooperation on combating transnational crimes such as online gambling and telecom fraud. The Lao side expressed readiness to strengthen bilateral law enforcement ties under the framework of the Global Security Initiative.

Talks with Nicaragua's police chief Francisco Díaz Madriz focused on capacity-building and multilateral coordination. In discussions with Ethiopia's commissioner general Demelash Gebremichael, both sides emphasized the safety of Chinese personnel and projects under the Belt and Road Initiative. Armenia's Investigative Committee chairman Artur Poghosyan highlighted cooperation in tackling organized crime and advancing police training. [Xinhua]

Prime Minister addresses Gaza crisis at Arab-Islamic Summit

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim delivered Malaysia's national statement at the Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit in Doha on September 15, condemning Israel's recent airstrike in Qatar that killed Hamas leaders and reaffirming Malaysia's solidarity with Qatar and Palestinian people.

Invited by Qatar's Emir, Anwar joined the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) leaders including those from Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, and Palestine, with discussions focusing on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The summit is expected to adopt a joint communiqué outlining collective action on the Gaza issue. [Malay Mail 1]

Moreover, he added that Malaysia will reiterate its firm stance on Gaza and highlight Israel's aggression against Qatar during his upcoming meeting with US President Donald Trump at the ASEAN Summit in October. [Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia to send team to Thailand for discussion on Thailand-Cambodia ceasefire oversight

(tl) Malaysia is set to deploy a team to Thailand to discuss the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Interim Observation Team (IOT), which will oversee compliance with the ceasefire between Thailand and Cambodia. The framework has already been agreed with Cambodia and will now be coordinated with Thai

authorities to ensure both sides follow a unified monitoring mechanism for peace along the border.

Meanwhile, discussions between Thailand and Cambodia continue under the General Border Committee (GBC) to finalize the TOR. IOT personnel from Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia are already in Cambodia, with Brunei and Singapore scheduled to join.

Malaysia's Chief of Defence Force, Gen Tan Sri Mohd Nizam Jaffar, said the IOT will enable ASEAN to monitor and enforce the ceasefire, marking its first collective response to a regional security crisis. While the dispute is primarily bilateral, ASEAN is acting as a trusted mediator, with Malaysia leading the process as 2025 ASEAN Chair, supported by the US and China. The conflict has escalated along the 817-kilometre border, where centuries-old temples have become points of tension. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia hosts 18th ASEAN Forum relating migrant labor

(tl) Malaysia recently hosted the 18th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML), under the theme "Accelerating Actions Towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on Safe Migration and Decent Work for Migrant Workers in ASEAN", which focused on promoting and protecting safe migration and decent work for migrant workers. Representatives from ASEAN states, workers' and employers' groups, civil society, and international partners from Australia, Canada, and Switzerland joined the two-day forum.

Participants shared best practices and agreed on recommendations, including eliminating forced labor through law enforcement, cutting recruitment fees via ethical hiring, improving workplace safety and health standards, expanding access to social dialogue and collective bargaining, and enhancing financial inclusion with cheaper remittance systems.

The Philippines is set to host the next AFML in 2026. [Bernama]

Malaysia signs UN marine biodiversity agreement

(tl) Malaysia's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (NRES) has announced that Malaysia signed the United Nations Agreement on

the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) on September 3.

The legally binding accord, established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), aims to safeguard marine biodiversity through enhanced international cooperation, capacity building, environmental assessments, and equitable access to marine genetic resources.

The ministry confirmed that Malaysia is now initiating domestic procedures toward ratification and continue contributing actively to the agreement's implementation. [Bernama]

Myanmar delegation participates in ASEAN ministerial on transnational crime

(su) A delegation led by Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Maj-Gen Aung Kyaw Kyaw joined the 19th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), held in Melaka, Malaysia from September 8 to 12. The opening ceremony on September 9 was attended by ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn, Malaysia's Home Affairs Minister Saifuddin Nasution bin Ismail, and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who delivered remarks.

Over the following days, Myanmar officials took part in plenary and partner sessions, including the 15th AMMTC+3 meeting with China, Japan, and South Korea, as well as separate sessions with each dialogue partner. Delegates discussed national, regional, and international efforts to combat transnational crime, with a focus on strengthening cross-border cooperation.

The meetings endorsed a series of initiatives, including the ASEAN Action Plan on Combating Transnational Crime (2026–2035), the Concept Paper on an Anti-Money Laundering Working Group, and the Roadmap for ASEAN Border Management Cooperation. They also adopted the Melaka Declaration on Combating Transnational Crime, as well as declarations on human smuggling, cybercrime, and online fraud. Additional declarations on money laundering, criminal apprehension, and the use of sports to counter violent extremism will be issued at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur this October. The next AMMTC will convene in Cebu, Philippines, in July 2026. [Eleven Myanmar]

Vietnam advances defense partnerships with UK, Turkey and Australia in pursuit of strategic autonomy

(ab) Vietnam is accelerating defense cooperation with multiple partners as part of its broader strategy to reduce reliance on any single country and reinforce strategic autonomy. Recent engagements with the UK, Turkey, and Australia highlight Hanoi's multi-directional approach to modernizing its defense capabilities and broadening its international network.

A Vietnamese delegation attended the International Defense and Security Equipment Exhibition in London from September 9–11, engaging with international defense firms and promoting its domestic defense industry. The move aligns with Vietnam's drive to cultivate multiple partners and modernize its dual-use defense capabilities beyond traditional suppliers such as Russia.

In parallel, Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler visited Hanoi from September 10–11 for talks with Defense Minister Phan Van Giang. Discussions centered on implementing the bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement, expanding cooperation in training, peacekeeping, and non-traditional security, and opening defense attaché offices. State President Luong Cuong emphasized that strengthening ties with Turkey fits into Vietnam's broader diversification strategy.

On the diplomatic front, Australian Governor-General Sam Mostyn made her first state visit to Vietnam on September 10, reaffirming the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership launched in March 2024. Talks with Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh focused on expanding cooperation across defense, trade, investment, and education. Chinh proposed raising bilateral trade to USD 20 billion and doubling two-way investment within three years, particularly in minerals, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure. Both sides also committed to deeper collaboration on Mekong Delta climate resilience and ASEAN-led regional initiatives. [Anadolu Ajansi] [Asia News Network] [Nhan Dan] [Vietnamplus] [Voice of Vietnam]

Vietnam joins ASEAN declaration on transnational crime

(ab) Vietnam's Prosecutor General Nguyen Huy Tien joined counterparts from nine other ASEAN member states in signing the *Sanur Bali Declaration* in Bali,

committing to closer cooperation on transnational crime.

The declaration, adopted at the ASEAN Prosecutors/Attorneys General Meeting (APAGM), outlines collective priorities in tackling offenses such as online gambling, scams, corruption, money laundering, and cross-border asset smuggling.

Indonesian Attorney General Sanitiar Burhanuddin noted that the declaration reflects ASEAN members' recognition of the challenges posed by crimes that cross jurisdictions. He highlighted cross-border asset recovery as a central issue, whilst underlining the need for coordination that also respects national legal frameworks—a key component of ASEAN.

The APAGM was also presented as a platform for strengthening legal cooperation, capacity building, and information sharing among ASEAN member states. The initiative aligns with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which sets out a framework for building a more cohesive, resilient, and adaptive regional community over the coming decades. [Vietnamnews]

Exhibition underscores rapid Bangladesh-China investment growth and trade imbalance between

(mon) Chinese investment in Bangladesh has surged by nearly 300 percent over the past year, officials said at the 2nd China-Bangladesh Exhibition held in Dhaka on September 12. The event, jointly organized by the Chinese Embassy and the Chinese Enterprises Association in Bangladesh, featured companies from sectors including infrastructure, technology, energy, logistics, and finance. [BSS News]

Bangladesh currently imports goods worth about BDT 2.6 trillion (USD 22 billion) annually from China, while exports remain limited, highlighting a persistent trade imbalance. Officials called for efforts to develop domestic production of industrial inputs and intermediate goods to reduce dependency on Chinese imports and strengthen competitiveness. Suggestions also included joint ventures in vehicle manufacturing to address road safety concerns.

Chinese representatives highlighted large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Padma Rail Link and the Karnaphuli Tunnel as examples of expanding involvement in transport and connectivity. Future areas of cooperation under discussion include

renewable energy, disaster resilience, and sustainable agriculture. [UNB]

Bangladesh presses India for longer-term Ganges Treaty and broader river management framework

(lm) At a meeting of the India–Bangladesh Joint River Commission (JRC) in New Delhi, Bangladesh called for a longer-duration treaty on Ganges water-sharing once the current 1996 accord expires, along with a more predictable flow of water. Dhaka is expected to seek an average of 40,000 cubic feet per second (cusecs) during the dry season, up from the 35,000 cusecs stipulated under the existing treaty. Indian officials noted that any revision would require careful assessment of domestic needs and consultations with state governments.

Bangladesh's delegation also proposed a new institutional mechanism to oversee water-sharing for 14 additional rivers, while India suggested strengthening the JRC instead of creating a separate body. Dhaka further pressed India on the long-stalled Teesta agreement, but Indian representatives reiterated that progress depends on reaching a consensus with West Bengal state authorities.

Other issues raised included cooperation on joint flood forecasting, data-sharing, and management of rainfall impacts in border regions, particularly after severe flooding from Tripura last year. Bangladesh stressed the importance of timely hydrological data to mitigate downstream damage.

For Dhaka, securing more predictable Ganges flows is vital to address dry season shortages, which affect rivers like the Gorai and ecosystems such as the Sundarbans. Indian officials, however, pointed to natural fluctuations in dry-season water availability. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh pledges to expand US imports after tariff cut

(lm) Bangladesh's interim leader Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said Dhaka is prepared to expand imports from the United States, particularly agricultural products, liquefied petroleum gas, and civil aircraft, following Washington's recent move to lower

tariffs on Bangladeshi exports from 35 percent to 20 percent.

During talks in Dhaka with US trade officials, both sides discussed reducing the bilateral trade imbalance, accelerating energy cooperation, and finalizing a draft trade agreement. Yunus stressed that the interim government aims to improve the investment climate, attract more US foreign direct investment, and secure concessional credit in health and education.

The US delegation welcomed Bangladesh's commitments, noting the importance of implementing tariff agreements and purchase commitments on schedule. [The Daily Star]

Brunei, Vietnam deepen partnership with expanding trade and cooperation

(ga) Brunei and Vietnam are strengthening bilateral relations with trade surpassing set targets and cooperation expanding into new sectors such as the digital economy, innovation, and science and technology.

At a reception marking Vietnam's 80th National Day in Brunei, Ambassador of Vietnam to Brunei Tran Anh Vu highlighted that bilateral trade has already exceeded the USD 670 million target for 2024, while Brunei ranks as Vietnam's 20th largest investor. He noted that cooperation now extends to defence, with the Royal Brunei Navy scheduled to visit Vietnam in 2025, as well as enhanced cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992 and the upgrading to a Comprehensive Partnership in 2019, both countries have expanded collaboration across energy, halal industry, tourism, investment, and education, further reinforced by the 2023–2027 Action Plan.

Tran further emphasized strong cultural and educational engagement, citing language programs, student exchanges, and nearly 20 cultural activities in Brunei over the past two years, with the Vietnamese community actively contributing to bilateral ties. [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei, Australia navies launch Exercise Penguin 25 to boost maritime security

(ga) The Royal Brunei Navy (RBN) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) began Exercise Penguin 25 on September 9, a bilateral maritime security drill aimed at enhancing interoperability and cooperation between the two countries.

The weeklong exercise off the coast of Brunei involves RBN patrol vessels KDB Darussalam and KDB Afiat, alongside an ANZAC-class frigate HMAS Ballarat and an RAAF P-8A Poseidon aircraft from Australia. [Borneo Bulletin] [Department of Defence Australia]

South Korean police crackdown on Cambodia-based online gambling syndicate

(dql) South Korean police arrested ten individuals linked to an illegal online gambling operation that processed KRW 44 billion (USD 33.8 million) in transactions from Cambodia. The Daegu National Police Agency confirmed the arrests on September 10, with seven suspects—including the alleged ringleader—formally detained.

Operating from February 2022 to July 2023, the network recruited over 11,000 users to platforms offering Sports Toto and Baccarat. The syndicate coordinated its operations from a Cambodian office while traveling between South Korea and Cambodia on tourist visas to evade authorities. [I Gaming Today]

Cambodia, France deepen partnership and commitment to global environmental treaties

(dql) Cambodia has reaffirmed its commitment to global environmental governance, signaling its intent to sign and ratify the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ) Agreement and endorsing the "Nice Wake-Up Call for an Ambitious Plastics Treaty." These commitments were highlighted during a courtesy meeting on September 10 between Minister of Foreign Affairs Prak Sokhonn and newly appointed French Ambassador Olivier Richard.

Cambodia emphasized its role in protecting marine biodiversity, addressing overfishing, pollution, and climate change, and promoting sustainable fisheries and marine protected areas.

