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Asia in Review

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No. 43, October/2025, 4

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Independence Day of the Czech Republic, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Slovakia, and Antigua and Barbuda, as well as the Republic Day of Turkey, and the Revolution Day of Alegria this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: Fouth Plenum pledges to boost domestic consumption, appoints new second-ranked CMC vice chairman

(dql) China's top leadership used the Fourth Plenum meeting, that concluded on October 23, to outline five-year development priorities centered on strengthening domestic consumption and advancing technological self-reliance in strategic sectors such as quantum computing, hydrogen energy, and advanced manufacturing.

According to a state media readout, the meeting called for "vigorously boosting consumption" while balancing it with "effective investment." The leadership emphasized stimulating demand through improved urban planning, public services, and elderly care rather than direct cash transfers, signaling a continued

preference for investment-driven growth. Analysts noted that the policy tone reflects Beijing's cautious approach to stimulating household spending amid persistent deflationary pressures and limited fiscal expansion. [Government, China, in Chinese]

The Plenum reaffirmed China's 2025 growth target of around 5 percent and projected an average annual growth of 4.6 percent through 2035. Officials pledged to achieve major advances in economic, technological, and defense capabilities, aiming to elevate China's "comprehensive national power and international influence."

At the same time, the leadership reiterated its focus on maintaining a strong industrial base, promoting high-quality real estate development, and pursuing carbon reduction goals. The emphasis on self-reliance reflects Beijing's strategic response to U.S. export controls and global competition in emerging technologies.

While the meeting reaffirmed China's ambition to become a global innovation and manufacturing power, analysts cautioned that the readout offered few details on boosting household income or implementing fiscal measures to drive consumption, leaving questions about the sustainability of China's growth strategy. [AP News] [CNBC]

New second-ranked CMC vice chairman

Beyond economics, President Xi Jinping promoted General Zhang Shengmin to become China's second-highest military officer. Zhang, long responsible for anti-corruption work within the People's Liberation Army (PLA), now serves as the second-ranked vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), replacing purged general He Weidong. Holding two CMC positions, he remains the Commission's Secretary of the Commission for Discipline Inspection.

A trusted Xi ally from the leader's home province of Shaanxi, Zhang has played a central role in the party's internal discipline apparatus and concurrently serves as deputy secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

His promotion follows the expulsion of nine generals from the Communist Party earlier this month (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3) and the replacement of 11 Central Committee members — the body's highest turnover since 2017. The expulsion primarily targeted officers from the former Nanjing Military Region and 31st Group Army—both key to operations concerning Taiwan—, highlighting the deep links between the affected figures and Xi's early career network.

Only 82 percent of Central Committee members reportedly attended the plenum, the lowest participation rate in decades, indicative of turbulence within the upper ranks. Footage from state media indicated that at least 16 top officers—including commanders of the ground, naval, northern, and western theatre commands—were absent from a recent meeting, though none have been publicly targeted. [Reuters] [SCMP]

Central Committee members passed over for promotion

In addition, a notable development was the quiet sidelining of seven alternate Central Committee members who were passed over for promotion—a rare move suggesting political downfall. These officials, drawn from both military and civilian sectors and including long-time associates of Xi or his regional allies in Shaanxi, are widely interpreted as having lost political favor or potentially come under investigation.

Among those affected are Wang Liyan, deputy commander of the PLA Rocket Force; Wang Kangping, commander of the Joint Logistics Support Force; Fang Yongxiang, former director of the CMC General Office; Fang Hongwei, a Shaanxi-based official with ties to Xi; Shi Yugang, a senior ethnic affairs official; Shi Zhenglu, commander of the Northern Theater Army; and Wang Jiayi, vice minister of education. Their omission underscores the expansion of purges from the Rocket Force into broader military and civilian hierarchies.

Observers note that while these measures are officially framed as anti-corruption, the selective targeting of Xi's former protégés and regional allies indicates a strategic political realignment. [NTD] [The Epoch Times]

PLA Daily publication series on political rectification launched

Meanwhile, China's military has initiated a high-profile campaign on "political rectification," linking ideological discipline directly to the loyalty and integrity of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). PLA Daily's first installment of the series, titled *Deepening Political Rectification*, urged officers to strengthen alignment with the Central Military Commission (CMC). The editorial framed the initiative as a response to ongoing ideological struggles, describing the military's task as resisting corruption and safeguarding loyalty, with political rectification as the key mechanism.

The campaign also calls for vigilance amid complex domestic and international challenges, urging the PLA to uphold the principle of "the party commands the

gun" and to maintain political and ethical discipline. Historical references to the revolutionary era and reports of military units conducting political reflection exercises illustrate the intended integration of ideological education with operational readiness. [PLA Daily, in Chinese] [SCMP]

China: 80th anniversary of Taiwan's restoration marked in official ceremony

(dql) On October 25, ceremonies were held in China and Taiwan to mark the 80th anniversary of Taiwan's "restoration" from Japanese rule—a date newly designated by Beijing as a national holiday, the Commemoration Day of Taiwan's Restoration.

The event, steeped in historical symbolism, carried strong political and geopolitical significance, reflecting Beijing's renewed drive to assert sovereignty over Taiwan and reinforce the "One China" principle amid deepening cross-Strait tensions.

A major ceremony was held in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, attended by senior officials, Taiwan representatives, and overseas Chinese. Wang Huning, member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo o of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) widely seen as the party's leading ideologist, delivered keynote address, calling for unity to achieve "complete national reunification," and urging to "to leave no room for 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities in any form." [State Council, China]

Wang also serves as Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a key political advisory body. In this role, he leads forums where Taiwan-related policy is discussed and shaped.

Parallel commemorations in Taipei featured pro-unification groups invoking shared heritage and denouncing what they described as the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government's distortion of history. Echoing Beijing's stance, they emphasized that reunification as an inevitable outcome of China's "national rejuvenation." [SCMP]

A day earlier, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's highest legislative body, decided to designate October 25 as the national day commemorating Taiwan's "restoration," coincides with the 80th anniversary of Japan's 1945 surrender of Taiwan to the then ruling Kuomintang (KMT), which ended five decades of Japanese colonial rule. In 1949,

the KMT under Jiang Kai-shek retreated to the island after losing the civil war to the Communists. [China Daily] [ABC News]

The new holiday also coincided with the recent election of Taiwan's main opposition party, Kuomintang (KMT), leader Cheng Li-wen (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3), viewed by Beijing as a potential partner for renewed dialogue under the One China framework. Chinese President Xi Jinping's congratulatory message to Cheng signaled Beijing's willingness to leverage cross-Strait political openings while warning against "foreign interference" and "Taiwan independence." [Grand Pinnacle Tribune]

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) condemned Beijing's move, denouncing it as an attempt to "fabricate" the claim that Taiwan belongs to the People's Republic of China (PRC). The MAC accused Beijing of distorting history and seeking to impose its "one China" narrative domestically and internationally, stressing that "the Taiwanese people will never accept" such political manipulation.

Taipei argues that the Taiwan Retrocession Day—which it already observes on the same date—commemorates the transfer of Taiwan and the Penghu Islands from Japan to the Republic of China (ROC), four years before the PRC was founded in 1949. [Focus Taiwan]

Beijing conducts bomber drills near Taiwan

On October 27, China announced that its H-6K strategic bombers had conducted combat drills near Taiwan. State media described the exercises—featuring air blockade and precision strike simulations—as part of "combat-oriented training" by the Eastern Theatre Command, underscoring Beijing's readiness to project military power amid renewed geopolitical tensions.

Chinese state television aired footage of the drills, including pilots identifying Taiwan's coastline, in what observers described as an effort to stoke nationalism and demonstrate military resolve. The H-6K bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, highlighted China's growing deterrence capabilities directed at both Taipei and the United States.

The timing of the announcement was widely seen as a calibrated signal of resolve ahead of high-stakes trade talks with Washington, coming just days before the summit between Presidents Xi Jinping and Donald Trump on October 30 in South Korea. Analysts said the drills served both to reinforce China's sovereignty

claims over Taiwan and to test the resolve of Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te, who advocates "peace through strength." [Modern Diplomacy] [Reuters]

Taiwan's defence ministry dismissed the exercises as psychological warfare aimed at intimidation, reporting limited Chinese aircraft activity near its airspace and calling for public calm. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reaffirmed Washington's support for Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act, stressing that the upcoming Xi–Trump talks would not compromise U.S. commitments. [Taipei Times]

China: Wind power industry doubles installation target

(dql) China's wind power industry has announced an ambitious plan to double annual turbine installations over the next five years, underscoring Beijing's drive to achieve carbon neutrality and strengthen its global leadership in renewable energy.

Under a declaration signed by more than 1,000 companies, the sector aims to install at least 120 gigawatts of new wind capacity annually between 2026 and 2030—twice the average achieved from 2020 to 2024—and raise total installed capacity to 1,300GW by 2030. Analysts view these targets as bold, far exceeding international projections, and signaling confidence in continued state backing for the renewables sector.

The initiative reflects both China's determination to meet its national goals of peaking carbon emissions by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, and its broader geopolitical intent to dominate the global clean energy supply chain. However, industry experts note that new electricity pricing reforms could test profitability, especially for high-cost offshore projects, making policy support from Beijing critical to sustaining momentum. [SCMP] [Yicai]

China: Industrial profits surge amid persisting high youth unemployment

(dql) China's industrial profits rose 21.6 percent year-on-year in September, the National Bureau of Statistics reported on October 27, extending a rebound that began in August and marking the fastest gain since November 2023. For the first nine months of 2025, profits at major industrial firms grew 3.2 percent, up

from 0.9 percent in the January–August period. [National Bureau of Statistics, China, in Chinese]

The rebound was largely driven by Beijing's policies aimed at curbing price wars in industrial sectors, easing pressure amid persistent trade tensions with the U.S. Manufacturing sector profits climbed 9.9 percent, electricity and utilities rose 10.3 percent, while the mining sector fell 29.3 percent. High-tech manufacturing saw a 26.8 percent surge in September, contributing strongly to overall industrial growth.

Profit growth varied by ownership: state-owned enterprises saw a slight decline of 0.3 percent, compared with gains of 4.9 percent for foreign-invested firms and 5.1 percent for private companies. Industrial output grew 6.5 percent in September, up from 5.2 percentin August, reflecting resilience despite a slow housing market, weak labor conditions, and export headwinds.

China's consumer prices fell 0.3 percent in September, and producer prices dropped 2.3 percent, highlighting ongoing deflationary pressures. Exports have remained resilient, but economists expect growth to slow in Q4 due to a high base last year and rising global trade barriers. Fixed-asset investment contracted 0.5 percent in the first nine months, the first decline since 2020.

Analysts suggest that the strong industrial performance may reduce Beijing's urgency to implement additional stimulus measures to meet its 2025 growth target of around 5 percent. Policymakers continue to emphasize technological innovation and industrial upgrading, while large-scale consumption stimulus appears unlikely in the near term. [CNBC] [SCMP 1]

Youth unemployment remains high despite slight September improvement

(dql) Urban youth unemployment in China showed a slight improvement in September but remains alarmingly high amid a crowded and competitive job market. The jobless rate for those aged 16–24, excluding students, fell to 17.7 percent from August's 18.9 percent, which had marked the highest level since the 2023 data revision following a record 12.2 million university graduates entering the workforce.

Unemployment for the 25–29 age group remained steady at 7.2 percent, while the overall urban jobless rate edged down slightly to 5.2 percent. The data highlight persistent structural challenges in China's labor market, particularly for younger generations,

underscoring pressures on economic stability and social expectations.

Despite the modest dip in youth unemployment, many young people struggle to find jobs matching their skills and expectations in a market affected by deflationary pressures and external uncertainties. [SCMP 2]

China: Large stealth flying-wing drone GJ-X raises prospects of next-generation unmanned bomber

(dql) China has flown a large new stealth flying-wing drone, possibly signaling a next-generation unmanned bomber capability. The aircraft, unofficially dubbed the GJ-X and spotted on Chinese social media since October 19, appears similar to a drone previously seen in August satellite imagery at Malan Airbase in Xinjiang, with an estimated wingspan of around 42 meters—comparable to the U.S. B-21 Raider stealth bomber.

The GJ-X resembles the smaller CH-7 drone, which China displayed in 2024, though it is significantly larger. This flight aligns with China's broader expansion of unmanned systems, demonstrated during last month's Beijing military parade, which featured reconnaissance strike drones, "unmanned wingman" fighters, air superiority drones, and carrier-based unmanned helicopters. These platforms are intended for covert strikes, surveillance, and autonomous operations, underscoring China's push to integrate high-end unmanned capabilities into its combat aviation strategy. [SCMP]

The drone's precise role remains uncertain. Analysts are divided: some see it as a large unmanned combat air vehicle (UCAV) focused on kinetic strikes, others as a dedicated unmanned stealth bomber, while a reconnaissance function—akin to the U.S.'s rumored high-altitude, long-endurance RQ-180 drone—may be both plausible and underappreciated. A multi-role capability combining strike and intelligence-gathering functions would be strategically valuable, but China's exact intentions remain unclear.

The GJ-X is part of a rapid surge in Chinese stealth aircraft development over the past year, including the J-36 heavy stealth tactical jet and the J-XDS tailless fighter, both recently conducting first flights. Numerous other unmanned tactical aircraft of this generation have been observed or revealed. The pace of China's advancements in advanced combat aviation is striking, and publicly visible programs likely

represent only a fraction of broader, covert developments underway. [TWZ]

China: Electromagnetic catapult tests underway on new drone carrier

(dql) China's newest Type 076 amphibious assault ship, the *Sichuan*, appears to be testing its electromagnetic aircraft launch system (EMALS), marking a major advance in the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) carrier technology.

Recent satellite and social media images show the vessel repositioned toward open waters at the Hudong-Zhonghua Shipyard in Shanghai, coinciding with a maritime exclusion zone declared from October 20–29 for "underwater activities." Analysts believe the area was used for sled tests—ground-based trials simulating aircraft launches—to evaluate the EMALS system's performance.

If confirmed, the tests would represent a significant technological milestone. The *Sichuan* is the first amphibious assault ship in the world to feature EMALS, a system previously seen only on the U.S. *Gerald R. Ford*-class and China's own *Fujian* aircraft carrier. Unlike conventional steam catapults or ski-jump ramps, EMALS enables more frequent and efficient aircraft launches, including heavier planes and drones, offering a substantial tactical advantage.

With a displacement exceeding 40,000 tons and a full-length flight deck, the *Sichuan* is expected to serve primarily as a drone carrier, supporting advanced unmanned systems such as the GJ-11 stealth combat drone. However, it remains capable of operating manned aircraft. [SCMP]

The vessel's integration of EMALS underscores China's ambition to achieve technological parity with, and potentially surpass, U.S. naval aviation capabilities—an important signal of Beijing's growing maritime power projection and strategic modernization.

China: Gaofen-14 02 satellite launched

(dql) On October 26, China successfully launched the Earth observation satellite Gaofen-14 02 aboard a Changzheng-4B (Long March-3B) rocket. The satellite is designed to provide high-resolution global imagery and geoinformation support, enhancing both national defense and economic planning. The Gaofen series

serves as a versatile tool for environmental monitoring, resource management, urban planning, infrastructure development, and disaster response. This mission marked the 603rd flight of the Long March rocket family. [Xinhua]

Gaofen-14 (02), part of the China High-resolution Earth Observation System (CHEOS), carries advanced multi-payload technology, including dual-line-array cameras, a hyperspectral camera, and a ranging laser. The satellite delivers panchromatic imagery at 0.6-meter resolution, multispectral images at 2.4-meter resolution, and hyperspectral data with visible-near-infrared resolution of 5 meters, enabling highly precise stereo mapping. The system supports urban planning, infrastructure design, agriculture, disaster relief, and broader geoinformation applications, while higher-numbered Gaofen satellites are believed to have dual-use, including potential defense applications.

This launch builds on the first Gaofen-14 satellite deployed in 2020, enhancing China's global high-resolution Earth observation and positioning capabilities. It also reflects China's strategic investment in space technologies, including both civilian and dual-use systems, to strengthen its economic planning, scientific research, and national security infrastructure. [Space News]

Earlier this month, Ukrainian intelligence reported that China has supplied space reconnaissance data to Russia, potentially aiding missile targeting in Ukraine, including at foreign-investor facilities. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied such claims, reiterating a neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The deployment of Gaofen-14 02 underscores China's growing integration of space technologies into strategic defense capabilities and economic development planning. [Mezha]

China – Hong Kong: Outspoken Lawmaker Kong to step down amid wave of Legislative Council retirements

(dql) Hong Kong lawmaker Doreen Kong Yuk-foon has announced on October 22 that she will not seek re-election, choosing to return to her legal practice. Her departure, one of 22 incumbents opting out of the upcoming Legislative Council (Legco, the city's parliament) election, reflects a notable turnover in the city's legislature, which currently has 89 members.

Kong, 55, plans to launch an online platform to analyze public affairs and explain policies, emphasizing that her commitment to serving Hongkongers remains unchanged. She insisted her decision was voluntary, dismissing speculation about political pressure.

Kong, first elected in 2021 via the election committee constituency, was known for her independent stance, opposing several government bills, including the controversial tobacco control legislation. Other vocal lawmakers, including Gary Zhang Xinyu and Tik Chi-yuen, have also announced they will not run.

A wave of retirement among senior legislators—12 of 14 aged 70 or above—has fueled speculation about a potential Beijing-endorsed age limit for candidates. Notably, Regina Ip and Lai Tung-kwok, both in their 70s, have yet to clarify their plans. [The Standard] [Hong Kong Free Press]

Meanwhile, outgoing Legco president Andrew Leung Kwan-yuen highlighted the legislature's accomplishments under the "patriots-only" system, including enacting 130 bills, addressing economic and livelihood issues, and passing the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance under Article 23 of the Basic Law. Leung defended the legislature against claims of being a "rubber stamp," citing detailed clause-by-clause reviews of key legislation and transparent operations.

The current term concludes on October 24, coinciding with the start of nominations for the December 7 Legco election. [SCMP]

China – Hong Kong: Water scandal highlights tender board oversight failures

(dql) Hong Kong's Financial Services Secretary Christopher Hui revealed that the Government Logistics Department (GLD) failed to flag problems with Xin Ding Xin Trade—a company accused of falsifying documents in a bottled water procurement tender—to the central tender board that approved the HKD 52.9 million (USD 6.77 million) contract.

An Audit Commission report found that the GLD repeatedly overlooked suspected forged filings from the company, which still secured a three-year deal to supply bottled water to government offices. Hui said the omission in the department's report to the central board, chaired by the Financial Services Bureau, was a key focus of an ongoing disciplinary probe into more than ten officials.