Sokhonn and Richard also discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors, including renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, aviation, the digital economy, health, defense, and cultural exchanges. [Phnom Penh Post]

Germany launches nutrition aid for displaced families in Cambodia's conflict-affected border regions

(dql) Germany has launched an emergency nutrition programme in partnership with World Vision Cambodia to support families displaced in border provinces of Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, and Oddar Meanchey affected by the conflict with neighboring Thailand. The initiative targets over 1,000 children under five and more than 570 pregnant and lactating women, addressing malnutrition risks worsened by displacement and seasonal flooding.

The program distributes specialized nutritional supplements — including therapeutic food for malnourished children and micronutrients for mothers — while conducting screenings through local health providers.

German embassy officials framed the initiative as part of Berlin's long-standing commitment to food security and health, aligning it with broader European Union (EU) humanitarian assistance, such as the recent EUR 700,000 (USD 821,000) EU relief package for Cambodia. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia, UK launch partnership to strengthen regulatory reform, investment climate

(dql) Cambodia and the United Kingdom have entered into a three-year partnership to advance regulatory reform, with a focus on improving regulatory impact assessments (RIA). The agreement, signed on September 11 by British Ambassador Dominic Williams and Minister Vongsey Vissoth, falls under the UK-ASEAN Economic Integration Program, which promotes sustainable growth through stronger and more transparent governance across the region.

Under the initiative Cambodia will strengthen its ability to analyze the economic, social, and environmental consequences of proposed legislation. The effort is

designed to improve the quality of policymaking, foster a more reliable business climate, and attract greater investment, all while supporting Cambodia's transition out of Least Developed Country status.

International partners, including the World Bank, OECD, and UNDP, are providing additional expertise and training to reinforce the process. [Cambodianess]

China, Indonesia launch local currency settlement, QR payment pilot

(ask) The central banks of China and Indonesia have launched a new local currency settlement (LCS) framework to encourage greater use of their domestic currencies in bilateral trade and investment. Building on a May 2025 agreement, the framework now encompasses all balance-of-payments items and establishes a joint working mechanism to enhance institutional coordination and financial cooperation. [Global Times]

Alongside this initiative, the two countries have begun piloting a cross-border QR code payment system. Under the pilot, Chinese users can make purchases in Indonesia via UnionPay and Alipay apps through Indonesia's QRIS network, which links over 40 million merchants. Conversely, Indonesian users can pay at pilot merchants in China using 22 local mobile payment apps. All transactions are settled in local currencies, and the system is expected to be fully operational by 2025. [Asian Banking & Finance]

These measures signal a strategic push to strengthen bilateral economic integration and reduce reliance on third-party currencies, while advancing digital payment connectivity between the two economies.

China, U.S. reach framework deal on TikTok in Madrid talks amid persisting trade tensions

(ask/dql/efg) China and the U.S. have reached a framework agreement to transfer TikTok's American operations to U.S.-controlled ownership. The announcement came after high-level trade talks in Madrid, led by Vice Premier He Lifeng on the Chinese side and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on the U.S. side. The talks followed earlier negotiations in Geneva, London, and Stockholm, where both sides agreed to extend a tariff pause until November 10.

Bessent and trade representative Jamieson Greer said the commercial terms of the agreement had been agreed and the deal would be finalized when President Donald Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping on September 19. [BBC]

The agreement comes just days before a September 17 deadline that requires TikTok's Chinese parent, ByteDance, to sell its U.S. arm or face a nationwide ban. Earlier this year the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the law that mandated divestment, citing what the Justice Department called a national security threat of "immense depth and scale," (see AiR No. 3, January/2025, 3). ByteDance has pushed back, insisting that its American operations are fully independent and that no data has been shared with Beijing. The company argues that banning the app would violate the free speech rights of its 170 million U.S. users. TikTok briefly went offline in January before Trump issued an executive order delaying enforcement of the law. [CNN]

The ownership dispute stretches back to 2020, when Trump first ordered ByteDance to divest the app. Multiple bids have since emerged, including Microsoft, Walmart, and Oracle, though none reached completion. Oracle, however, has continued to host TikTok's U.S. data since 2022, and its executive chair Larry Ellison is widely seen as a frontrunner to lead the current investor group. [The Guardian]

In addition, Bessent indicated that the Trump administration will refrain from imposing additional tariffs on Chinese imports tied to Russian oil purchases unless European nations adopt comparable measures. Speaking to *Reuters and Bloomberg*, he added that in the discussions with Chinese officials in Madrid he emphasized President Trump has been pressing European countries to introduce tariffs of 50–100 percent on China and India to curb Russian oil revenues. According to him, the Chinese side responded by insisting that decisions on oil purchases fall within their sovereign rights. [Reuters 1]

Just ahead of the Madrid talks, the Ministry of Commerce launched on September 13 two investigations into U.S. chip trade practices—one on alleged discrimination against Chinese firms and another on possible dumping of U.S. analog chips. Beijing criticized Washington's export controls and restrictions as protectionist measures aimed at containing China's high-tech development, vowing countermeasures to defend its companies. [AP News]

The move came after Washington has stepped up restrictions on China's semiconductor industry by

placing 32 additional companies on its trade blacklist, including entities connected to Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC). Notable additions, such as GMC Semiconductor Technology (Wuxi) and Jicun Semiconductor Technology, are accused of assisting SMIC in acquiring U.S.-made chipmaking equipment despite existing export controls. [Parameter]

Meanwhile, China's market regulator has stated on September 15 a preliminary probe found US-based technology company Nvidia to have violated antitrust laws related to its 2020 acquisition of Israeli interconnect solutions provider Mellanox Technologies and opened further investigation.

Authorities say Nvidia did not prevent anti-competitive practices and ensure supplies to China in a case which highlights Beijing's growing use of antitrust laws against foreign tech firms in an escalating tech war. China has opened a further investigation, state media has reported. Nvidia has denied not complying with the law in all respects. [China Daily] [New York Times] [Hong Kong Free Press]

Nvidia could face fines of up to 10 per cent of annual sales, however the risk lies in potentially tighter conditions for future chip sales. The company faces growing scrutiny in China including a focus on its H20 chip and pressures from local firms that have been encouraged to shift towards domestic alternatives. [Reuters 2] [SCMP]

Analysts suggest that Beijing's objective is not to eliminate Nvidia from the Chinese market, but to strengthen its domestic semiconductor industry while signaling to Washington that tariffs and export controls carry consequences, particularly at a sensitive juncture in trade negotiations. [Wall Street Journal]

Chinese, U.S. foreign and defense ministers hold parallel talks

(efg/dql) On September 10, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke by phone with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to follow up on discussions held in July on the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Malaysia.

Wang emphasized the importance of adhering to previous agreements between the two countries, expressing concern over recent U.S. actions, particularly remarks regarding Taiwan. He urged caution, warning against provocative "words and

deeds" and stressing the need for bilateral cooperation to address global challenges. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

The U.S. State Department's readout did not reference Wang's warnings, noting only that Rubio highlighted the importance of constructive communication on bilateral, regional, and global issues. [State Department of State, USA]

On the same day, Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun and his U.S. counterpart Pete Hegseth held a video conference. Dong reaffirmed China's commitment to maintaining military communication and exchanges, calling for a clearer mutual understanding of the bilateral military relationship. He reiterated the "Taiwan red line," warning that any foreign interference to support Taiwanese independence "through force" or "use Taiwan to contain China" would fail. [Ministry of Defense, China, in Chinese] [Xinhua]

Hegseth emphasized that the United States does not seek conflict with China or regime change but will defend its vital interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The Pentagon described the discussion as "candid and constructive," confirming that both sides agreed to continue dialogue. [Department of War, USA] [Reuters]

The talks occur amid heightened tensions. Hegseth had previously warned of a "real and potentially imminent" threat from China and called on U.S. allies to increase defense spending. The meetings also followed a high-profile Chinese military parade attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, raising concerns in Washington and internationally about potential geopolitical alignments. [Nikkei Aisa]

U.S. bars Chinese researchers amid intensifying space race

(ask/dql) In a new sign of escalating U.S.-China competition in the space sector, NASA has barred Chinese citizens holding U.S. visas from participating in its programs. The restrictions prevent these researchers from accessing NASA facilities, supercomputing resources, online meetings, and agency-funded events. While the measure affects fewer than 100 individuals—many of whom work in space and climate science—it disrupts ongoing research.

The move comes amid a renewed lunar race, with China planning to land astronauts on the Moon by

2030, while NASA aims to return U.S. astronauts as early as 2027. NASA Administrator Sean Duffy—the agency's highest-ranking official—described the policy as necessary to maintain U.S. leadership in the "second space race," portraying China's space program as a military operation in contrast to the U.S.'s peaceful objectives.

Lawmakers highlighted the strategic stakes of lunar missions, including potential control over valuable resources such as rare earth metals and helium. [NASA] [BBC]

Scientists warn that the ban could intensify the space race and hinder international cooperation in critical fields such as climate research, where satellite monitoring and data-sharing are essential. By restricting Chinese participation, the policy risks creating parallel scientific systems and diminishing the global capacity to address shared challenges. [CNN]

The decision has drawn sharp criticism from Beijing. Chinese state media described the move as discriminatory, arguing that it harms Chinese researchers and undermines the principle of open scientific exchange. Commentators cautioned that excluding China from international space cooperation could isolate the U.S. and slow collective scientific progress. [Global Times]

China, Austria discuss strategic partnership and Europe's approach to Beijing

(dql) On 12 September, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his Austrian counterpart Beate Meinl-Reisinger in Vienna to discuss the deepening bilateral relationship and broader international cooperation. The meeting was part of Wang's three-nation Europe that included visits to Poland and Slovenia and comes ahead of the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Wang reiterated China's willingness to assist Europe in achieving genuine strategic autonomy, while opposing any attempts to advance European interests at the expense of China. He expressed hope that Austria would help guide Europe toward a balanced and pragmatic approach in its dealings with China.

Wang also presented China's Global Governance Initiative, calling for Austria's support in fostering a just and rules-based international order.

According to the Chinese readout of the meeting, Meinl-Reisinger reaffirmed Austria's commitment to the one-China policy and stressed the importance of expanding practical cooperation, particularly in the green economy, people-to-people exchanges, and tourism.

Both ministers exchanged views on shared international concerns, including the Ukraine crisis, Middle East tensions, and climate change, agreeing to maintain communication and coordinate efforts to promote ceasefires and peaceful dispute resolution. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Meinl-Reisinger called on China to leverage its influence over Russia to help end the war in Ukraine, warning that Beijing risks further sanctions from Europe and the United States if it continues supporting Moscow. In an interview following her meeting with Wang, she emphasized that China should pressure President Vladimir Putin to enter meaningful negotiations and refrain from supplying weapons to the Kremlin.

Meinl-Reisinger noted that the EU is using sanctions to pressure Russia and that any circumvention of these measures may require additional action. While the U.S., under President Donald Trump, has proposed imposing tariffs of up to 100 percent on China and India to curb Russian oil purchases, Austria advocates a more cautious approach, urging the EU to assess potential economic impacts before implementing new measures. [Liga.Net]

British prosecutors drop charges against two men accused of spying for China

(efg) British prosecutors have dropped espionage charges against two men accused of working for China, citing insufficient evidence.

Christopher Cash, a former parliamentary researcher linked to Parliament's China Research Group, and teacher Christopher Berry were arrested in March 2023 under the Official Secrets Act. They had been accused of gathering information between 2012 and 2023 that could have been useful to a Chinese agent. Both were due to stand trial in October. The court instead entered formal not-guilty verdicts. Cash, who has publicly warned parliament of Chinese risks, denied all allegations.

The Home Office expressed disappointment at the collapse of the case, while the Chinese embassy

dismissed the allegations as “malicious slander” and fabricated.

The arrests came amid growing concerns in the UK about Chinese espionage targeting sensitive political, defense, and business sectors as part of increasingly sophisticated intelligence operations. [The Guardian] [Reuters] [BBC] [AP]

China, Poland commit to deepening ties

(dql) China and Poland are set to strengthen bilateral relations and deepen strategic cooperation following talks in Warsaw between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Polish President Karol Nawrocki, and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski.

At the fourth plenary meeting of the China-Poland Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee, held on September 15, Wang highlighted Poland’s importance as a European partner and called on Warsaw to foster a more balanced perception of China within the EU. He criticized the use of punitive tariffs as a violation of global trade norms and urged Europe to join China in pushing back against unilateral economic pressure.

Nawrocki affirmed Poland’s readiness to advance cooperation with China and work together to safeguard global peace and security.

The visit, part of Wang’s three-nations Europe tour that included also Slovenia and Austria, underscored China’s strategy of strengthening ties with key European states amid growing trade frictions with the U.S. and EU. Diplomatic relations between China and Poland date back to 1949 and were upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2011, with current annual trade estimated at USD 23 billion. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Anadolu Ajansı]

The visit came shortly, after on September 9, a freight train has departed from Warsaw to China for the first time, marking an important step in Poland–China trade connectivity. The service is seen as a step toward strengthening economic ties and diversifying transport routes between Europe and Asia.