He emphasized that the GLD's responsibility to ensure full transparency for the board had been neglected, suggesting that its effort to "encourage fair competition" may have led to lax scrutiny. The investigation, led by senior civil servant Alice Lau, is expected to conclude by year's end and will determine the roles and accountability of both the logistics department and the tender board.

Authorities are also planning reforms to strengthen due diligence, including on-site inspections and a centralized database to track irregularities in government tenders. [SCMP]

Japan: New prime minister unveils ambitious economic and defense expansion agenda in first policy speech

(dql) On October 24, newly appointed Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi outlined an ambitious agenda to revive Japan's economy and strengthen national defense in her first parliamentary address since taking office on October 21 (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3). Her speech emphasized both fiscal expansion and security enhancement, combining economic stimulus with a strong focus on national security.

Takaichi, Japan's first female prime minister, pledged to make rising living costs her government's top priority and committed to "responsible and proactive" fiscal policies aimed at boosting incomes, consumption, and business confidence. Despite concerns that her stimulus-driven agenda could expand government debt, she argued that financial sustainability could be maintained if debt grows slower than the economy.

Her proposed economic measures include abolishing the long-standing provisional gasoline tax, raising the nontaxable income threshold from JPY 1.03 million (approximately USD 6,700) to JPY 1.6 million (around USD 10,400), and developing a new system combining tax deductions with cash benefits for households. She also scrapped a controversial JPY 20,000 (around USD 130)-per-person handout promised under her predecessor, Shigeru Ishiba.

On social policy, Takaichi announced plans for a cross-party framework to address Japan's aging population and declining birthrate. She pledged to take firm action against foreigners who violate rules, stressing that such measures should not be confused with xenophobia, though details of implementation remain unclear. As Japan increasingly depends on foreign workers to address its shrinking labor force, questions

are emerging about whether her government will introduce a "total cap" on foreign residents, a policy supported by her coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party.

In addition, Takaichi backed discussions on decentralizing Japan's governance structure by exploring the establishment of a "second capital," aligning with the Japan Innovation Party's (JIP) Osaka Metropolis plan—a move reflecting the LDP's new coalition with the JIP after Komeito's departure from the 26 year-coalition with the LDP. [The Mainichi 1]

In foreign and security policy, she vowed to revise Japan's National Security Strategy and related documents by next year to reflect the increasingly volatile regional environment. She announced plans to raise defense spending to 2 percent of GDP by March —far ahead of 2027 that was originally set time frame. Reaffirming the U.S.-Japan alliance as the "cornerstone" of Tokyo's defense policy, she pledged deeper engagement with partners such as South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Australia, and India to advance a "free and open Indo-Pacific." While identifying China as a key security challenge, she also called for maintaining "constructive and stable" bilateral ties. [AP News] [DW] [The Japan Times] [Japan Today]

The last-minute agreement between the LDP and JIP, formalized a day before the prime minister vote in the Diet, paved the way for Takaichi's premiership. However, the LDP-JIP coalition still lacks a majority in the House of Representatives, forcing Takaichi to seek cooperation from other opposition groups to secure legislative stability (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3).

Appealing for political unity, Takaichi said her government would "flexibly and sincerely" consider opposition proposals consistent with LDP principles. [Kyodo News 1]

Main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) leader Yoshihiko Noda, however, ruled out cooperation, warning of the LDP's rightward drift on security policy and vowing that his party would serve as a counterbalance to the new government's agenda. In an immediate response to Takaichi's premiership, Noda vowed to position his party as a centrist alternative to Takaichi's new conservative administration and its coalition with JIP.

Noda called on the new Cabinet to immediately strengthen regulations on corporate and organizational political donations—a key funding source for the LDP—criticizing the LDP-JIP decision, formalized in their coalition agreement, to delay

reforms until September 2027, when Takaichi's party leadership term ends.

Similiarly, Tetsuo Saito, leader of the LDP's former coalition partner Komeito, dismissed the LDP-JIP reform pledge as insufficient to restore public trust, warning it would not "dispel public anger" over money in politics.

Although Komeito and the CDP share positions on several social issues—including support for allowing separate surnames for married couples and a more inclusive approach toward foreign residents—the prospects for a unified opposition bloc appear weak.

The Democratic Party for the People (DPP)—the centrist to center-right political party which has gained traction among younger voters—continues to distance itself from the CDP. DPP leader Yuichiro Tamaki, once floated as a potential opposition unity candidate, said his party would pursue "policy-based engagement" with both the LDP and JIP. He ruled out a comprehensive alliance with the CDP, citing policy differences on nuclear energy and national defense. [The Mainichi 2]

High approval ratings for new Takaichi administration

Meanwhile, Takaichi's new Cabinet began with a 64.4 percent approval rating, according to a *Kyodo News* survey conducted immediately after she became Japan's first female leader. The result marks a strong start, surpassing the initial support levels of her two predecessors, Shigeru Ishiba (50.7 percent) and Fumio Kishida (55.7 percent), though slightly below Yoshihide Suga's 66.4 percent in 2020. The disapproval rate stood at 23.2 percent.

The poll found broad support for the new ruling LDP-JIP coalition with 64.4 percent calling the alliance "good." In addition, 76.5 percent said Takaichi's inauguration would help advance women's empowerment, and 66.2 percent welcomed Komeito's exit from its 26-year partnership with the LDP.

Among those supporting the new government, 26.6 percent cited trust in Takaichi, while 22.5 percent said her economic policies appeared promising amid continued inflation. Party support for the LDP, however, slipped slightly to 31.4 percent from 33.8 percent earlier in the month. [Kyodo News 2]

Japan: Osaka High Court upholds constitutionality of vote disparity in

Upper House Election

(dql) The Osaka High Court ruled that the up to 3.13-fold disparity in vote weight in Japan's July upper house election did not violate the constitutional principle of equality, rejecting a petition to nullify the results. The ruling is the first among 16 similar lawsuits filed nationwide by lawyer groups challenging the fairness of the election, with other courts expected to issue verdicts by late November before a final Supreme Court review.

While the Supreme Court had previously deemed larger disparities in the 2010 and 2013 elections "in a state of unconstitutionality," it has upheld smaller gaps since electoral reforms merged constituencies. The court nonetheless warned in 2023 that correcting remaining imbalances remained an "urgent issue."

The plaintiffs argued that the system must be fundamentally restructured to reflect population distribution more accurately, as the disparity has widened again. The defendants included election commissions from six prefectures. [The Mainichi] [The Japan Times]

The ruling underscores Japan's ongoing struggle to reconcile electoral equality with representation in less-populated regions.

Japan: Far-right opposition party proposes law to criminalize damage to national flag

(dql) Far-right opposition party Sanseito submitted a bill to the House of Councilors proposing revisions to the Penal Code to criminalize damaging the national flag. Party leader Sohei Kamiya cited incidents during the July upper house election where protesters displayed Japanese flags with crosses, which he described as "blasphemy against the country."

Currently, Article 92 of the Penal Code penalizes defacing foreign flags with intent to insult, but no equivalent protection exists for Japan's flag.

Sanseito is seeking support from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party, which are reportedly considering similar legislation. [The Japan Times]

Since the July Upper House election, Sanseito has gained significant traction, increasing its seats from 1 to 15 while advancing a populist, Trump-like "Japan-First" agenda focused on national pride, conservative

values, and protection of traditional symbols. The party has also taken a hardline stance on immigration, advocating stricter controls and prioritizing Japanese citizens in the labor market, appealing to concerns over social cohesion and economic competition. Initiatives such as criminalizing damage to the national flag reflect its broader strategy to position itself as a defender of Japan's cultural and political heritage. This combination of nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric has helped Sanseito carve out a distinct niche in Japan's political landscape, attracting voters dissatisfied with mainstream parties. [AP News]

Japan: Assassin of former Prime Minister Abe pleads guilty

(dql) Tetsuya Yamagami, 45, indicted for the 2022 assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, pleaded guilty on the first day of his trial on October 28, three years after the attack. Yamagami is accused of shooting Abe with a homemade firearm during a campaign speech in western Japan. The Nara District Court will hold hearings before issuing a ruling in January.

Yamagami told investigators that his motive stemmed from a grudge against the Unification Church, which he blamed for his family's financial ruin after his mother donated an estimated JPY 100 million (USD 660,000) to the group. Abe was targeted because his grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, helped introduce the church to Japan in the 1950s. [Kyodo News]

Beyond the murder itself, investigations following the assignation exposed close ties between the Unification Church and conservative lawmakers in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, leading to the resignation of four ministers. Earlier this year, the Tokyo District Court ordered the dissolution of the Church's Japanese arm, citing "unprecedented damage" to society.

The attack also highlighted vulnerabilities in Japan's stringent gun-control system. Security personnel failed to recognize the first shot and were unable to prevent the killing in time, prompting lawmakers to strengthen firearm regulations in 2024. Under the new law, distributing tutorials on making guns or promoting gun sales on social media carries fines or up to one year in prison. [France 24]

The Unification Church is a religious movement founded in South Korea in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon, who described it as a Christian-based organization with

a unique theology. It is formally known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. The church has faced criticism for aggressive recruitment, high-pressure fundraising, and large donations from members.

Japan: Largest power producer to acquire U.S. shale gas assets amid push to diversify energy supply

(ay) JERA Co., Japan's largest power producer, announced on October 23 that it will acquire shale gas assets in western Louisiana for about USD 1.5 billion, marking its first investment in American upstream gas production, following an agreement with U.S. companies Williams and GEP Haynesville II to purchase their stakes in a shale basin near the Gulf of Mexico, which currently produces about 500 million cubic feet of gas per day. [JERA]

The company aims to double its output by 2030. With the site's proximity to major LNG export terminals offers a strategic advantage, the deal is expected to strengthen Japan's LNG value chain at a time of growing demand from data centers.