The inaugural shipment includes goods from Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Latvia, with products ranging from furniture to sporting equipment. The cargo is expected to reach China in under two weeks—considerably faster than sea routes, which have been disrupted by Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

While freight trains have previously operated from Gdańsk and Małaszewicze, this is the first time Warsaw has served as the starting point, underlining the capital's emerging role in the "New Silk Road." From Henan province, shipments will be distributed across China and other Asian markets. [Notes from Poland]

China approves extradition treaty with Serbia

(ask) China has ratified an extradition treaty with Serbia, expanding its network of European partners willing to hand over Chinese nationals. The treaty, approved by Beijing's top legislature, was first signed during President Xi Jinping's 2023 visit to Belgrade and still requires Serbian parliamentary approval.

Rights groups warn the pact could endanger dissidents, asylum seekers, and Taiwanese individuals. In 2022, the European Court of Human Rights blocked Poland from extraditing a Taiwanese man, ruling he would face a real risk of ill-treatment in Chinese detention.

The deal underscores China's growing role in the Balkans, where it has held joint police patrols in Serbia and signed a law enforcement pact in 2024 and an extradition agreement in July with Hungary, while Chinese firms such as CATL and BYD expand investments in both countries.

The European Commission has warned of opening a door for foreign interference. [Devdiscourse]

China, Slovenia discuss deepening bilateral ties

(dql) On September 13, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Slovenian President Nataša Pirc Musar in Ljubljana during his three-nation Europe tour that also includes Poland and Austria.

Wang highlighted China's Global Governance Initiative, which aims to reform international governance, uphold fairness, and expressed China's willingness to deepen multilateral collaboration with Slovenia, strengthen China-EU relations, and enhance China's engagement with Central and Eastern Europe.

Musar, for her part, emphasized the growing relationship between the two countries noting that bilateral trade had surged from USD 1.3 billion in 2019

to USD 7.3 billion, with China now Slovenia's fifth-largest trading partner.

However, she stressed the need for a more balanced trade relationship, as Slovenia's exports remain limited, and underscored the importance of securing stable supplies of rare metals.

The leaders also addressed major international crises, including the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, Iran, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Indo-Pacific region. Fajon called on China to use its influence with Russia to help achieve peace in Ukraine, while Wang reiterated China's aim to work with responsible countries to promote global stability and development. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [The Slovenia Times]

China condemnation of Israel's strike on Qatar highlights growing strain in bilateral relations

(efg) China has condemned Israel's September 9 airstrike on Doha, Qatar, which targeted Hamas political leaders, calling it a violation of Qatari sovereignty and a threat to regional stability. The Chinese foreign linked the attack to the "long-standing and gravely unbalanced stance of certain external powers on Middle East issues," implicitly referencing the United States.

China urged all parties, especially Israel, to work toward de-escalation, restart negotiations, and avoid actions that could exacerbate tensions. Beijing also called on major powers to play a constructive role in promoting a ceasefire and easing hostilities. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Xinhua]

The U.S., meanwhile, described the strike as a unilateral action that undermines both American and Israeli interests, with President Trump expressing disapproval. [Reuters]

China's condemnation of the attack highlights that the long-standing China-Israel partnership, once grounded in robust economic and technological cooperation, has come under growing strain. For over three decades, bilateral ties flourished across semiconductors, AI, and agricultural technology, with substantial Chinese investment in Israeli firms.

However, the relationship began deteriorating after Hamas's attacks on Israel in October 2023 and Israel's military response, with China taking a noticeably pro-

Palestinian stance, condemning Israeli actions, and supporting UN resolutions critical of Israel. [Asia Times]

Mexico to raise tariffs on Chinese vehicles

(ask) Mexico has announced plans to raise tariffs on cars imported from China to as high as 50 percent, marking a significant shift in its trade policy. The proposal, which is expected to be finalized in the coming weeks, reflects growing alignment with U.S. trade measures as Washington presses allies to counter Chinese industrial overcapacity. [Financial Times] [Bloomberg]

The move follows a broader U.S.-China tariff escalation and comes as Mexico seeks to protect its domestic auto industry from low-cost Chinese competition. Analysts suggest the measure could disrupt supply chains and raise costs for consumers but aligns Mexico more closely with Washington's trade agenda.

The tariff hike is likely to heighten trade tensions between Mexico and China, whose automakers have rapidly expanded exports to Latin America in recent years. [The Diplomat]

India engages Myanmar rebels on rare earths while reinforcing military ties with junta

(lm) India is exploring options to diversify rare-earth supplies after China imposed export restrictions. According to sources, New Delhi has asked state-owned and private firms to work with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an ethnic armed group that is part of the resistance against Myanmar's military junta, to collect and transport mineral samples from mines in Kachin state. The KIA controls the Chipwe-Pangwa belt, one of the world's main deposits of heavy rare earths such as dysprosium and terbium, and has begun gathering samples for Indian analysis while assessing whether bulk exports could be feasible. India still lacks large-scale facilities to process the minerals into industrial magnets, limiting immediate benefits. [Reuters]

In parallel, India is continuing formal defense cooperation with Myanmar's military. During the 7th Army-to-Army Staff Talks, a delegation led by Lieutenant General Ko Ko Oo of the Myanmar Army visited India's Eastern Command in Kolkata. The two

sides discussed expanding defense collaboration, particularly in technology and training, and underlined their commitment to strengthening institutional military ties. [The New Indian Express]

India pledges USD 680 million in economic support for Mauritius

(lm) India has announced INR 56.6 billion (USD 680 million) in grants and concessional credit lines to Mauritius, targeting healthcare, infrastructure, and maritime security projects. The package was unveiled during Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam's state visit to India and is seen as part of New Delhi's effort to expand its strategic influence in the Indian Ocean amid competition with China.

The assistance includes funding for a new hospital, port redevelopment, and restructuring, along with the provision of helicopters and INR 2.1 billion (USD 25 million) in direct budgetary support for the current fiscal year. A key element is support for surveillance and development of the marine protected area around the Chagos archipelago, which hosts the U.S.-British Diego Garcia air base.

The announcement follows Britain's May 2025 decision to cede sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining military control of the base under a 99-year lease. India has historically backed Mauritius' sovereignty claim while also supporting the U.S. military presence as a counterbalance to China's growing footprint in the region. [Reuters]

Indonesian president visits Qatar, UAE

(gp) On September 12, President Prabowo Subianto visited Qatar to convey his country's support to Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani following Israel's recent airstrike on Doha. According to Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya, who accompanied Prabowo to Qatar, the trip was intended to demonstrate Indonesia's solidarity with the Qatari government amid escalating regional tensions. Reportedly, the two leaders pledged to deepen cooperation, particularly on humanitarian issues and global diplomacy.

Soon after, Prabowo flew to Abu Dhabi to meet UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Both leaders condemned destabilizing actions in the region and stressed that Middle Eastern nations must

strengthen unity to prevent further escalation. Their discussions also touched on enhancing bilateral ties in economic, investment, and renewable energy cooperation, building on the Indonesia-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

This latest visit reflects Prabowo's interest in expanding Indonesia's role in international diplomacy, particularly in the Middle East. The Indonesian president has long been a vocal critic of Israel's actions in the region, and has repeatedly drawn attention to the matter on multilateral stages, calling for unity and adherence to international law. He now appears poised to continue to do so at this year's UN General Assembly (UNGA). [Antara] [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Japan spots China's aircraft carrier Fujian for first time

(ja) The Japanese Defense Ministry stated on September 11 that the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) had sighted China's newest aircraft carrier Fujian for the first time when it sailed in the East China Sea, about 200 kilometers northwest of the Japanese-administered, China-claimed islands, called the Senkaku Islands by Japan, and Diaoyu by China.

The ministry's Joint Staff is assessing whether the carrier has been formally commissioned or remains in a trial operational phase.

The Fujian, China's second domestically built carrier, was seen heading southwest in the direction of the Taiwan Strait (see article in this edition), alongside two missile-equipped destroyers, but no carrier-based aircraft were spotted by Japan's MSDF P-3C Orion surveillance plane monitoring the ship.

The vessel is the first of China's aircraft carriers with an electromagnetic catapult system, which facilitates efficient aircraft launching. [Kyodo News] [Stars and Stripes]

Japan provides USD 10.5 million grant to strengthen Maldives' seawall resilience

(lm) The Maldives has signed a grant agreement worth approximately USD 10.5 million with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to upgrade Male city's seawalls and install advanced stormwater drainage systems. The initiative follows a July 2025 exchange of notes between the two governments and

builds on Japan's long-standing support, including seawalls constructed between 1988 and 2006 that protected Male during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. [The Sun]

U.S. deploys Typhon missile system in Japan

(dql) On September 15, the U.S. showcased its Typhon intermediate-range missile system in Japan for the first time, highlighting growing Washington–Tokyo cooperation on weapons Beijing views as destabilizing. The land-based system, capable of firing Tomahawk cruise missiles at targets along China's eastern seaboard or parts of Russia, will participate in the ongoing annual Resolute Dragon exercise, involving 20,000 U.S. and Japanese troops along with warships and missile batteries. [Stars and Stripes] [The War Zone]

The system is scheduled to leave Japan after the exercise that runs through September 25, though its next location remains undisclosed. Its appearance in Japan follows a deployment to the Philippines in April 2024 and live-fire drills in Australia, signaling a more assertive U.S. posture in Asia.

Military analysts warn that Typhon's presence in Japan, closer to China, could provoke a stronger reaction from Beijing. The system can also launch SM-6 missiles against ships and aircraft at ranges beyond 200 km, complementing U.S. efforts to counter China's growing missile arsenal. Unlike next-generation missile programs, Typhon relies on existing, mass-producible weapons, enabling quicker deployment across the region.

The deployment occurs amid regional military expansions. Japan is purchasing Tomahawk missiles and developing its own intermediate-range systems, marking its largest defense buildup since World War II. Taiwan plans a 20 percent increase in defense spending by 2026, while China intends to raise its defense budget by 7.2 percent this year.

Analysts view these moves as part of a broader U.S.-led effort to strengthen the First Island Chain, a strategic string of territories from Japan to the Philippines designed to contain Chinese sea and air power. [Reuters]

Japanese high court upholds conviction of U.S. Air Force serviceman over sexual assault of minor

(ja) A Japanese high court on September 10 upheld the five-year prison sentence of U.S. Air Force airman Brennon Washington, 26, for kidnapping and sexually assaulting a minor in Okinawa in December 2023. The court rejected his appeal, ruling that discrepancies in testimony stemmed from the victim's mental state.

The case, initially concealed from Okinawa authorities, fueled anti-base sentiment and prompted Tokyo to review its information-sharing with local governments. In response, the Pentagon's inspector general announced a review of U.S. Forces Japan personnel involved in violent crimes, while U.S. forces resumed joint patrols with local police to reassure the community. [Kyodo News]

Japanese, Belgian foreign ministers discuss bilateral, global cooperation

(dql) On September 16, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya met with Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot in Tokyo.

During the talk, Iwaya emphasized Japan's intent to deepen cooperation with Belgium, a strategic partner sharing common values.

The ministers discussed economic collaboration, including the establishment of a Japan-Belgium Task Force to foster business opportunities for Japanese companies and prepare for the upcoming friendship anniversary.

During a working lunch following the meeting they exchanged views on international security issues, including the situations in Ukraine, the Middle East, and East Asia. They highlighted coordination on North Korea, covering nuclear and missile programs as well as the abductions issue. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Meanwhile, Belgium's Minister for the Economy, Employment, and Agriculture, David Clarinval, urged Japan to lift its 13-year ban on Belgian pear imports, citing concerns over invasive insect species. Speaking in Tokyo on September 16, Clarinval called on Japan to restart and accelerate negotiations between Belgium's Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV) and Japanese food safety authorities.

Clarinval expressed confidence in progress, noting that Belgium currently exports USD 230 million in agricultural products to Japan annually and emphasizing that Japan is Belgium's third-largest trading partner in Asia and second-largest investor outside Europe. [Belga News Agency]

Japan, Portugal upgrade ties to strategic partnership

(dql) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and his Portuguese counterpart, Luis Montenegro, agreed on September 11 to elevate bilateral relations to a strategic partnership.

The two leaders met in Tokyo and pledged to strengthen cooperation across multiple areas, including the economy and security. They emphasized that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions is increasingly interconnected and affirmed their commitment to promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan] [Nippon.com]

Japan expands sanctions on Russia

(dql) Japan on September 12 widened its sanctions against Russia in response to the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, targeting additional individuals and organizations while lowering the Russian oil price cap.