The acquisition comes shortly before U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to Tokyo for talks with Japan's new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and follows Washington's pressure on Tokyo to reduce imports of Russian LNG and increase investment in U.S. energy projects, including a USD 44 billion LNG development in Alaska. [Nikkei Asia] [Reuters]

Japan: Inflationary pressure persists as September core inflation accelerates

(dql) Japan continues to struggle with inflationary pressure as core consumer prices rose 2.9 percent year-on-year in September, up from 2.7 percent in August, driven by higher energy and food costs. This marks the first acceleration in four months, with inflation remaining above the Bank of Japan's 2 percent target since April 2022.

Excluding both energy and fresh food, the core-core CPI rose 3.0 percent, reflecting persistently elevated food prices. Non-fresh food costs climbed 7.6 percent, though slightly below August's 8.0 percent increase, while rice prices surged 49.2 percent—slowing after a peak of 101.7 percent in May. Utilities rebounded 2.3

percent as last year's government subsidies waned, while household durable goods fell 1.8 percent, driven by cheaper air conditioners. Service prices edged up 1.4 percent, influenced by lower childcare fees.

Economists caution that despite some deceleration, staple food prices remain high, indicating inflation has yet to stabilize, and consumer spending may not strengthen. [The Mainichi] [Reuters]

Against this backdrop, Japan's largest labor union, Rengo, has announced it will seek a minimum 5 percent wage increase in next spring's annual labor-management negotiations, maintaining the same target as this year to keep pace with persistent inflation. The union aims for a real wage gain of 1 percent, aligning with the government's goal to preserve purchasing power. It also recommended introducing a "catch-up clause" to compensate for any real wage declines caused by unexpected inflation in the following year.

Rengo plans to push for a 3 percent or higher base-pay rise as part of the overall 5 percent increase and encourages unions in small and medium-sized enterprises—which employ about 70 percent of workers—to target 6 percent or more to reduce the wage gap with larger companies. Additionally, the union will demand a minimum hourly wage of JPY 1,300 yen (USD), up JPY 50 from this year.

In the 2025 negotiations, Japanese firms agreed to an average 5.25 percent wage increase, marking the second consecutive year of rises above 5 percent, reflecting ongoing momentum in wage growth amid inflation. [The Japan Times] [The Mainichi 2]

Japan: Exports rebound for first time in five months

(ay) Japan's exports rose 4.2 percent year-on-year in September, ending a four-month streak of declines despite continuing pressure from U.S. tariffs. The figure fell short of the 5.7 percent increase expected by economists polled by FactSet, according to finance ministry data released on October 22. [Ministry of Finance, Japan]

Analysts said a weaker yen—down 2.3 percent against the dollar compared with a year earlier—likely boosted export competitiveness. However, shipments to the United States fell 13.3 percent from a year earlier, marking the sixth consecutive month of contraction due to tariffs on autos, chip-making equipment and

motors imposed under the Trump administration's 15 percent "reciprocal" duty. This contrasts with Japan's trade with Asia that saw a sharp rise of 9.2 percent in September. [NHK] [Devdiscourse]

While a new bilateral trade deal has eased some uncertainty, Japanese manufacturers continue to face higher costs and reduced U.S. demand. The Bank of Japan is expected to weigh the trade impact of tariffs when releasing updated economic projections later this month. [Wall Street Journal]

Japan: Toyota posts record global sales despite U.S. tariffs

(dql) Toyota Motor Corp. reported a 4.7 percent year-on-year rise in global sales for the April–September period, reaching a record 5.27 million vehicles, driven by strong hybrid demand in North America and China despite higher U.S. tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump. Global production grew 6 percent to nearly 5 million units, supported by a recovery in domestic output following last year's certification scandal.

In the United States, sales surged 11.3 percent to 1.3 million vehicles, while Chinese sales rose 5.5 percent to 914,000 units, reflecting solid demand for new electric and hybrid models. Domestic sales in Japan dipped slightly by 0.4 percent amid ongoing recovery from Prius-related recalls. September marked the ninth consecutive month of global sales growth, with both sales and output setting new monthly records.

However, the steep increase in U.S. auto tariffs—from 2.5 percent to 27.5 percent, later reduced to 15 percent for Japan—has clouded Toyota's profit outlook. The automaker expects net profit to fall 44.2 percent to 2.66 trillion yen (USD 17 billion) in fiscal 2025–26, as tariff pressures outweigh cost-cutting gains and higher-margin sales.

In response, Toyota is diversifying its market strategy to reduce dependence on North America, emphasizing expansion in China and other Asian markets to sustain growth under challenging trade conditions. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Government unveils revival plan for shipbuilding industry

(dql) The government and the ruling LDP have launched an ambitious initiative to restore global competitiveness in the shipbuilding sector, which has seen its market share drop to around 8 percent due to competition from South Korea and China. The plan includes a government-led fund exceeding JPY 1 trillion (USD 6.55 billion) to support large-scale investments, advance digital technologies and robotics, and expand LNG carrier construction.

It aims to double domestic shipbuilding capacity to 18 million gross tons by 2035 and address the steel price gap, which makes Japanese ships roughly 20 percent more expensive than Chinese competitors. The initiative underscores the strategic importance of maritime transport, as 60 percent of Japan's domestic shipping relies on the Japanese merchant fleet and reflects efforts to revitalize the industry amid global competition, including initiatives in the United States. [Shipping Telegraph]

Japan: First Yen-backed stablecoin launched

(dql) Japan launched its first yen-backed stablecoin, JPYC, on October 27, marking a cautious but notable step into digital currency in a market where cash and credit cards still dominate. Issued by the startup JPYC, the stablecoin is fully convertible to yen and backed by domestic savings and Japanese government bonds. The company aims to issue JPY 10 trillion (USD 66 billion) over three years and encourage widespread use overseas, initially without transaction fees, earning revenue from interest on government bond holdings.

Globally, stablecoins—digital assets pegged to fiat currencies—are dominated by U.S. dollar-backed coins, which make up over 99 percent of supply. Experts note that yen-backed stablecoins may not gain momentum as quickly, though participation by Japan's three megabanks could accelerate adoption over the next 2–3 years. Policymakers, including Bank of Japan Deputy Governor Ryozo Himino, have voiced concerns that stablecoins could bypass regulated banking systems and partly replace bank deposits, urging regulatory adaptation. [Reuters] [Trading Economics]

The move aligns with broader regional trends: South Korea is considering won-based stablecoins, and China is exploring yuan-backed digital currencies. [Maeil Business Newspaper] [China Daily]

Japan: Government moves to establish centralized national intelligence secretariat

(dql) The government has begun reviewing plans to create a new National Intelligence Secretariat to strengthen centralized intelligence coordination amid rising security challenges.

The proposed body would upgrade the existing Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, which currently gathers and analyzes information for the prime minister. Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara stated that the government will swiftly define the agency's structure, functions, and authorities.

Establishing the secretariat was a key pledge in Takaichi's ruling party leadership campaign and part of her coalition agreement with the center-right Japan Innovation Party. The two parties aim to submit a bill to create the new agency during the 2026 ordinary Diet session. [The Mainichi]

Japan: New cargo spacecraft to International Space Station launched

(dql) On October 26, Japan has successfully deployed its latest unmanned cargo spacecraft, HTV-X, delivering approximately 5.8 tons of essential supplies to the International Space Station. With a payload capacity of six tons—50 percent more than its predecessor, Kounotori, which serviced the ISS nine times between 2009 and 2020—the HTV-X represents a significant upgrade in Japan's space logistics capabilities.

The spacecraft is expected to reach the International Space Station on October 30, remain docked for six months, and subsequently undertake a three-month orbital technology demonstration. Enhanced with a new power supply feature, HTV-X can transport experiments requiring low-temperature conditions, broadening the scope of research it can support.

The H3 rocket has also been upgraded, now equipped with two main engines and four boosters, allowing it to carry multiple satellites in future missions. [Kyodo News]

The successful deployment underscores Japan's growing role in space supply operations and its ambitions in satellite deployment and technological innovation. [Grand Pinnacle Tribune]

Mongolia: Constitutional Court overturns prime minister's dismissal

(fs) The Constitutional Court has ruled that parliament's recent vote to dismiss prime minister Gombojav Zandanshatar was unconstitutional.

The court supported President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh's veto of the resolution, which cited procedural irregularities, including the use of an incorrect voting formula. According to the President's Office, the parliament failed to follow proper procedures as it was lacking the required quorum when voting on the motion of no confidence (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3). [Al Jazeera]

Zandanshatar, a Russian-educated economist, had replaced Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene, who resigned in June amid corruption scandals and mass protests due to allegations that his son and daughter-in-law's lavish lifestyle may have been funded through corruption (see AiR No. 22, June/2025, 1).

Analysts say the ruling highlights deepening divisions within the ruling Mongolian People's Party, where reformists led by former parliamentary speaker Dashzegve Amarbayasgalan are challenging Zandanshatar's conservative economic stance. The dispute, they warn, could lead to policy paralysis and deter foreign investment, further straining the economy already affected by inflation and overreliance on mining. [Reuters] [Sight Magazine]

Mongolia: Government discusses urban redevelopment, fuel reserves, peacekeeping compensation, and water supply progress

(fs) At its regular meeting on October 22, the Mongolian Government addressed several issues ranging from urban redevelopment to national fuel reserves and infrastructure projects.

It approved measures to relocate residents from Ulaanbaatar's ger districts to new apartments under the Nogoon nuur 1008 households project, financed by a Chinese grant. The project, nearing completion, includes eight 21-story buildings and aims to provide both ownership and rental housing to low-income families.

The Cabinet also raised allowances for Mongolian troops serving in UN peacekeeping missions, increasing their share of UN reimbursements from 70 to 80 percent. Additionally, the government instructed the Defence Ministry to expand vocational training opportunities for conscripts to enhance post-service employment prospects.

To secure energy stability, the Cabinet decided to extend national fuel reserves to cover 30 days of consumption by providing low-interest loans to companies for storage capacity expansion. Industry Minister G. Damdinnyam confirmed that fuel supplies remain stable despite a recent surge in demand.

The meeting also reviewed progress under the Ulaanbaatar Water Supply Improvement Program, funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Mongolian Government with a total investment of USD 461.76 million. Implementation stands at 88.7 percent, though additional government funding is required due to flood-related expenses and technical adjustments in groundwater development works. [Sonin, in Mongolian]

Mongolia: Major corruption investigation in Oyu Tolgoi project launched

(dql) Oyu Tolgoi LLC, a Mongolian mining company majority-owned by Anglo-Australian multinational mining company Rio Tinto, has launched an internal investigation into alleged corruption and misconduct within its procurement division, requesting police assistance. The move follows police raids on employees' homes reported by local media.

The investigation deepens reputational strains for Rio Tinto and Oyu Tolgoi, already under scrutiny after Mongolia's failed corruption lawsuit in the British High Court and a separate arbitration over tax disputes. These tensions highlight ongoing frictions between the mining giant and the Mongolian government, whose partnership is strategically significant given Oyu Tolgoi's role as one of the world's largest copper deposits—vital to global energy transition supply chains.

Despite governance controversies, Oyu Tolgoi's production is surging, with copper output expected to rise nearly 50 percent this year and the mine projected to generate positive cash flow for the first time. [Financial Review]

Mongolia: Fuel retailers fined USD 14.6 million for suspected price-fixing violations

(fs) The Authority for Fair Competition and Consumer Protection (AFCCP) announced that 21 fuel importing and retail companies have been fined a total of MNT 52.6 billion (approximately USD 14.6 million) for suspected price-fixing of AI-92 gasoline. The investigation found that the companies simultaneously increased the retail price of AI-92 fuel by USD 0.05 per liter to USD 0.72 in Ulaanbaatar starting on May 23.

At the time of the price increase, some companies cited the depreciation of the Mongolian tugrik against the U.S. dollar and rising operational costs as justification. However, the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources criticized the companies for acting without government consultation or approval.

It noted that a joint state-private sector council on fuel price stabilization had not yet completed its review when the retailers raised prices, calling the move inappropriate and politically opportunistic amid an unstable domestic environment, as the prime minister might get dismissed, next year's budget remains unapproved and there are strikes by teachers and medical workers demanding pay increases. [Bloomberg TV]

North Korea: Families resort to selling blood as harvest fails to ease hunger

(sm) In the South Hamgyong Province and other regions, North Koreans are reportedly selling 300 to 400 mL of blood in exchange for small food rations. Examples of these include a few kilograms of rice or cooking oil as the harvest fails to meet the basic needs of the population. Sources say the number of donors has surged sharply compared to recent years. [Daily NK]

Accounts from the 1990s of famine described similar practices, when citizens sold blood to survive amid food shortages. The reemergence of this trend suggests that food insecurity remains a serious challenge across parts of the country. [Reuters]

North Korea: App-based grain voucher system launched

(sm) North Korea has begun rolling out a mobile=app-based grain voucher system designed to regulate the distribution of state-issued food supplies. The system reportedly replaces paper ration coupons with QR codes that citizens must scan on smart phones when collecting grain from state distribution centers. [Daily NK]

The technology is currently being piloted in select provinces with plans for national expansion. The initiative builds on earlier trends, as the regime has expanded digital payments and home-delivery logistics since 2024, creating app-based systems for consumer goods and delivery services. [NK Insider]

North Korea: Hacker groups steal USD 2.84 billion in cryptocurrency since 2024

(mo) North Korea has stolen an estimated 2.84 billion USD in cryptocurrency from January 2024 to September 2025, according to a new report by the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team (MSMT), a group of 11 countries including the US, South Korea, and Japan. Roughly 1.19 billion USD was taken in 2024, making up about one-third of Pyongyang's foreign currency income that year; another USD 1.65 billion was stolen in the first nine months of 2025.

The thefts were mainly executed by North Korean cyber units infiltrating major exchanges such as Bybit (UAE), DMM Bitcoin (Japan), WazirX (India), BingX and Phemex (Singapore). The stolen crypto was laundered and cashed out through networks in China, Russia, Hong Kong, Cambodia and others, with Chinese nationals and China's financial system playing a central role by providing forged IDs and handling cash-outs through UnionPay cards and commercial banks. Cambodian platforms like Huione Group/Huione Pay were also used; Huione was sanctioned by the U.S. in October.

The report also highlights that overseas North Korean IT workers—despite UN bans— generated USD 350-800 million in 2024, sending roughly half their earnings to the regime. These workers, tied to sanctioned bodies like the Reconnaissance General Bureau—North Korea's main intelligence and clandestine operations agency—., have won contracts in the US and Europe (including defense-related sectors) using fake identities to conceal their origin. Between 1,000 and 2,000 North Korean IT workers are currently believed to be stationed abroad, mainly in China and Russia, with additional bases in Southeast Asia and Africa.

The MSMT was launched after Russia vetoed the renewal of the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea sanctions in March 2024. The panel was tasked with monitoring and supporting the enforcement of international sanctions imposed on North Korea. [The Korea Herald] [Chainalysis]

North Korea: Short-range ballistic missiles fired as speculation grows over possible Trump–Kim meeting

(mo) North Korea launched multiple short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) toward the country's northeast on October 22, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. Fired from North Hwanghae Province, the missiles traveled roughly 350 kilometers. This marks Pyongyang's first SRBM launch since May, and its fifth missile test this year. North Korea described the missile as a "new weapons system," reportedly hypersonic projectiles. Seoul's Office of National Security convened an emergency meeting to assess the security impact amid speculation that U.S. President Donald Trump may meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this week during Trump's visit for the APEC Summit. North Korea recently paraded what appears to be an upgraded Hwasong-20 ICBM aimed at the U.S. mainland but refrained from testing it, potentially to preserve space for diplomacy.

Analysts say a Trump–Kim meeting could take place at Panmunjom, where the two last met after the 2019 Hanoi breakdown. Civilian tours have been suspended in preparation for a potential last-minute summit. Trump has expressed readiness to meet Kim again, and Seoul is inclined to support renewed talks under President Lee Jae-myung's new "END (exchange, normalization, denuclearization) Initiative," though Kim has ruled out denuclearization negotiations.

Still, it is unclear whether Seoul would be informed in advance, and whether Kim is truly interested, given closer ties with China and Russia and his past experience with the failed Hanoi summit. [The Diplomat] [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Vice land minister resigns amid housing market controversy

(dql) President Lee Jae Myung has accepted the resignation of First Vice Land Minister Lee Sang-kyeong following public outcry over his recent comments on

property prices. Lee had suggested in a video appearance that potential buyers should wait until housing prices decline, a statement that drew widespread criticism from citizens and lawmakers across the political spectrum for being out of touch with the challenges faced by ordinary homebuyers.

The departure comes as the government recently imposed stricter controls on housing loans to curb escalating property values. A former real estate professor, Lee has long advised President Lee, dating back to his tenure as Seongnam mayor and governor of Gyeonggi Province.

The housing market has become a politically charged issue ahead of the local elections in June, with apartment prices in Seoul—particularly near the Han River—soaring and speculative activity intensifying, presenting a key test for the new administration's policy approach. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Former Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn raided in martial law investigation

(dql) South Korean authorities on Monday conducted a raid at the residence of former Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn amid an investigation into his alleged role in inciting unrest connected to former President Yoon Suk Yeol's December attempt to enforce martial law.

The special counsel team, led by Cho Eun-suk, carried out the search under a warrant tied to claims that Hwang encouraged violent actions by Yoon's supporters ahead of the Constitutional Court's impeachment decision. The former prime minister, who served under Park Geun-hye, had previously been reported to police in March by a civic group for his purported involvement in fomenting political violence.

The incident highlights continued legal scrutiny of senior political figures linked to efforts that challenged South Korea's constitutional order. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Ex-senior prosecutor sentenced to two years for cash-for-audit influence

(mo) A former senior prosecutor surnamed Park was sentenced to two years in prison on appeal for accepting KRW 100 million (USD 69,000) from former

Nature Republic CEO Jung Woon-ho in exchange for lobbying to suppress a Board of Audit and Inspection probe. The Seoul High Court upheld the first-trial sentence and ordered the confiscation of KRW 92 million (USD 64,000) for violating the Attorney-at-Law Act but allowed Park to remain free on bail due to health reasons.

Prosecutors said Park used his connection to a senior audit official to intervene in an audit tied to Jung's attempted acquisition of a Seoul subway commercial operator. Park denied taking money or mediating requests, but the court found testimony credible and said the lobbying attempt was directly related to the audit agency's duties.