Tokyo announced it will freeze the assets of 14 individuals and 51 organizations, including Russian officials, business executives, and pro-Russian figures in Ukraine, according to the Foreign Ministry. In addition, Japan will reduce the oil price cap from USD 60 per barrel, set by the G7 in 2022, to USD 47.60 per barrel. The cap restricts shipping firms and insurers from exporting Russian oil above this price, aiming to limit Moscow's revenue.

The move mark's Tokyo's first sanction against Russia since January. Japan has consistently supported the Western stance on Ukraine, providing financial and material aid to Kyiv and imposing sanctions on Russian individuals and entities. In retaliation, Russia has banned Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya, the Japanese ambassador to Ukraine, and seven other Japanese officials from entering the country. Former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his successor Shigeru Ishiba have also been barred from Russia. [The Japan Times]

Japan to shut down business education centers in Russia amid strained relations

(dql) Japan announced the closure of all six of its state-backed business education centers in Russia, reflecting the deepening deterioration of bilateral ties. [Government, Japan]

Established in 1994 and formalized through intergovernmental agreements in the early 2000s, the "Japanese Centers" in Moscow, Vladivostok, and other cities had provided management and business training to Russian executives, originally aimed at supporting post-Soviet economic reform.

Tokyo cited "the situation inside Russia," for this decision, in an apparent reference to two inspections of the Vladivostok center by Russian authorities in July and August. [The Moscow Times]

The closures underscore Japan's growing alignment with Western policy aimed at isolating Moscow. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Japan has joined sanctions and recently signaled readiness to participate in Western-led security guarantees for Ukraine under a future peace deal (see AiR No. 33, August/2025, 3).

Japanese lawmakers submit petition to urge government to recognize Palestinian state

(ja) A group of nonpartisan Japanese lawmakers submitted a petition containing 206 signatures on September 11 to Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya that urged the government to recognize a Palestinian state. The move comes ahead of a high-level international conference in New York scheduled to take place on September 22 regarding the proposed two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

Iwaya has noted that he takes the petition very seriously given how many signatures were collected and stated that the ministry will look further into the matter. [Kyodo News]

The National Diet, the country's bicameral legislature consisting of the 465-member House of Representatives and the 248-member House of Councillors.

Malaysia, China reaffirm commitment to combat transnational crime

(tl) During a bilateral meeting between Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail and China's Vice Minister of Public Security and Commissioner of the National Immigration Administration (NIA), Wang Zhizhong, Malaysia reaffirmed its commitment to working with China to combat transnational crime, including scams, human trafficking, cybercrime, narcotics, money laundering, and terrorism.

The discussions, held alongside the 19th ASEAN Ministers' Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) in Melaka, focused on enhancing regional cooperation through capacity-building, joint training, dialogue, real-time information sharing, and the use of digital tools such as AI and big data in law enforcement.

Furthermore, they discussed collaboration under the AMMTC+China mechanism, including the implementation of the Asean-China Action Plan on Transnational Crime, and bilateral efforts like dedicated working groups, police academy exchanges, scholarships, and collaborative crime prevention research. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia's Sarawak, Indonesia strengthen bilateral trade

(tl) Sarawak Premier Abang Johari announced that Malaysia and Indonesia have agreed to designate the Tebedu-Entikong border as an official trading point, following recent bilateral discussions with President Prabowo Subianto, which was also attended by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. The move is expected to boost cross-border collaboration and benefit local communities.

He also revealed that Indonesia has requested Sarawak to extend electricity supply to Nanga Badau, which could pave the way for wider cooperation in energy. Abang Johari highlighted the potential for Sarawak to further develop integrated economic opportunities with Indonesia, especially in trade and agriculture, aligning with ASEAN's regional goals. [The Borneo Post]

Japan, Mongolia discuss expanding cooperation in urban development and housing

(fs) Minister of Construction and Urban Development of Mongolia Bat-Amgalan Erdenebat held talks with Vice Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism of Japan Kenichi Ogasawara on September 9 to strengthen cooperation in urban planning, construction, and housing.

The meeting focused on applying Japan's smart city planning experience to address Ulaanbaatar's air pollution, congestion, and overpopulation.

The two sides discussed implementing a pilot project to transport blood donations and emergency medical supplies by drone between the National Center for Blood Transfusion, the First Central Hospital of Mongolia, and the Mongolian-Japanese Hospital in Ulaanbaatar. They also agreed to accelerate the development of underground pedestrian infrastructure in crowded areas of Ulaanbaatar, integrating commercial and service facilities through public-private investment.

Further cooperation will include involving Mongolian engineers in the bilateral 1000 Engineers Program and organizing regular training programs. Both sides also agreed to apply Japan's expertise in the long-term management of wastewater treatment facilities, building on projects already completed in Ulaanbaatar and nine other provinces, with five more under development. [iToim]

On a separate development, Deputy Governor of Ulaanbaatar Amartuvshin Amgalanbayar, responsible for green development and environmental policy, met with a Japanese City-to-City collaboration team to discuss clean energy solutions and potential joint projects.

Amgalanbayar highlighted the capital's gradual shift toward gas, electricity, and renewable energy, expressing interest in learning from Sapporo, Japan, which has a similar climate.

Fujii Masanori, representing the Japanese delegation, emphasized reducing heat loss and improving energy efficiency as key measures for cutting emissions.

Ulaanbaatar is accelerating efforts to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by banning raw coal and adopting middling and semi-coked briquettes. As part of its 24 mega development projects, the city has already insulated 5,000

households in highly polluted districts, replacing coal-based heating with gas during the first phase of coal reduction. [Montsame]

Mongolia, South Korea discuss deeper defense cooperation

(fs) Mongolia's Minister of Defense Batlut Damba took part in the Seoul Defense Dialogue 2025, hosted by South Korea's Ministry of National Defense from September 8 to 10.

The event brought together defense ministers from five countries, deputy ministers from eight countries, NATO representatives, and over 1,000 delegates from 68 nations and international organizations.

On the sidelines, Damba met with his South Korean counterpart Ahn Gyu-back to discuss strengthening high-level visits, joint field exercises, personnel training, and regional security cooperation within the framework of the two countries' Strategic Partnership, agreeing to expand defense exchanges and collaboration. [Montsame]

Mongolia, Uzbekistan establish friendship society to strengthen bilateral ties

(fs) The Committee on Interethnic Relations and Work with Compatriots Abroad of Uzbekistan held a regular meeting during which the founding assembly of the Uzbekistan-Mongolia Friendship Society was convened.

Committee specialists and representatives of relevant agencies discussed the society's objectives, focusing on expanding cooperation in science, education, culture, agriculture, and experience sharing. Emphasis was placed on deepening cultural and humanitarian exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and friendship, [Uza]

The Committee is a government agency tasked with the implementation of state policies related to interethnic relations and engagement with the Uzbek diaspora.

India explores rare-earth supply from Myanmar rebels amid Chinese export curbs

(su) India is working to secure rare-earth minerals from mines controlled by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in northern Myanmar. New Delhi's Ministry of Mines has asked state-owned IREL and private firm Midwest Advanced Materials to collect samples from the Chipwe-Pangwa mining belt, which the KIA seized from junta-aligned forces last year. The aim is to test the ores for heavy rare earths such as dysprosium and terbium, critical for manufacturing magnets used in electric vehicles and advanced equipment.

The arrangement, reported for the first time, would mark an unusual case of India engaging directly with a non-state armed group. The KIA has begun gathering samples, and officials on both sides are considering whether bulk exports to India are feasible. However, logistical hurdles remain, with minerals currently transported more easily into nearby China, and India lacking large-scale processing facilities.

The development comes as Beijing, which holds near-monopoly control over rare-earth technology, has tightened export restrictions this year in response to trade frictions with the United States. Analysts note that the KIA continues to supply China, though relations have been strained by clashes with junta forces around the strategic town of Bhamo. India is also seeking partnerships with Japanese and Korean firms to expand its capacity to refine rare-earth elements domestically. [Reuters]

Czech aircraft reportedly supplied to Myanmar junta air force

(anl) Myanmar Witness—a non-profit organization that documents human rights violations, armed conflicts, and political developments in Myanmar—released a report suggesting that a Czech company may be supplying transport aircraft to Myanmar's military junta, raising concerns about international complicity in the junta's ongoing air campaign.

According to flight tracking data and documented evidence, Let Aircraft Industries, a subsidiary of the Czech defense group Omnipol, is suspected of transferring three Let L410 UVP-E20 twin-engine short-range transport aircraft to the Myanmar Air Force (MAF).

Tracking records show that aircraft registered as OK-JMA (serial number 3413) departed Kunovice Airport in the Czech Republic and arrived near Yangon in late September 2024. By October that year, Myanmar authorities had re-registered the plane as XY-AMV,

officially placing it under MAF control. Since then, the aircraft has been tracked operating across multiple locations in Myanmar.

Two additional aircraft—OK-AMJ (serial number 3418) and OK-AMK (serial number 3419)—were reportedly flown from Kunovice to Myanmar in mid-2025, with OK-AMJ departing on 9 June and OK-AMK on 8 July. While Myanmar Witness has not independently confirmed their continued presence in the country, the organization has reason to believe both are now part of the MAF fleet.

The junta's air force has previously adapted Chinese-made Y-12 transport planes into makeshift bombers, which have been repeatedly cited in reports of devastating airstrikes nationwide. Analysts warn that the similar capabilities of the L410 aircraft could enhance the military's capacity to conduct aerial attacks.

Although conclusive evidence regarding the two 2025 transfers remain pending, Myanmar Witness argues that the available data strongly indicates that all three Czech-built aircraft are now in the hands of the junta's air force. [Mizzima]

Sweden to end development aid to Myanmar by 2026

(anl) On September 11, Sweden announced it will gradually end all development aid to Myanmar by June 30, 2026, redirecting resources to support Ukraine. This decision, coming after a similar U.S. pullback, has been criticized by rights groups as a significant blow to Myanmar's already vulnerable civil society.

Making clear Ukraine as the top priority of Swedish development aid and Ukraine Europe's "primary line of defense," Minister of Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade Benjamin Dousa stressed that reallocating resources is crucial to strengthen both military and civilian support for Kyiv.

On September 11, Sweden announced a new military aid package of SEK 9.2 billion (USD 928 million) to Ukraine, aiming to raise total support to SEK 70 billion (USD 7.5 billion) over the next two years. The aid includes artillery, ammunition, and radar systems. [Anadolu Ajansı]

The Swedish government also cited deteriorating conditions for development work in Myanmar since the 2021 military coup. Under the phase-out plan,

Sweden's aid agency Sida will provide up to USD 18 million in 2025 and USD 15 million in 2026 through existing programs before ending all assistance in mid-2026.

Rights organizations warned that withdrawing aid could accelerate the collapse of independent media and human rights monitoring, undermining decades of capacity-building and making junta abuses harder to track. Human Rights Myanmar called on Sweden to conduct a rapid conflict-sensitivity review, extend the transition period, and develop a responsible exit strategy. It also urged other donors, including the EU, UK, and Australia, to step in to mitigate the impact. [The Irrawaddy]

North Korea redraws maps to portray South Korea as foreign state

(dql) North Korea has reportedly ordered all state agencies to replace maps of the entire Korean Peninsula with maps showing only its northern half, coinciding with Foundation Day on September 9. The move is part of Pyongyang's escalating effort to erase the notion of reunification and reinforce its doctrine of "two hostile states."

The new map depicts only North Korea in detail, while South Korea is shaded gray, without administrative divisions or place names. This marks a departure from the North's traditional use of "South Choson (South Korea)" and symbolically treats Seoul as a separate, foreign entity, equivalent to other neighboring states such as China and Russia.

Authorities have instructed agencies to educate members that only the North constitutes "our land" and to refer to the South strictly as a foreign country. Existing maps of the full peninsula have been recalled, making them increasingly rare inside official institutions. [Daily NK]

North Korea prepares contingency plans for potential Trump negotiations

(mo) North Korea is preparing contingency plans for potential negotiations with U.S. President Donald Trump, following his recent statement that he is open to meet before the end of the year. According to internal sources, Pyongyang's strategy centers on freezing nuclear production and implementing limited

risk reduction measures, rather than full denuclearization—an option it has rejected since enshrining its nuclear program in the constitution.

The approach reflects lessons learned from the failed 2019 Hanoi summit. Instead of pursuing a sweeping deal, North Korea now favors incremental agreements in areas such as energy, agriculture, and public health, using these as leverage to push for sanctions relief, limited financial transactions, and ultimately, a non-aggression pact with Washington.