Park was dismissed from office in 2017 for integrity violations. His separate administrative suit contesting his dismissal is still pending on appeal. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Growth beats forecasts in Q3 but remains exposed to Trump tariff risks

(mo) South Korea's GDP expanded 1.2 percent quarter-on-quarter in Q3 — nearly doubling the pace of the prior quarter helped by AI-driven semiconductor demand — as stimulus and exports offset tariff pressures, though analysts warn the export-dependent economy remains vulnerable to further U.S. trade action. [The Wall Street Journal]

Government transfers boosted consumption and investment, while construction lagged. Despite the upside surprise, officials warn the trade-reliant economy remains exposed to U.S. tariff pressure under President Trump. Seoul and Washington are negotiating a 350 billion USD investment package tied to tariff relief ahead of this week's APEC summit, but disagreement remains over whether funds must be deployed upfront or can include indirect financing, with Seoul cautioning that an aggressive drawdown could strain FX reserves of just over 400 billion USD. [Market Screener]

South Korea: KOSPI sets new record on tech rally as markets cheer planned Trump–Xi summit

(mo) South Korean stocks surged to another all-time high on October 24 amid strong gains in tech shares

after the White House confirmed that U.S. President Donald Trump and China's Xi Jinping will meet during the APEC summit this week.

The KOSPI jumped 2.5 percent to close at 3,941.59 as institutions and foreign investors bought heavily while retail investors sold. Samsung Electronics and SK hynix advanced sharply, joined by a near 10 percent spike in LG Energy Solution. Auto shares were mixed and Hanwha Aerospace fell. The Korean won strengthened to 1,436.85 per dollar. Bond prices also rose, pushing yields on three- and five-year Treasurys slightly lower. [Yonhap News]

South Korea: Concerns raised over record wage gap amid rise in part-time elder care jobs

(dql) The wage disparity between regular and non-regular workers in South Korea has reached its highest level since records began in 2004, driven by the growth of low-paid, part-time roles among the country's aging population.

Data from the Ministry of Data and Statistics shows non-regular employees—including part-time, temporary, and contract workers—earned an average of KRW 2.09 million (USD 1,460) per month from June to August, compared with KRW 3.90 million (USD 2,727) for regular employees, creating a record gap of KRW 1.81 million (USD 1,265).

A key factor is the surge of older adults in caregiving and social welfare roles. For the first time, non-regular workers aged 60 and above exceeded 3 million, accounting for 35.5 percent of the non-regular workforce. Jobs in health and social welfare now represent 20.5 percent of non-regular employment, roughly 1.76 million workers, many of whom are part-time and among the lowest-paid in the labor market.

Non-regular employment totaled 8.57 million in August (38.2 percent of all wage workers), with women representing a record 57.4 percent. About one-third of non-regular workers reported not choosing their employment type voluntarily, citing financial necessity or limited suitable positions. The age profile is shifting sharply: for the first time, there are more non-regular workers aged 70 and above (1.21 million) than in their 40s (1.20 million), while employment among younger adults and those in their 40s and 50s has declined.

The trends highlight the challenges posed by an aging workforce and the prevalence of low-paid, precarious

jobs despite rising overall employment. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Chief of largest internet service provider signals resignation over micropayment breach

(mo) KT CEO Kim Young-shub has announced to "take responsibility once the situation is resolved," effectively confirming plans to step down amid fallout from September's hacking-driven unauthorized micropayments and data leak. KT, formerly Korea Telecom, is South Korea's largest fixed-line and internet provider and one of the country's top mobile carriers, considered a core piece of national digital infrastructure.

Testifying at a National Assembly committee audit, Kim acknowledged top-level accountability and clarified that his remarks include resignation. He pledged to notify all customers of the personal information breach, shifting from KT's earlier approach that required users to check exposure status on its website.

Kim also said victims of unauthorized micropayments and illegal base-station access will receive penalty-fee exemptions, while decisions on broader fee relief for all users will follow the results of a public-private investigation. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Cheongung-II export to Iraq advances after pricing rift resolved

(mo) The dispute between LIG Nex1, the system integrator for the Cheongung-II air defense system, and Hanwha Aerospace/Hanwha Systems over the Iraqi export package has been resolved, clearing the way for the USD 2.58 billion project to move forward.

Hanwha Aerospace and Hanwha Systems signed supply contracts with LIG Nex1 totaling USD 1.03 billion for key components, including launchers and multi-function radars. Under the agreements, Hanwha Systems will provide multi-function radars under a USD 599 million contract, while Hanwha Aerospace will supply launchers for USD 270 million and launch tubes and related hardware for USD 159 million.

The Hanwha affiliates will customize the package—previously exported to the UAE and Saudi Arabia—to

meet Iraqi requirements ahead of delivery. LIG Nex1 said it will now proceed with the Iraq project "stably."

The rift originated in September last year, when LIG Nex1 secured the Iraq export contract without first finalizing pricing and delivery terms for Hanwha-produced subsystems. Hanwha warned that delivery could become untenable, raising concerns that the deal might collapse. After mediation by the National Assembly and the Defense Acquisition Program Administration, the companies reached an agreement in November to "ensure smooth exports," culminating in the recent contract signings.

LIG Nex1 emphasized that integrators traditionally lead exports and developed the core interception technologies, while Hanwha highlighted its key role in Cheongung-II development. With the contracts now in place, the conflict is considered fully resolved. Iraq has requested that details on export volume and delivery schedules remain confidential.

Cheongung-II is a domestically developed medium-range, medium-altitude surface-to-air missile system capable of intercepting aircraft and missiles at up to 15 km—below the U.S. Patriot's 20 km—but at roughly one-third the unit cost of U.S. systems. Before Iraq, the system had been exported to the UAE and Saudi Arabia. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Court rejects arrest warrants for ex-defense minister in Marine death probe

(mo) Former Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup appeared at the Seoul Central District Court for a hearing on whether he will be arrested over allegations that he interfered in the 2023 Marine Corps investigation into the death of Cpl. Chae Su-geun.

A special counsel requested a warrant on charges including abuse of power, alleging that the former Yoon administration blocked the transfer of the probe to police to shield a senior Marine commander from responsibility. The court, however, rejected the bench warrants for Lee and four other senior defense and military officials, citing a legal dispute over the alleged "investigation pressure" and insufficient need for detention. The court stated that key facts are established; evidence has largely been secured over two years of investigations, and the charges should be tested at trial without custody.

Lee denied the charges, insisting that his actions were lawful exercises of ministerial authority and not attempts to influence suspects or obstruct accountability. [The Chosun Daily]

Only former 1st Marine Division Commander Im Seong-geun was arrested on October 23, with the court citing concerns over potential evidence destruction. Former 11th Artillery Battalion Commander Choi Jin-kyu, whose warrant was also requested, avoided arrest. The setback is expected to weaken the special counsel's momentum, particularly regarding core abuse-of-authority accusations that could implicate former President Yoon Suk-yeol. Remaining suspects are now likely to be indicted without detention.

Chae died in July 2023 after being swept away during a search mission in heavy rain without proper safety gear. [Yonhap] [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Government fines job portal after major data breach

(mo) South Korea's Personal Information Protection Commission has fined the job portal Incruit KRW 463 million (USD 320,000) after a massive data breach affecting more than 7.27 million users. Hackers infiltrated an employee's PC in January 2023, stole database credentials, and leaked member data along with 54,475 files including resumes and self-introductions amounting to 438GB.

Incruit did not detect the breach until hackers sent an extortion email two months later. The commission found that the company ignored unusual access logs outside business hours and failed to apply adequate safeguards despite handling sensitive information such as education, employment history, and disability status. It also noted a previous leak at Incruit in July 2023 involving over 35,000 users. In addition to the fine, Incruit was ordered to disclose the incident publicly on its website and to submit a recurrence-prevention plan within 60 days, while regulators signaled tougher sanctions against repeat offenders going forward. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Army tests advanced equipment with reserve forces

(dql) The South Korean Army concluded a two-week exercise for its reserve troops, showcasing advanced uniforms and combat gear designed to improve battlefield effectiveness and survivability. The drills, which began on October 14, were the first to feature "warrior platforms" integrating high-tech equipment.

Approximately 240 reservists from the 31st, 35th, and 52nd infantry divisions participated, training with five types of gear, including telescopic sights, high-performance magnifiers, laser target designators, and new bulletproof helmets and vests. Exercises focused on familiarization with the equipment and live-fire drills.

The Army aims to expand the deployment of these warrior platforms to 82 reserve units by 2029, advancing its goal of creating a more capable and technologically equipped force. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Sharp rise in online sexual crimes against minors reported

(dql) Incidents of online sexual exploitation targeting children and adolescents in South Korea have surged over the past year, with authorities warning of growing risks from grooming and AI-generated sexual content.

New data from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family shows that reported grooming cases—defined as online communication with minors for sexual purposes—jumped from 73 in 2023 to 202 in 2024, with nearly all victims being middle-school-age girls. Lawmakers highlighted that offenders are increasingly young and technologically adept, using popular digital platforms to manipulate victims.

More broadly, digital sex crimes in the country rose from 9,700 cases in 2020 to over 15,400 in 2024. AI-generated sexual imagery, including deepfakes exploiting real individuals without consent, saw a dramatic increase from 31 cases in 2020 to 550 last year.

The surge in offenses has sharply increased demand for victim assistance. The Digital Sex Crime Victim Support Center, run by the Korea Women's Human Rights Institute, handled over 332,000 support requests in 2024, nearly double the 2020 figure, primarily focused on removing non-consensual content. The center's services, which operate from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., assisted more than 10,000 individuals last year, an eightfold rise since its launch in 2018. [The Korea Herald]

Taiwan: Ruling party announces 2026 local election candidates

(dql) President and ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chair Lai Ching-te has announced several candidates for the 2026 local elections, confirming nominees for key races in Taichung, Chiayi, Yilan, and Taitung.