Officials reportedly see dialogue to gain de facto recognition as a nuclear weapons state, while gradually reducing reliance on China and Russia through "rebalancing," not outright substitution. For potential talks, Pyongyang is considering channels through its U.N. delegation in New York or third countries such as Sweden, with neutral venues like Singapore or Geneva favored over Panmunjom due to strained inter-Korean ties. [38North] , [Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (.gov)]

Ultimately, North Korea's participation hinges on whether Trump offers concrete incentives, especially sanctions relief on petroleum and minerals, and credible security guarantees. [Daily NK]

Pakistan's commerce body targets USD 3 billion in exports to Bangladesh amid thaw in ties

(lm) Pakistan is moving to expand trade with Bangladesh as both countries seek to reset relations after decades of strained ties. Pakistan's commerce authorities have announced plans to raise exports to Bangladesh from the current USD 800 million to USD 3 billion within the next few years, with medium-term potential estimated at USD 5–7 billion. The initiative was launched at a textile and chemicals exhibition in Dhaka, where Pakistan set up a pavilion to target Bangladesh's USD 47 billion textile and apparel industry.

The trade push comes amid a broader political thaw. Relations began warming after last year's student-led uprising in Bangladesh that ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who later sought asylum in India, complicating Dhaka–New Delhi ties. Since then, Pakistan and Bangladesh have resumed sea trade and expanded government-to-government commerce, signaling a mutual interest in strengthening economic links.

During a meeting in Islamabad with AFM Khalid Hossain, Bangladesh's Adviser on Religious Affairs, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called for deeper cooperation in trade, academic exchange, and people-to-people contact. Both sides also discussed the early resumption of direct flights and reaffirmed plans to sustain high-level visits. Khalid, accompanied by Bangladesh's High Commissioner, delivered greetings from Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus along with condolences and an offer of flood relief assistance. Sharif praised Yunus's leadership in poverty alleviation and his role in driving bilateral engagement. [Arab News] [The Daily Star]

Pakistan's president seeks to deepen China ties despite collapse of USD 1.8 billion power utility acquisition

(lm) Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has launched a ten-day visit to China aimed at deepening economic, trade, and defence cooperation, even as relations face strains following Shanghai Electric's termination of a USD 1.8 billion deal to acquire Pakistan's largest private power utility.

The utility in question, K-Electric, supplies electricity to Karachi, Pakistan's commercial hub. Shanghai Electric abandoned the acquisition on September 9, citing worsening business conditions and K-Electric's failure to meet conditions. The deal, first proposed in 2016, had stalled due to regulatory delays and Pakistan's worsening *circular debt crisis* — a cycle of unpaid subsidies that leaves utilities unable to settle obligations with power producers and suppliers. Meeting Shanghai Electric Chairman Wu Lei in Shanghai, Zardari pledged to resolve outstanding issues "amicably" and invited further investment, including in transmission and distribution modernization. He also oversaw the signing of an agreement for a coal gasification plant in Sindh's Tharparkar district. [Arab News 1]

Defence and aviation ties formed another central pillar of the trip. In Chengdu, Zardari became the first foreign head of state to tour the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC)'s Advanced Aircraft Complex, which produces advanced fighter jets. He reaffirmed Pakistan's intention to expand co-production of the JF-17 Thunder, deepen collaboration on the J-10 fighter, and receive briefings on next-generation technologies including the J-20 stealth aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and multi-domain command-and-control systems. According to Zardari, Chinese aircraft have already strengthened the

Pakistan Air Force, particularly during the four-day clash with India in May 2025, when Islamabad claimed to have downed six Indian jets — including three French Rafales — using Chinese J-10Cs, a claim New Delhi has not confirmed. [Arab News 2]

China accounts for 81 percent of Pakistan's imported weapons over the past five years, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), underlining Beijing's dominant role in Pakistan's defense procurement. These exports have included aircraft, missile systems, and radar platforms, many of which are co-developed or produced locally in Pakistan with Chinese technology. [DAWN] [Daily Times]

Beyond defence and energy, Zardari's visit has also emphasized cultural and connectivity cooperation. He addressed the Golden Panda International Cultural Forum in Chengdu, praising China's Global Security Initiative, and later travelled by high-speed rail to Mianyang, where he highlighted China's achievements in sustainable transport and infrastructure resilience as potential models for Pakistan. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

The visit comes shortly after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's trip, during which Islamabad and Beijing signed USD 8.5 billion in new investment and joint venture deals. China remains Pakistan's largest trading partner, with annual bilateral trade exceeding USD 25 billion, anchored by heavy Chinese investment in energy, transport, infrastructure, and telecommunications through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Pakistan and U.S. continue to strengthen ties

(lm) Pakistan's relationship with the United States continues to show signs of a reset after years of strained ties.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke by phone on September 13, reaffirming their commitment to deepen cooperation across trade, critical minerals, digital currency, and other sectors. The dialogue builds on momentum from earlier this year, when President Donald Trump claimed credit for brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan, leading to improved diplomatic space for Islamabad in Washington. Both sides finalized a trade deal in July, while Pakistan's exports to the US — its top export destination — grew to USD 5.44 billion in fiscal year 2023–2024, a 10 percent increase over the previous year. For

Islamabad, closer ties with Washington are part of a wider effort to stabilize its economy after a 2023 debt crisis. [Arab News]

Parallel to this diplomatic outreach, US regulators are assessing whether Pakistan can restore direct air connectivity to the American market. A team from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) concluded a weeklong safety audit of the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) in Karachi on September 12, reviewing legal, regulatory, and operational standards. The outcome will determine whether Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), barred since 2020 after a deadly crash and pilot license scandal, can resume flights to the US. European and British regulators recently reinstated PIA's access, raising cautious optimism for a similar US decision. A second FAA review later this year will examine airport and airspace security. For Pakistan's nearly 700,000 expatriates in the US, resuming direct routes would cut travel times and restore confidence in the national aviation sector. [Arab News]

New Pakistan-Bahrain security agreements cover counterterrorism and law enforcement cooperation

(my) Pakistan and Bahrain have signed new security agreements covering extradition, mutual legal assistance, police and battalion training, and counter-narcotics operations. The deals were finalized during meetings in Islamabad between Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Bahrain's Interior Minister Lt. Gen. Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa.

A Joint Working Group will be established to coordinate cooperation on counterterrorism, immigration, border security, and coast guard operations. Bahrain will also appoint a drug liaison officer in Islamabad to support joint anti-narcotics efforts. Pakistan's Anti-Narcotics Force reported seizing narcotics worth about USD 146 million (PKR 41 billion) in recent operations.

Alongside security cooperation, Pakistan offered Bahraini investors expedited visa services and business facilitation, signaling an intent to link security collaboration with economic engagement. [Arab News] [DAWN]

Pakistan and Iraq strengthen defense and security cooperation

(my) Pakistan and Iraq have agreed to deepen cooperation across military and security domains. In Islamabad, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and Iraqi Air Force (IAF) committed to expanding joint exercises, pilot exchange programs, and training initiatives. Iraq requested Pakistani support in modernizing its air force training system and expressed interest in replicating Pakistan's National Aerospace Science and Technology Park, which integrates academia, industry, and military requirements.

Parallel talks between the two governments also advanced broader defense and security collaboration, with agreements to sign multiple Memoranda of Understanding covering extradition, mutual legal assistance, counter-narcotics, specialized battalion training, and police cooperation. Both countries will establish a Joint Working Group to coordinate efforts in counterterrorism, immigration, border security, and coast guard operations.

Pakistan's interior minister emphasized counter-narcotics as a central element of the partnership, highlighting record drug seizures by the Anti-Narcotics Force valued at about USD 146 million despite limited resources. [Arab News] [Radio Pakistan] [The Nation]

Pakistan-Iran talks focus on border infrastructure and trade expansion

(my) Pakistan and Iran have agreed to improve border infrastructure to facilitate trade during the 22nd session of the Pakistan–Iran Joint Economic Commission (JEC) in Tehran. Pakistani Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan met with Iran's Minister of Road and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh on September 15, stressing the need for better road and rail connectivity, border markets, customs data sharing, and maritime services.

The two countries, which currently trade about USD 3 billion annually, aim to raise bilateral trade to USD 10 billion. The talks follow 12 agreements and memorandums of understanding signed during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Pakistan in August, covering cooperation in commerce, tourism, culture, transport, science, and education.

Khan, who is leading Pakistan's delegation and co-chairing the Joint Business Forum, said the visit was intended to give fresh momentum to bilateral economic and commercial ties. [Arab News]

Pakistan and UAE appoint envoys to step up anti-narcotics cooperation

(lm) Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have appointed special representatives to coordinate intelligence sharing and joint operations against drug trafficking networks. The announcement followed talks in Islamabad between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad bin Hamdan Al Nahyan, chairman of the UAE's new federal anti-narcotics authority.

The appointments build on commitments made at a Pakistan-hosted Gulf Cooperation Council conference in April, where Gulf states pledged deeper cooperation against heroin, synthetic drugs, and precursor chemicals. Pakistan emphasized its role as a frontline state, citing recent joint operations that led to 400 arrests and the seizure of five tons of narcotics bound for the UAE.

Both governments acknowledged rising smuggling of synthetic drugs and pledged to expand cross-border enforcement mechanisms. The UAE, which created a federal anti-narcotics authority last year to centralize drug control, has framed the partnership as part of its wider regional security strategy. [Arab News]

South Korea halts feasibility study for Philippines bridge loan, Manila turns to France

South Korea has suspended a feasibility study for a proposed multibillion-peso bridge program in the Philippines, citing issues raised in Korean media about its loan approval process. The South Korean Embassy in Manila stressed that the move was unrelated to the Philippine government and was meant to verify concerns on Seoul's side.

The project, called the Pang-agraryong Tulay para sa Bagong Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka (PBBM Bridges), was designed to build 350 modular steel bridges nationwide by 2028 at a cost of about PHP 28 billion (USD 480 million). The Department of Finance (DOF) initially sought funding from South Korea's Economic Development Cooperation Fund in 2023, but the request was rejected in 2024 over corruption risks and feasibility doubts. A smaller version of the project, covering 70 bridges, was later revived by the Korean Export-Import Bank.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung announced on September 10 that he had ordered the feasibility study to be put on hold, following a magazine report alleging that the project's revival had been pushed through under political pressure.

Philippine officials clarified that Manila had already dropped plans to tap Korean financing by late 2024 after the Department of Agrarian Reform flagged misalignment in scope and technical requirements. The DOF said it is now in advanced negotiations with France to fund the full project. [Inquirer] [PhilStar]

Philippines protests Chinese plans for nature reserve in South China Sea

(ghd) On September 12, the Philippines filed a diplomatic protest against China over the latter's plan to establish a national nature reserve at Scarborough Shoal. This area, the site of frequent confrontations between the two nations, is part of the contested South China Sea.

According to the DFA, the shoal is an integral part of Philippine territory, as it is located 124 nautical miles west of Luzon and well within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). On the other hand, it is far from mainland China as it is more than 470 nautical miles away from the southernmost province of Hainan. Thus, the Philippines has exclusive authority to establish environmental protection areas in this shoal.

The DFA is urging China to respect Philippine sovereignty, withdraw its plans, and comply with international law, namely the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award. In contrast, China's State Council has claimed that the planned reserve aims to maintain the natural ecosystem of the area. [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

Several members of the diplomatic community, including ambassadors from Denmark, Japan, and Canada, as well as the EU delegation, have publicly expressed concern over China's announcement. Via social media posts, they reiterated the importance of respecting the 2016 Arbitral Award, which is legally binding and invalidated the basis of China's claims. [Manila Bulletin3]

Meanwhile, the Philippine army reported a change in China's tactics in the South China Sea. During a joint maritime exercise with the US and Japan on September 12 and 13, a Chinese warship was seen within the

Philippine's EEZ. Instead of invoking the ten-dash line, the Chinese vessel invoked sovereign immunity as it was allegedly conducting legal military operations in the high seas, where freedom of navigation applies. However, the warship was seen 35 nautical miles southwest of Capones Island. [Manila Bulletin4]

Japan, Philippines reciprocal access agreement enters into force

(ghd) The Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) between the Japan and Philippines, which aims to deepen the defense and security cooperation between the parties, takes effect on September 11. While the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) has already been conducting humanitarian activities in the Philippines before the RAA's effectivity, the RAA will allow the JSDF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to conduct humanitarian, training, and other activities in each other's territories without the need to go through lengthy clearance processes. The RAA was signed in Manila on July 8, 2024 during the Philippines-Japan Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting.

On the sidelines of the Seoul Defense Dialogue on September 9, Philippine defense sectary Teodoro met with Japanese defense minister Gen. Along with welcoming the entry into force of the RAA, the two reviewed other defense initiatives and possible partnerships. They emphasized the importance of maritime cooperation considering the region's security issues, and of strengthening the Philippines' defense capabilities. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Trafficking victims rescued from Cambodia

(ghd) According to the immigration bureau, ten victims of human trafficking have been rescued from Cambodia, where they were forced to work in illegal scam hubs. The victims were lured by online traffickers with promises of high salaries, but instead were subjected to brutal working conditions, torture, and confinement. Their passports were confiscated upon arrival in Cambodia, and those who refused to participate in online scams were forced to pay a penalty.

Ambassador to Cambodia Mayo noted the increase in the number of Filipinos seeking rescue from scam hubs, from 80 in 2024 to 180 by August 2025. Many of

these were former employees of Philippine offshore gaming operators, who left the Philippines disguised as either tourists or overseas workers. The immigration bureau aims to prevent this by enhancing immigration checks, improving inter-agency cooperation, and raising public awareness. The social welfare department likewise established help desks designed to assist travelers with issues concerning Minor Travel Authorizations (MTAs) at international airport. The MTA, which aims to protect children from trafficking and abuse, is required whenever minors are traveling overseas without their parents. [Inquirer1] [Manila Bulletin1]

During operations held at the Tawi-Tawi airport last September 5 and 6, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) arrested three job recruiters attempting to traffic 27 individuals to an offshore gaming operator hub in Cambodia. Based on the NBI investigation, the suspects coerced victims to enter Cambodia through complicated routes over Manila, Zamboanga, Tawi-Tawi, and Malaysia. The arrests were made after a victim alerted the NBI of the suspects' location. [Inquirer2][Manila Bulletin2]

Renewed energy partnership between Philippines, New Zealand

(ghd) On September 9, coinciding with the Philippine International Geothermal Conference, New Zealand ambassador to the Philippines McIntosh hosted a reception for a geothermal delegation. The partnership between the two countries in the field of geothermal energy is entering a new phase with a framework for investment and knowledge exchange.

As part of this renewed collaboration, the New Zealand company Western Energy has opened its first office in Manila to bring its technology and expertise to the Philippine geothermal industry. Another company, MB Contact, is also helping Philippine geothermal plants with technical challenges. This cooperation is also supported by the ADB and various government agencies. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines, Thailand hold disaster response drills

(ghd) The Philippine and Thai armies held a two-day joint training exercise on September 11-12, focusing on humanitarian assistance and disaster response. An

expert discussed topics such as collapsed structure search and rescue, rope rescue, patient handling, and medical response operations. In addition to improving the armies' technical knowledge, the drills also improved camaraderie between the soldiers.

Both countries are prone to natural disasters, with the Philippines facing typhoons and earthquakes and Thailand experiencing major floods. This shared vulnerability has encouraged greater cooperation in disaster readiness and response between Manila and Bangkok. [Manila Bulletin]

US to provide USD 241 million health aid to the Philippines

(ghd) On September 12, the US Embassy in Manila announced that the US is planning to provide USD 241.6 million in foreign assistance to strengthen the Philippines' health system. Specifically, the funding shall be used to improve disease detection and response capabilities and enhance maternal and childcare health services, with particular focus on tuberculosis. It will also support initiatives such as supply chain management, data and information systems, and laboratory strengthening. [Manila Bulletin]

Singapore to Launch Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with New Zealand

(ms) Singapore will elevate its relations with New Zealand through a new Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on 15 September. The upgrade reflects both countries' intention to deepen cooperation amid shifting global dynamics.

The announcement came as Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan outlined Singapore's foreign policy priorities in Parliament, stressing the need to remain relevant and trusted in an era of major power rivalry, protectionism, disrupted supply chains, and rapid technological change. He said Singapore's prosperity depends on free trade and global connectivity and must be safeguarded through pragmatic engagement with partners worldwide.

The CSP represents the highest level of bilateral cooperation, expanding on the Enhanced Partnership signed in 2019. That framework already covered trade

and economics, defense and security, science and innovation, and people-to-people exchanges. In 2022, a green economy pillar was added, followed by a supply chain resilience pillar in 2024, announced during New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's visit to Singapore.

Both governments describe the new CSP as a platform to consolidate these areas while opening space for further collaboration. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has previously highlighted New Zealand as one of the "like-minded countries" with which Singapore should deepen ties. [Channel News Asia] [The Straut Times]

South Korea seeks Japan's support for potential Kim-Trump summit

(mo) Unification Minister Chung Dong-young met with Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Koichi Mizushima urging Tokyo to support efforts to revive dialogue between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Chung noted that sanctions have failed to resolve the nuclear issue and stressed the need for diplomatic solutions. He also pointed Kim's appearance alongside Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the recent Beijing military parade as evidence of growing alignment against the U.S., further underscoring the limits of sanctions. [KBS] [Yonhap News]

Mizushima, for his part, emphasized the importance of communication and trilateral cooperation among Japan, South Korea, and the U.S., particularly regarding U.N. sanctions on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. [The Korea Times]

South Korea, U.S. vow stronger defense posture amid deepening North Korea–Russia military ties

(mo) U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Commander Samuel Paparo met separately with South Korea's Minister of National Defense Ahn Gyu-back and Foreign Minister Cho Hyun in Seoul on September 14. The discussions focused on the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and strengthening the South Korea-U.S. alliance.

Both sides agreed that North Korea's growing nuclear and missile capabilities, along with its illegal military cooperation with Russia, pose grave threats to peace not only on the Korean Peninsula but across the broader Indo-Pacific region. They emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong combined defense posture and reaffirmed the value of trilateral security cooperation with Japan to deter these threats. Additionally, both countries agreed to deepen economic and industrial cooperation, recognizing South Korea as an optimal partner for the U.S. manufacturing revival and moving forward on bilateral shipbuilding collaboration. [The Coshun Daily]

South Korea, U.S. conduct Iron Mace drill to strengthen nuclear deterrence against North Korea

(mo) South Korea and the United States are conducting a tabletop exercise (TTX) this week at Camp Humphreys, focused on integrating U.S. nuclear assets with South Korea's conventional forces to bolster deterrence against North Korea.

The exercise, called Iron Mace, will be the third of its kind since August 2024 and April 2025, but the first under President Lee Jae-myung's administration. Details of the drill were not disclosed by South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff or U.S. Forces Korea, but the move highlights allied efforts to strengthen extended deterrence amid Pyongyang's advancing nuclear and missile programs. [Yonhap]

South Korea and the United States began two simultaneous military exercises on September 15: Freedom Edge 25, a trilateral outdoor drill with Japan in international waters southeast of Jeju Island, and Iron Mace, that focuses on conventional-nuclear integration and joint planning against North Korean nuclear threats. [The Times of India], [Korea Joong Ang Daily]

In response, North Korea issued strong international statements, warning that the exercises would bring negative consequences and that Pyongyang would intensify countermeasures.

Analysts believe these reactions, along with Kim Jong-un's recent inspections of nuclear and conventional forces, are setting the stage to justify further nuclear weapons development, modernization of conventional forces, and possible weapons tests before the end of the year. [The Korea Herald]

Hyundai raid in Georgia delays factory opening, strains US–South Korea investment ties

(mo/dql) A historic immigration raid at Hyundai's US plant in Georgia, detaining 475 people—including roughly 300 South Koreans—will delay the factory's opening by at least two months, Hyundai CEO José Muñoz said. Most of those detained were temporarily sent from South Korea to help launch the plant. None were directly employed by Hyundai, and LG Energy Solution, a partner at the battery facility, noted that many had visas or were under visa waiver programs.

The raid has heightened US–South Korea tensions. President Lee Jae-myung warned it could discourage foreign investment, while noting that US President Donald Trump had proposed some workers remain to train American staff, an offer largely declined. Hyundai is assessing how to fill positions vacated by returning South Korean workers.

The incident also raises questions about the viability of the US–South Korea trade deal, under which Trump had eased tariff threats in exchange for billions in investment. Hyundai alone had pledged USD 26 billion, including a new steel plant in Louisiana.

The Georgia complex, poised to create 8,500 jobs, represents the largest economic development project in the state's history and is central to US efforts to boost manufacturing through foreign investment. [BBC] [CNN]

In a separate development, POSCO—one of the world's largest steel producers—has become the first South Korean company to join the U.S.-backed Alaska LNG project through a strategic partnership with Glenfarne Alaska LNG, the project's lead private developer.

The agreement, signed at the Gastech conference in Milan, includes plans for POSCO to supply steel for a 1,300-kilometer pipeline connecting Alaska's interior to a southern LNG export terminal. In addition, POSCO committed to a 20-year purchase agreement for 1 million tons of LNG annually, the project's first such deal. The partnership underscores South Korea's role as a key Asian investor in the initiative, which has strong support from the Trump administration. [Energy Terminal] [Yonhap] [Business Korea]

The deal follows Seoul's July pledge to buy 100 billion USD in U.S. energy products as part of a 350 billion USD package linked to Washington's decision to cut

tariffs on South Korean imports from 25 percent to 15 percent.

South Korea's Hanwha Aerospace to cooperate Britain's BAE on anti-jamming tech

(mo) Hanwha Aerospace announced on September 11 that it has partnered with Britain's BAE Systems to incorporate advanced GPS and anti-jamming technology into its Chunmoo multiple launch rocket system, also marketed abroad as the Deep Strike Capability system.

The integration of BAE's proven solutions, already tested by NATO members, is expected to significantly improve the system's reliability and effectiveness in electronically contested environments, strengthening its precision-guided strike capabilities. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap] [Joint Forces] [Hanwa] [European Defense Industry]

South Korean President holds first call with French President Macron

(mo) South Korean President Lee Jae-myung held his first phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron on the September 11 since taking office.

Macron congratulated Lee on his inauguration, voiced hope that relations between the two countries will deepen under Korea's new government, and suggested meeting in person during the upcoming UN General Assembly to discuss bilateral and global issues. Lee thanked Macron for his congratulations, noted the steady growth of trade and investment between South Korea and France, and expressed his desire to expand cooperation in strategic industries such as artificial intelligence, space, and defense. [The Chosun] [Korea.Gov] [KBS]

South Korea to fund USD 15 million digital education project in Egypt

(mo) Egypt has launched a 15 million USD initiative for a five-year strategic partnership with South Korea to spearhead digital education transformation across Africa. The initiative, signed by the Egyptian Education Minister and South Korean Ambassador, will

modernize 54 public middle schools across all 27 governorates, ensuring equitable nationwide access. [Tech in Africa] [Egyptian Gazette]

The program includes ICT-based curricula, teacher training, digital infrastructure upgrades, and administrative reforms, with preparatory studies through 2026 and full implementation from 2027. It also promotes cultural exchange through Korean language instruction, expanding King Sejong Institutes and integrating Korean into schools.

Chinese envoy meets Sri Lanka's ex-presidents

(lm) Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong visited former Presidents Mahinda Rajapaksa and Ranil Wickremesinghe in quick succession, amid intensified legal and political pressure on both.

The visit to Mahinda Rajapaksa's official residence came a day after Parliament passed the *Presidents' Entitlements Repeal Act*, which forces former presidents to return state-provided residences and other privileges. Rajapaksa has since vacated the mansion, reportedly moving to his family home in Tangalle. [Daily Mirror]

Ranil Wickremesinghe, meanwhile, was arrested in August over allegations of misusing public funds linked to a London trip for his wife's graduation — a rare case of legal action against a former Sri Lankan head of state. [Daily Mirror]

In addition, China has pledged to fully supply school uniform materials for 2026 as a grant covering over 4.4 million students in government and assisted schools. [Daily Mirror]

Taiwan reiterates sovereignty claims over Chinese plans for nature reserve in South China Sea

(acl) On September 11, Taiwan reaffirmed its sovereignty over the South China Sea after China approved a proposal on September 10 to establish a national nature reserve in the disputed Scarborough Shoal. China's State Council said the reserve aims to preserve the atoll's ecosystem diversity, stability, and sustainability.

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) reiterated its sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands and surrounding waters, citing international law and the law of the sea. The ministry condemned China's unilateral action as illegal and warned it could escalate regional tensions in the Indo-Pacific. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Taiwan]

MOFA also affirmed Taiwan's readiness to work with regional partners, including the Philippines, to resolve disputes peacefully under international law. [Focus Taiwan]

The Philippines protested the decision, with its foreign ministry stating that the move "clearly infringes" on Manila's national rights and interests and warning against it a "clear pretext for occupation." [Reuters]

Indian officials visit Taiwan to attend SEMICON, strengthen bilateral collaboration

(acl) Two Indian officials—, S. Krishnan, secretary of India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, and Amitesh Sinha, CEO of India Semiconductor Mission, the government agency responsible for formulating and implementing national semiconductor initiatives—visited Taiwan to attend SEMICON Taiwan 2025 last week to advance collaboration between India and Taiwan within the global semiconductor ecosystem.

At a press event in Taipei on September 11 ahead of the forum, Krishnan noted that in 2024, India's Tata Electronics partnered with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation to establish the country's first 12-inch wafer fabrication plant. He emphasized that India offers "favorable ground" for high-tech investment due to its large domestic market and large pool of young talent.

Two officials aimed to explore new opportunities for cooperation in advanced semiconductor design and manufacturing, capital equipment, and supply chain resilience—areas of strategic interest for India's engagement with Taiwan in the absence of formal diplomatic ties.

SEMICON Taiwan 2025 run from September 10 to 12 and featured more than 1,200 semiconductor and technology companies, with over 4,100 booths.