Legislator Ho Hsin-chun will run for Taichung mayor, while Legislator Wang Mei-hui is the DPP nominee for Chiayi. Yilan's candidate is Lin Kuo-chang, a former county official who plans to join the DPP, and Taitung will be represented by Legislator Chen Ying of Puyuma heritage, aiming to strengthen the party's presence in the county.

Other nominations remain contested. Legislator Su Chiao-hui has expressed her intention to seek the DPP nomination for New Taipei mayor, while Changhua County is experiencing internal disputes. Former Mayor Chiu Chien-fu and Legislator Huang Hsiu-fang are both competing in the party primary, with factional disagreements and early endorsements contributing to tensions. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Former Taipei deputy mayor testifies in Ko Wen-je graft case, denies knowledge of alleged bribe

(dql) Former Taipei Deputy Mayor Huang Shan-shan testified in the graft case against ex-Taipei Mayor and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) Chair Ko Wen-je, clarifying her interpretation of messages cited by prosecutors as evidence of an alleged NTD 15 million (USD 460,000) bribe. Prosecutors claim Ko received the payment from Core Pacific Group Chair Sheen Ching-jing in exchange for favorable floor area ratio terms for a Core Pacific development, citing messages referencing "Sheen 1500" and "Sheen has already paid."

Huang said she did not understand why Ko sent the messages and had no knowledge of any financial dealings between Ko and Sheen. Her reply of "understood" was intended to acknowledge Ko's preference to avoid pressuring donors for campaign contributions.

Huang also described the "KP Show," initially framed as a campaign fundraiser, as a commercial event that reflected Ko's personal interest in hosting a concert

rather than political fundraising. She noted that candidates can legally earn income through activities such as book sales to support campaigns. Prosecutors argued that ticket sales and merchandise reflected fundraising activity.

Following the hearing, Huang criticized prosecutors for unprofessional speculation, and Ko's team accused them of attempting to access internal party information unrelated to the case. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: High Court acquits former President Chen Shui-bian of money laundering over statute of limitations

(dql) The Taiwan High Court has acquitted former President Chen Shui-bian of money laundering charges, citing expiration of the statute of limitations. Prosecutors had alleged that Chen and his wife, Wu Shu-jen, accepted NTD 10 million (USD 310,000) from Chen Min-hsiu in exchange for assistance in her appointment as chair of the Taipei Financial Center Corporation. The couple had previously received prison sentences in related corruption cases.

Earlier, the High Court had found Chen complicit in money laundering and ordered a reinvestigation, leading to a renewed indictment. However, the Taipei District Court suspended the trial in 2015 due to Chen's chronic illnesses, and he has remained on medical parole since then. Including delays, the 12-year, six-month statute of limitations expired in December 2022, prompting the High Court to reject prosecutors' appeal.

Chen, who served as Taiwan's president from 2000 to 2008, has previously been convicted on separate corruption charges involving embezzlement and bribery. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Watchdog probes forced labor allegations in textile industry

(dql) Taiwan's Control Yuan, the government watchdog body, has initiated a probe into alleged forced labor practices in the country's textile industry following a U.S.-based NGO report exposing abuses involving migrant workers. The probe, led by Control Yuan members Chi Hui-jung and Wang Yu-ling, seeks to assess whether Taiwanese authorities have adequately

addressed violations of labor rights and complied with international human rights commitments.

The report by Transparentem, *"Following the Thread: Labor Abuses in Taiwan's Textile Industry,"* found that nine Taiwanese manufacturers supplying major global brands—including Adidas, Nike, H&M, and Patagonia—had charged illegal recruitment fees of up to USD 6,000, withheld wages and identity documents, and intimidated workers. Such practices meet the International Labour Organization's criteria for forced labor. [Focus Taiwan] [Transparentem]

Taiwan: Manufacturers hit hard by U.S. tariffs

(dql) Taiwanese manufacturers are grappling with the impact of a 20 percent U.S. tariff on their exports, with orders stalling and profit margins under pressure across traditional industries such as auto parts and bicycles. President Lai Ching-te has pledged the effects will be temporary and announced a NTD 93 billion (USD 3 billion) relief package to support affected companies and workers, spanning manufacturing, agriculture, and fisheries.

Industry leaders report significant disruption, with over 70 perrcent of traditional sectors affected. Businesses like Coplus and VooDoo Cycles cite uncertainty as a key challenge, while labor data shows more than 7,300 workers on unpaid leave, mostly in export-oriented manufacturing. Taiwan's manufacturing activity remains weak, with the September purchasing managers index at 48.3, marking a fourth consecutive month of contraction.

The tariffs also pose political challenges for Lai, as any trade adjustment with Washington could face scrutiny from the opposition-led legislature. Some companies, like Sheh Kai Precision, worry about losing competitiveness compared to South Korea and Japan, which secured lower 15 percent rates. However, firms are exploring diversification to Southeast Asian markets, and optimism persists that a U.S.-Taiwan trade deal could soon ease the uncertainty. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Government to roll out cash handouts starting early November

(dql) The government will begin distributing NTD 10,000 (USD 326) cash handouts in early November via multiple channels, Finance Minister Chuang Tsui-yun announced October 23. Chuang highlighted that the Ministry of Finance is finalizing recipient lists, registering residents in remote areas, and preparing online registration to ensure safe, accurate, and non-duplicative payments.

The first round will target direct deposit recipients, with other methods—including ATM, post office withdrawals, and roster distribution—following. [Taiwan News] [Taipei Times]

The cash handout program is part of a broader government strategy to stimulate domestic consumption and provide relief amid economic pressures, including inflation and rising living costs.

In an earlier move the same day, President Lai Ching-te has signed the special resilience budget into law, authorizing the cash handout for all citizens. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: First M1A2T Abrams Tank battalion to be activated

(dql) Taiwan will establish its first tank battalion equipped with U.S.-made M1A2T Abrams tanks on October 31. The battalion will be activated after the tanks complete operational testing, with an inauguration ceremony planned to mark the occasion.

The Army has received 80 of the 108 purchased tanks, along with six types of ammunition, including high-explosive anti-tank warheads and armor-piercing rounds, though depleted uranium rounds are not part of the procurement package.

The formation of the battalion underscores Taiwan's ongoing modernization of its armored forces amid rising regional security tensions, highlighting the strategic importance of U.S. military support and advanced defense capabilities. [Focus Taiwan] [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Military conducts series of live-fire drills to bolster readiness against Chinese threats

(dql) Taiwan's Army Aviation and Special Forces Command has launched a weeklong live-fire drill at the Hengchun Joint Training Base, featuring coordinated helicopter operations designed to simulate responses to Chinese military incursions.

The 602nd Brigade deployed SuperCobra attack helicopters, Kiowa reconnaissance aircraft, and Black Hawks armed with rockets, cannons, and machine guns. The exercise included sequential strikes on mock enemy targets, showcasing rapid suppression and close air support tactics.

The drills follow the launch of the Army's inaugural Lu Sheng exercise, involving armored and mechanized infantry brigades in northern Taiwan. That exercise tests decentralized command, urban combat, drone integration, and logistics support.

Simultaneously, the Air Force has begun its Tian Long exercise to evaluate pilot combat readiness through emergency scrambles and simulated missile engagements. The drills feature emergency scrambles, dogfights, midair target identification, and simulated missile launches to test pilot proficiency in intercepting and repelling enemy aircraft. Ground-based air defense units are conducting parallel exercises to strengthen the island's integrated defense network.

The exercise coincides with Taiwan's expanding defense modernization program. The Air Force expects the first 10 of its 66 ordered F-16V Block 70 fighter jets from the United States to be assembled this year and maintains regular delivery reviews with Lockheed Martin.

Additionally, Taiwan is awaiting delivery of three NASAMS (National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System) batteries, including 123 extended-range AMRAAM missiles, and has stationed officers in the U.S. to oversee the process. Looking ahead, the Air Force plans to acquire nine more NASAMS batteries with 339 missiles under a NTD 110 billion (USD 3.57 billion) program to further strengthen Taiwan's air defense capabilities.

Together, the concurrent exercises underscore Taiwan's efforts to strengthen joint operational capability and readiness amid growing regional security tensions. [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan: Retired general jailed for 7.5 years for China-backed subversion attempt

(yl) The Taiwan High Court sentenced retired Army Lt. Gen. Kao An-kuo to seven years and six months in prison for attempting to form a China-backed organization aimed at overthrowing Taiwan's government.

Kao and his partner Liu were found guilty of seeking financial support and direction from Chinese officials to recruit active and retired military officers, plan attacks on government institutions, and establish an interim regime aligned with Beijing. Their plan failed after no military personnel agreed to join.

Four accomplices received prison sentences ranging from 2.5 to 6 years. The court ruled that all defendants knowingly collaborated with a hostile foreign power seeking to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Government debunks fake Chinese 'Defection App' as disinformation attempt

(dql) Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) has dismissed circulating claims about a Chinese app allegedly enabling Taiwanese citizens and soldiers to "defect" as a fabricated hoax. The rumored app, called *"Return Home,"* was said to allow users to register their defection and even earn rewards for recruiting others. Posts online claimed over 128,000 registrations, including 28,000 from Taipei.