At a side event on geopolitics, co-sponsored by Taiwan's foreign ministry, Foreign Minister Lin Chia-

Lung described semiconductors and AI as Taiwan's "strategic resources". He stressed Taiwan's commitment to forging stronger tech ties with other democracies, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, where the Russian invasion of Ukraine has drawn sympathy for the security challenges Taiwan says it faces from China.

This year's SEMICON also drew delegations from countries with closer ties to China. Costa Rica attended for the first time; it was the first Central American nation to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2007. An African delegation also attended for the first time, despite China's diplomatic and economic influence in the region. [Reuters] [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan deploys patrol boats to monitor Chinese vessels near Dongsha Island

(acl) On September 13, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) said it had deployed patrol vessels to expel a Chinese coast guard ship and a Chinese fishing boat detected near Taiwan-administered Dongsha Island (also known as Pratas Island) in the South China Sea.

According to the CGA, the Chinese coast guard vessel was first spotted on September 11, northeast of Dongsha Island, approaching the island's restricted waters. The CGA immediately dispatched a 2,000-ton patrol vessel to shadow the Chinese ship.

Later the same day, a Chinese fishing boat was spotted within the island's restricted waters, east of Dongsha. two CGA patrol boats seized a small raft belonging to the Chinese fishing boat, before expelling the boat from the area. [Focus Taiwan][Taipei Times]

Taiwan's foreign minister visits Czech Republic as part of Europe tour

(yl) Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung visited Prague on September 10, attending the opening of a National Palace Museum exhibition at the Czech National Museum alongside Czech Senate Speaker Milos Vystrcil.

The visit was part of his 10-day Europe tour in the frame the "Taiwan Culture in Europe 2025" campaign. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs not disclosed the full itinerary. [Reuters]

The ministry dismissed Beijing's criticism of Lin's trip, stressing that China has no right to interfere in other countries' sovereign decisions. It reiterated that Taiwan would continue strengthening cooperation with democratic partners based on shared values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, while rejecting Beijing's intimidation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan] [Focus Taiwan]

French Senate delegation visits Taiwan for high-level meetings

(yl) A delegation of French senators led by Rachid Temal, chair of the Senate Taiwan Friendship Group, arrived in Taiwan on September 14 for a six-day visit. [Focus Taiwan]

The group, including senators Jean-Michel Arnaud, François Bonneau, Bernard Buis, Yannick Jadot, and Mireille Jouve, is scheduled to meet Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim, Legislative Speaker Han Kuo-yu, Deputy Foreign Minister François Wu, and ministers of economics, defense, and environment. They will also meet Minister without Portfolio Audrey Tang and visit the Taipei City government. [Focus Taiwan]

In addition to official talks, the delegation will hold meetings with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the opposition Kuomintang (KMT), and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Their program also includes visits to Hon Hai Precision Industry (Foxconn, a major company in ICT industry) and Sun Moon Lake (a natural landscape in Mid Taiwan). [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan, UK sign MOU to boost talent development collaboration in semiconductor industry

(acl) On September 11, Taiwan and the UK signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to strengthen bilateral collaboration in talent development in the semiconductor sector.

The agreement aims to promote talent exchanges and talent development in the semiconductor industry to enhance economic ties, shared democratic values, and supply chain resilience. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Taiwan in Chinese] [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News]

Cambodia and Thailand signal de-escalation with arms pullback, mine clearance, and scam crackdown

(lm/bk/acs) Thailand and Cambodia signaled progress toward easing tensions at their September 10 General Border Committee (GBC) meeting in Koh Kong province, though challenges persist along the frontier. The GBC is a bilateral defense forum between the two countries that oversees security cooperation and conflict de-escalation along the border.

The meeting followed weeks of clashes since July 24 that killed at least 36 people and displaced more than 150,000 civilians along the 800-kilometre border. Landmine blasts alone have maimed 14 Thai soldiers since mid-July. Between August 10 and September 11, Thai bomb disposal teams recovered 2,470 items, including 349 anti-personnel mines, four anti-tank mines, 75 unexploded shells, and more than 2,000 unused explosives, in Si Sa Ket and Ubon Ratchathani provinces. Most incidents occurred on previously cleared patrol routes, underscoring the severity of renewed contamination. [Bangkok Post 1]

At the session, co-chaired by acting Thai Defence Minister Gen Nattaphon Narkphanit and Cambodian Defence Minister Tea Seiha, both sides agreed to withdraw heavy weapons from contested areas within three weeks, begin joint mine clearance within a month, and launch a joint task force within a week to dismantle Cambodia-based scam networks. Bangkok handed over intelligence on more than 60 scam centers, with police from both countries due to meet on September 16 in Sa Kaeo province to coordinate enforcement.

On border management, the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC) — the bilateral body tasked with demarcating the border — will continue its mapping and survey work, while the Regional Border Committee (RBC), a military-to-military mechanism at regional command level, will draft detailed management plans. Talks included reopening crossings in Chanthaburi and Trat provinces, but no immediate approvals were given. Any reopening will initially apply only to goods vehicles and depend on local readiness.

Officials cautioned that concrete follow-through on weapons pullback, mine clearance, and scam suppression will be critical to restoring stability. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet's outreach to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has also helped to ease tensions. The next GBC meeting is scheduled in Thailand in October. [Bangkok Post 2] [Thai Enquirer]

At the same time, Thailand's Second Army Region reported detecting more than 80 drones flying near or into Thai territory on September 14, alongside continued Cambodian troop movements. Thai commanders said their forces are closely monitoring the situation despite the progress at talks. [Bangkok Post 3]

Chinese capital dominates buildout of Thailand's industrial corridor as scrutiny on crime and influence grows

(msz/lm) China has become the largest foreign investor in Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) — a government-backed industrial development zone south of Bangkok spanning the provinces of Chon Buri, Rayong, and Chachoengsao, designed to attract advanced manufacturing, logistics, and technology. Between 2019 and 2024, Chinese investors secured approvals worth USD 8.4 billion (THB 302 billion), more than any other foreign country. Investments focus on electric vehicles (EVs) and energy, led by BYD, alongside strategic infrastructure projects: a 220-kilometre high-speed rail line linking Bangkok to the corridor and a planned logistics "aerotropolis" around U-Tapao Airport designed by China's Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone.

Chinese investment now outpaces Japan (12 percent share) and dominates foreign participation, reflecting Beijing's effort to diversify supply chains away from U.S. tariffs. The EEC itself is central to Bangkok's strategy for regional competitiveness, offering seaport access and a lower-cost production base. [The Nation]

In parallel, China is addressing the political sensitivities that accompany its growing footprint. The new Chinese ambassador to Thailand, Zhang Jianwei, pledged cooperation on cracking down on "grey-zone" crime — illicit activity by Chinese nationals and networks operating in Thailand — and insisted Chinese firms are under orders to comply with local law. He also rejected speculation that Chinese influence could erode Thailand's sovereignty, stressing that investment aims to support local development. [Bangkok Post]

Chile urges Thailand to make deeper use of bilateral free trade deal

(lm) Chile has urged Thailand to maximize the potential of their decade-old free trade agreement (FTA), noting

that while bilateral trade has more than tripled since its signing, opportunities remain underexploited. Chilean exports to Thailand reached USD 682 million in 2024, driven largely by food products such as salmon and cherries, but officials stressed the need to diversify into services, creative industries, and new business operations.

Beyond trade in goods, Chile positioned itself as a strategic gateway for Thai firms seeking entry into Latin America's 600 million–strong consumer market. Officials highlighted prospects in sectors such as film production, digital services, and value-added agribusiness, framing the FTA as an underused platform for cross-regional investment and supply-chain integration. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand and Australia launch joint air force drills

(lm) The Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) have launched *Exercise Thai Boomerang 2025*, a fighter jet training exercise running from September 8–19 at Korat Air Base in Nakhon Ratchasima, northeast Thailand. More than 500 personnel are participating in the 15th iteration of the drill since its inception in 1992. The exercise includes dissimilar air combat training, large force employment, and close air support operations, with Australia deploying F/A-18F Super Hornets and Thailand contributing F-16s and JAS-39 Gripen aircraft. [Bangkok Post]

Cambodia returns 79 Vietnamese citizens, majority found working illegally

(hn) Cambodian authorities have returned 79 Vietnamese citizens, including 66 men and 13 women from 22 provinces, to Vietnam, according to Tây Ninh Police. Most had been working illegally in Cambodia, with 57 crossing the border unlawfully and 22 exiting legally. Their jobs ranged from restaurant and karaoke staff to roles in scam operations run by Chinese-owned businesses.

Authorities fined 55 individuals a total of VND 206 million (USD 7,800) for illegal border crossings, while one case is under criminal investigation. By Tuesday evening, 78 citizens were handed over to local police for further verification and legal processing. [Vietnamnews]

South Korea, Vietnam seek deeper trade and nuclear energy cooperation

(ab) South Korea and Vietnam held their fourth joint working group meeting on trade relations in Seoul, aiming to raise bilateral trade to USD 150 billion by 2030, as agreed at last month's summit between Presidents Lee Jae Myung and To Lam.

Talks also advanced cooperation in nuclear energy, including implementation of an MoU between Korea Electric Power Corp. and Petrovietnam to develop Vietnam's nuclear workforce.

Separately, South Korea's trade ministry met Vietnam's finance ministry to address business concerns, including VAT refunds for Korean textile firms and the transfer of incentives linked to HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering's acquisition of Doosan Vina. Seoul confirmed these director general-level meetings will be held regularly to strengthen cooperation on investment, supply chains, and business operations. [Korea Times]

Vietnam, Singapore advance carbon credit cooperation

(ab) Vietnam and Singapore have signed an implementation agreement to advance collaboration on carbon credit trading under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

The deal follows earlier memoranda of understanding between the two governments and sets out mechanisms for cooperation in carbon markets, including the transfer of emission reduction credits. Officials said the agreement is aimed at supporting both countries' climate commitments whilst promoting sustainable development.

Singapore has pursued similar arrangements with several countries as part of its strategy to meet climate targets, while Vietnam has been working to establish a domestic carbon market by 2028. [Vietnamplus]

Vietnam urges US to reconsider seafood export ban

(ab) Vietnam has formally asked the United States to reverse a decision that could block a range of Vietnamese seafood exports to the US market from January 2026. The request follows a ruling by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that 12 Vietnamese fishing methods pose risks to marine mammals.

The US is one of Vietnam's largest seafood markets, with exports worth USD 1.24 billion in the first eight months of 2025, or 17.3 percent of total shipments. A ban would hit key exports such as tuna, swordfish, crab, and squid, affecting hundreds of thousands of livelihoods, the ministry warned.

The appeal comes as bilateral trade faces headwinds: Washington imposed a 20 percent tariff on Vietnamese exports in August, with transshipments from third countries through Vietnam facing a 40 percent levy. [Reuters]

Vietnamese feed makers turn to Canadian canola meal amid China tariffs

(ab) Vietnamese feed millers have begun purchasing Canadian canola meal at discounted prices after China, the main buyer, imposed steep anti-dumping duties earlier this year. Traders said Vietnam has been importing around 30,000 metric tons a month in recent months, paying about USD 220 per ton compared with USD 300–310 previously paid by Chinese buyers.

The shift highlights how trade frictions are reshaping global commodity flows. Vietnam usually relies on soymeal for animal feed, but the price drop has made canola meal more attractive. Traders expect further deals, though volumes remain small compared with China's typical demand.

Some Canadian shipments stranded in Chinese bonded warehouses due to a 100 percent duty may also be redirected to Vietnam, according to industry sources. [Reuters]

Vietnam–UK strengthen financial ties

(ab) The Vietnam Investment and Finance Association (VIFA) in the UK hosted "Financial Insights 2025" in London, bringing together over 50 financial experts, asset managers, and members of the Vietnamese business community to discuss investment trends and opportunities.

The event introduced the upcoming UK–Vietnam Business Summit 2025, which will focus on renewable energy and the development of Ho Chi Minh City's International Financial Centre. Participants were also briefed on recent UK employment law changes, offering practical guidance for Vietnamese firms operating in the UK.

VIFA Chairwoman Christine Le stressed the association's role as a bridge between Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the UK and partners in Vietnam, highlighting the event as a step toward deeper bilateral cooperation in finance and business. [Vietnamplus]

Vietnam advances EU ties through Denmark, Romania, and Malta

(ab) Vietnam is stepping up efforts to deepen its ties with the European Union through a series of high-level visits to Denmark, Romania, and Malta.

During his September 12–13 visit to Denmark, National Assembly Vice Chairman Nguyen Khac Dinh met parliamentary leaders, the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen, and senior executives from companies including Lego, Pandora, and Maersk. The visit underscored the growing Vietnam–Denmark Green Strategic Partnership, launched in 2023, with Denmark highlighted as a model in green transition, digital transformation, and public administration. Dinh proposed closer parliamentary cooperation, secured Danish backing for green investment projects, and encouraged business partnerships in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Key outcomes included Danish Industry, representing 19,000 firms, announcing plans to open a representative office in Vietnam, and Vietnam Airlines' scheduled direct Hanoi–Copenhagen flight from December 2025, expected to boost trade and tourism. Discussions also covered EU–Vietnam trade, with Dinh urging Denmark—set to hold the EU Council Presidency in late 2025—to support increased investment through the ratification of the EU–Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement and push for the lifting of the EU's "yellow card" on Vietnamese seafood.

Earlier, in Romania, Dinh engaged officials on cooperation in trade, investment, education, defense, and maritime security, noting progress under the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement and Investment Protection Agreement. Both sides emphasized multilateral collaboration through ASEAN–EU and UN mechanisms.

Meanwhile, in Malta, Deputy Foreign Minister Le Thi Thu Hang focused on economic, scientific, and maritime partnerships, along with people-to-people exchanges. Malta reaffirmed its readiness to back Vietnam's broader EU engagement.

Such visits reflect Vietnam's strategy of diversifying European partnerships, showcasing its role as a multilateral actor in the EU framework, and desire to be seen as a partner that values a rules-based international order. [Scandasia] [Vietnamplus] [Vietnamplus 2] [Vietnamplus 3]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

17 September 2025 @ 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

Expanding ROK-U.S. Defense Industry Cooperation for Advanced Technology Partnership and Supply Chain Resilience

This webcast will address the expanding U.S.-ROK defense industry cooperation and explore potential collaboration through a Reciprocal Defense Procurement agreement, shipbuilding, maintenance and overhaul, and the Collaborative Combat Aircraft program. The discussions align with U.S. priorities to strengthen the defense industrial base and accelerate delivery of critical capabilities. For more information and to register for this online event, please see [CSIS].

17 September 2025 @ 4:00–5:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

Yemen - Iran's last proxy battleground or case study for regional de-escalation?

Amid shifting Middle East dynamics, Yemen stands out for the resilience and growing influence of the Iranian-backed Houthis, despite setbacks to other Iranian proxies. Their strategic position near the Red Sea and recent Israeli strikes highlight Yemen's importance in regional security and trade. This hybrid event will examine Iran-Yemen relations, the Houthis' role in Tehran's regional strategy, and prospects for either de-escalation or continued foreign competition in Yemen. For more information and to register for this online event, visit [Chatham House].

17 September 2025 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Implications of Middle East security trends for Latin America and the Caribbean

This hybrid event will discuss how Middle East dynamics affect Latin America and the Caribbean. The event will explore security, economic, and energy implications, including proxy group activity and shifting oil demand, highlighting often-overlooked regional impacts. It is co-organized with several FIU institutes and lecture series.

For more information and to register for this online event, please see [Atlantic Council].

18 September 2025 @ 9:15-11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

The Growing U.S.-Netherlands Innovation Partnership: How Local Innovation Ecosystems Play a Global Role

In an era of intense global competition in advanced technologies, a strong innovation system is a national security priority. The Netherlands, a longtime U.S. ally, has leveraged its semiconductor expertise and pragmatic international partnerships to strengthen research, development, and global cooperation. This online panel will explore strategies to sustain and

deepen U.S.-Netherlands collaboration in innovation and economic security for the twenty-first century. For more information and to register for this online event, please see [CSIS].

18 September 2025 @ 9:30-10:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for a New American Security (CNAS), USA

Countering China's Digital Silk Road: Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 seeks to transform the kingdom into a regional hub for AI and emerging technologies, but its ambitions hinge on foreign partnerships amid U.S.-China competition. The 2025 landmark U.S. deal granting Saudi access to advanced AI chips has sparked debate in Washington over technology security and Riyadh's growing ties with Beijing. This online panel will discuss Saudi Arabia's technological trajectory, the Digital Silk Road, and U.S. strategies to provide a viable alternative. For more information and to register for this online event, visit [CNAS].

18 September 2025 @ 2:00-3:30 p.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The Upcoming Sabah Election: Perspectives from Kinabalu to Semporna

This webinar will examine the fast-approaching Sabah state elections, where the locally based coalition Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) seeks to consolidate its position amid the state's complex ethnic and political landscape. Key questions include GRS's ability to rival established parties such as UMNO and Warisan, the push for governance by local parties, and the influence of youth-led protests. For more information and to register for this online event, visit [ISEAS].

18 September 2025 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

Rethinking global supply chains: insights for a changing world

This event will present key findings from the Horizon Europe project *ReThinkGSC*, conducted by 30 researchers across 11 institutions. The project analyzes

how global supply chains are changing under geopolitical and economic shifts, assessing their impacts, resilience, and the role of services and knowledge flows, with implications for policy. For more information and to register for this online event, please see [Bruegel].

22 September 2025 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Multidimensional Deprivation and Emerging Policy Challenges in Indonesia's Extreme Poverty Alleviation Efforts

Despite Indonesia's major progress in reducing poverty, around 2.4 million people still live in extreme poverty as of March 2025. With a goal to eradicate extreme poverty by 2026, the government is relying on social assistance, fiscal transfers, and livelihood support, but faces headwinds from slowing growth, limited formal employment, regional disparities, fiscal constraints, and climate-related shocks. This webinar will review recent poverty trends and examine policy challenges, including inter-ministerial coordination. For more information and to register for this online event, visit [ISEAS].

22 September 2025 @ 1:00–2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

From protest to parliament: Lessons from Iraq four years on

Following Iraq's 2019 protests, the election of protest-linked and independent MPs raised hopes that parliament could channel demands for accountability and reform. Four years later, structural barriers, political pressures, and limited cohesion have curtailed their impact. This panel will explore why some MPs withdrew or joined traditional parties, the challenges facing independents in the 2025 elections, and lessons for enhancing legislative influence in Iraq and comparable regional cases. For more information and to register for this online event, visit [Chatham House].

23 September 2025 @ 1:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Atlantic Council Africa Energy Forum

This hybrid event address Africa's pressing energy access challenge—affecting over 600 million people—amid shifting U.S. foreign and energy policies under President Trump. Discussions will focus on the continent's vast gas resources, its minimal emissions contribution, and the role of gas in the global energy transition. For more information and to register for this online event, please see [Atlantic Council].

23 September 2025 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

Tariffs in a world of large global capital flows—implications for central banks

Recent trade disruptions risk reshaping the global economy. With financial flows and interlinkages expanding, this hybrid event will explore how market responses will be crucial in determining their overall impact. For more information and to register for this online event, please see [Bruegel].

23 September 2025 @ 2:30-4:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The Price of Friendship: Trump's Tariffs and the Philippine Economy

U.S. President Trump's newly announced tariffs have strained U.S.-Philippine trade relations, with Manila facing a 19% tariff despite President Marcos Jr.'s direct negotiations. The tariffs, particularly the 100% duty on non-U.S. semiconductors—Philippines' main export—pose significant risks to the country's economy and development trajectory. This webinar will assess the implications of the tariffs, explore mitigation strategies, and discuss policy reforms to strengthen resilience, diversify exports, and enhance the Philippines' role in global supply chains.

For more information and to register for this online event, visit [ISEAS].

23 September 2025 @ 5:00–6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

Is this a new age of nuclear proliferation?

The global nuclear order faces mounting strain, with North Korea expanding its arsenal, uncertainty over Iran, renewed India-Pakistan tensions, and faltering U.S.-Russia agreements, all while P5 disarmament efforts stall. Rising interest in nuclear capabilities by allies such as South Korea, Japan, and Saudi Arabia reflects eroding confidence in U.S. nuclear protection under the Trump administration. This discussion will examine the future of the non-proliferation regime, challenges to international trust, and the risks of a renewed arms race. For more information and to register for this online event, visit [Chatham House].

Recent Book Releases

Mirca Madianou, ***Technocolonialism: When Technology for Good is Harmful***, Polity, 256 pages, published January 13, 2025. For a review, see [LSE].

Suraj Milind Yengde, ***Caste: A Global Story***, C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 360 pages, published June 30, 2025. For a review, see [LSE].

Erin M.B. O'Halloran, ***East of Empire: Egypt, India, and the World between the Wars***, Stanford University Press, 334 pages, published, March 11, 2025. For a review, see [Asian Review of Books]

Joseph Torigian, ***The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun***, Father of Xi Jinping, published June 3, 2025. For a review, see [Los Angeles Review of Books]

Robert L. Suettinger, ***The Conscience of the Party: Hu Yaobang, China's Communist Reformer***, Harvard University Press, 488 pages, published October 15, 2024. For a review, see [The Business Standard].

Andrew Hussey, *Fractured France: A Journey Through a Divided Nation*, Granta Books, 336 pages, published September 11, 2025. For a review, see [Book Blast].

Calls

The **International Association of Constitutional Law** invites paper proposals for its ***World Congress of Constitutional Law (WCCL)***, to be held on July 6-10, 2026, at the Universidad Externado de Colombia. The theme of the Congress is "Sustainable Constitutionalism: Answers for a Changing World." The deadline for abstract submission is September 30, 2025. For more information, see [WCCL].

The **European Political Science Society (EPSS)** invites paper proposals for its first **annual conference**, to be held in Belfast on June 18-20, 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is November 7, 2025. For more information, see [EPSS].

The **International Association for Political Science Students (IAPSS)** invites paper proposals for its **World Congress 2026 "Academic Freedom"**, to be held on May 5-9. 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is November 7, 2025. For more information, see [IAPSS].

The **Political Studies Association (PSA)** invites paper proposals for its 76th Annual International Conference "Political Studies Futures," to be held on March 30 to April 1, 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is October 17, 2025. For more information, see [PSA].

Jobs and Positions

The **Carter Center** seeks a **Senior Associate Director – Conflict Resolution Program**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [Emory University].

Relief International seeks a **Country Director – Philippines**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [Relief International].

UNFPA seeks a **Director – Division for External Relations**, with New York as duty station. The deadline for application submission is September 19, 2025. For more information, see [UNFPA].

Project HOPE seeks a **Deputy General Counsel – Legal and Compliance**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [Project HOPE].

Mercy Corps seeks a **Director – People Policy and Organizational Design**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [Mercy Corps].

Management Sciences for Health (MSH) seeks a **Managing Director – MSH Nigeria**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [MSH].

Resources for the Future (RFF) seeks a **Senior Research Fellow**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [RFF].

Fondazione CESVI seeks a **Project Manager – Gaza.** The deadline for application submission is September 28, 2025. For more information, see [CESVI].

The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** seeks an **Auditor General**. The deadline for application submission is October 8, 2025. For more information, see [ADB].

The **Secretariat of the United Nations** invites applications for the position of **Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights**. The deadline for application submission is September 19, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **Secretariat of the United Nations** invites applications for the position of **Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**. The deadline for application submission is September 19, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **Secretariat of the United Nations** invites applications for the position of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The deadline for application submission is October 6, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **Secretariat of the United Nations** invites applications for the position of **Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**. The deadline for application submission is October 6, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** invites applications for the position of **Assistant Executive Director**. The deadline for application submission is September 21, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** is seeking a **Legal Adviser and Director – Office of Legal Affairs**. The deadline for application submission is October 13, 2025. For more information, see [NATO].

The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** is seeking an **International Consultant – Renewable Energy and Education Experts in Central Asia**. The deadline for application submission is September 15, 2025. For more information, see [OSCE].

The **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** is seeking a **Director – Risk Modelling, Validation, and Stress Testing**. The deadline for application submission is September 8, 2025. For more information, see [EBRD].

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is seeking an **Executive Director**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [HRW].

The **School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography** at the **University of Oxford** welcomes applications for the position of **Departmental Lecturer in Social and Medical Anthropology**. The deadline for application submission is September 23, 2025. For more information, see [University of Oxford].

The **Bennett School of Public Policy** in the Faculty of Human, Social and Political Science at the **University of Cambridge** welcomes applications for the position of **Research Assistant/Associate (Fixed Term)**. The deadline for application submission is September 23, 2025. For more information, see [University of Cambridge].

Team:

Aika Sagheer (as), Alex Bushnell (ab), Alex Wong (aw), Amy Carlotti Lu (acl), Aung Naing Lin (anl), Azra Selvi Kapu (ask), Busawan Kachonnarongvanish (bk), Dániel Babcsán (dnb), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Emily Fleur Gilmour (efg), Felix Serna Calvo (fs), Geo Dzakwan Arshali (ga), Giulia Metyas (gm), Grey Pilarczyk (gp), Hoa Khanh Ngo (hn), Henning Glaser (hg), Joshua James Althaus (ja), Lucas Meier (lm), Marina Ortiz Ortiz (mo), Monica Sareen (mon), Morten Strantzen (ms), Muhammed Yulmaz (my), Myat Sandar Zaw (msz), Nat Ng Ther Li (nl), Nicholas Fenech (nf), Thoon Nadi Lynn (tl), Venus Phuangkom, Yamonyongyos Anankajeerapong (ya), Yeo Hui Qi (yq), Yi-Chen Lin (yl)

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German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance - CPG
Room 207, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

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