The MAC clarified that the app does not exist on any known platform and identified the claims as part of a foreign disinformation campaign aimed at undermining public morale and creating the illusion of widespread defections. The Ministry of Digital Affairs confirmed that searches of iOS and Android stores in both Taiwan and China found no such app.

Authorities stressed that if the app were real, immediate steps would be taken to block or remove it. The incident underscores ongoing Chinese information operations targeting Taiwan's society and military to sow confusion and erode trust. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Government launches emergency response to suspected African swine fever outbreak

(yl) Premier Cho Jung-tai announced emergency measures after a suspected African swine fever (ASF) outbreak was detected on a pig farm in Taichung's Wuqi District, where 117 pigs died between October 10 and 20.

Testing confirmed the presence of ASF nucleic acid, pending formal verification under World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) guidelines. The Ministry of Agriculture imposed a five-day nationwide ban on pig transport and slaughter, prohibited the use of kitchen waste as feed, and suspended pork exports.

Authorities will release frozen pork to stabilize supply and strengthen border inspections and anti-smuggling efforts. A three-kilometer control zone was established around the affected site, while culling and disinfection have been completed. [Focus Taiwan 1] [Focus Taiwan 2]

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

Bangladesh: Tribunal proceedings intensify as ex-prime minister's war crimes verdict nears, while enforced disappearance cases broaden military exposure

(lm) Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal-1 (ICT-1) — a domestic tribunal originally created in 2010 to prosecute atrocities from the 1971 Liberation War — has entered the final phase of its most politically sensitive proceedings to date. It is simultaneously

handling two sets of major cases linked to the July–August 2024 uprising, which led to the fall of the Awami League government, the exile of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and the installation of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's interim administration.

Crimes-against-humanity trial against Hasina and Kamal

The tribunal's headline case concerns crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the 2024 crackdown on anti-government protests. Prosecutors have sought the death penalty for Hasina and her former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, arguing that they orchestrated the nationwide repression that, according to United Nations estimates, left between 800 and 1,400 people dead and more than 14,000 injured. Chief Prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam described Hasina as the *"mastermind and principal architect"* of the violence. [AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]

Hasina's state-appointed lawyer contended that she *"did not flee but was forced to leave"* Bangladesh amid the chaos and argued that the indictment lacks the genocidal intent required under international law. The verdict is scheduled for November 13, with the defense expecting acquittal. Both Hasina and Kamal remain in exile in India, while the Yunus government has banned Awami League activities and pledged accountability for past abuses. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

State-appointed defense counsel Md Amir Hossain has publicly rejected allegations that the tribunal functions as a *"kangaroo court."* He said he had faced no external pressure and described the proceedings as transparent and professionally conducted, noting that media clips showing him smiling during hearings had been misinterpreted. [The Daily Star 1]

Enforced disappearance cases involving senior security and military officers

Running parallel are two enforced disappearance cases postponed by ICT-1 on October 26 from November 20 to November 23 after a prosecution request. These cases target Hasina, Kamal, and a large group of former and serving security officials accused of ordering secret detentions and torture of political opponents during the previous administration.

The first case names 17 defendants, including Hasina, former Defence Adviser Major General (Retired) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, and former Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed, for alleged operations at the Task Force Interrogation (TFI) Cell. The second names 13 defendants, including Hasina

and Siddique, for overseeing disappearances at the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) — known as the "Aynaghar." In total, 30 individuals were indicted on October 8, and 13 army officers are being held in a temporary sub-jail inside Dhaka Cantonment under an order issued on October 12. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

In total, 30 individuals were indicted on October 8, among them 15 army officers. Thirteen of these officers are currently detained in a temporary sub-jail inside Dhaka Cantonment under a Home Ministry order issued on October 12, while the remaining accused are either absconding or outside the country. These cases mark the first time active-duty personnel have faced trial before the tribunal for post-independence crimes. [AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]

Amid heightened scrutiny, the Chief Prosecutor's Office issued a clarification on October 27 rejecting reports that prosecutor Gazi Monawar Hossain Tamim had said the 15 indicted officers "remain in service until Army Headquarters applies the law." The office called the statement "misquoted and distorted," stressing that under Section 20C of the amended International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973, anyone formally charged before the tribunal is automatically disqualified from public service. It further cited Section 26 of the Act and Article 47(3) of the Constitution, which give the tribunal's provisions legal precedence over other statutes. [The Daily Star 2]

Adding to procedural sensitivities, Barrister M. Sarwar Hossain, a former army officer and Supreme Court lawyer, withdrew on October 23 as defense counsel for the detained officers after acknowledging a conflict of interest. His brief appearance before ICT-1 drew public criticism before his withdrawal. [Dhaka Tribune 3]

ICT-1 is also conducting 45 additional investigations into former Awami League politicians and security officials, with findings due by December 8.

Bangladesh: Reform commission faces legal deadlock as youth movement continues boycott of reform charter

(lm) Bangladesh's National Consensus Commission (NCC) — an expert body formed in February 2025 to draft and oversee the implementation of post-uprising political reforms — is struggling to finalize a legally viable framework for enforcing the July National Charter, the reform blueprint signed on October 17 by interim head and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus

together with 25 political parties as the foundation for the country's post-uprising transition.

The charter, drafted in the aftermath of the 2024 student-led uprising that toppled the Awami League government of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, lays out 84 proposed reforms to rebuild Bangladesh's political and constitutional order. These include potential reinstatement of caretaker-style oversight, new guarantees for judicial independence and executive accountability, and the creation of a bicameral parliament.

Despite months of deliberation, the NCC has yet to determine how to make these reforms legally binding on the next parliament. At a series of recent meetings, commission members and legal experts admitted there is no precedent in Bangladesh or comparable parliamentary systems for compelling a future legislature to enact predetermined constitutional changes.

Two enforcement options — dissolving parliament if reforms are not enacted within 270 days, or automatically incorporating the reforms into the constitution after that period — were both deemed unworkable. A third idea, to form a Constitution Reform Assembly before convening parliament, was rejected as impractical because it would prolong the interim government's tenure. The commission may ultimately retain the 270-day deadline without specifying consequences, effectively relying on political consensus rather than legal enforcement. [The Daily Star 1]

Under the current draft plan, the next parliament would serve a dual role for its first nine months, acting both as legislature and as a Constitution Reform Council tasked with debating and approving the reforms. The NCC is also expected to recommend that the interim government issue a "July Charter Implementation (Constitutional Reform) Order", followed by a national referendum to secure public endorsement — a sequence that would formally launch the constitutional transition process. [The Daily Star 2]

The NCC's work, however, unfolds amid deep political divisions. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — the historical rival of the Awami League — and Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party and a former BNP ally, have both signed the charter but remain split over the timing of the referendum, while several leftist parties continue to boycott the process. [AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]

Arguably most consequential, the National Citizen Party (NCP) — a youth-led movement that emerged from the 2024 uprising and was instrumental in bringing Yunus to power — has refused to sign the charter, calling it "legally baseless" until its enforcement is guaranteed through both executive order and popular referendum. During a recent meeting with the NCC, NCP representatives demanded that the draft implementation order be published and described the charter as belonging "to the entire nation," not to any political faction. They reiterated that the party will only join alliances or elections under a platform fully committed to executing the charter's reforms. [The Daily Star 3] [Dhaka Tribune]

In response, senior BNP figures have urged the NCP to avoid "emotional or revolutionary" rhetoric that could undermine the legitimacy of the interim government, emphasizing that the current administration was formed constitutionally and that the next parliament will ratify its actions to ensure legal continuity. [The Daily Star 4] [Dhaka Tribune]

Amid these divisions, families of protesters killed during the 2024 uprising that ousted Hasina have urged the commission to provide legal recognition and protection for victims, complaining of ongoing humiliation and neglect by state offices. [The Daily Star 1]

Bangladesh: Supreme Court hearings on caretaker government system center on restoring electoral credibility

(lm) Bangladesh's Supreme Court is continuing hearings on an appeal seeking to reinstate the non-party caretaker government system, which was abolished in 2011 during the first term of the Awami League government led by then–Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The case, now before a seven-member Appellate Division bench, carries major implications for the future of election-time governance in Bangladesh.

The hearings, which began on October 21, follow the Court's August 27 decision to allow appeals against its own 2011 verdict that struck down the 13th Amendment — the constitutional provision that had introduced the caretaker government system in 1996 to ensure neutrality in national elections. That verdict was followed by the 15th Amendment, through which the Awami League–controlled parliament formally abolished the system and restored elections under incumbent governments — a move widely criticized for undermining electoral impartiality.

During recent sessions, the Chief Justice emphasized that the Court aims to establish a “sustainable and effective” framework for election-time governance rather than simply reviving the old model. The Attorney General, representing the state, acknowledged that years of political oppression, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings had eroded public confidence in state institutions, arguing that political stability depends on restoring trust in the electoral process.

Petitioners have maintained that the caretaker model remains the most credible mechanism for guaranteeing free and fair elections and that the Court’s ruling should reflect the July National Charter, the reform framework guiding the current transition under the Yunus-led interim government. They further contend that the 13th Amendment had strengthened democracy by enabling impartial election oversight. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star]

At the time of writing, no official readout from the October 28 session had been released. The next phase of the proceedings is expected to clarify whether the Court intends to propose a revised framework for interim governance or to reinstate the caretaker model in its original form.

Bangladesh: Parties and civil society call for credible, inclusive elections amid deep mistrust of interim institutions

(lm) As Bangladesh prepares for its next national election, political parties and civil society groups have renewed calls for a free, fair, and internationally recognized vote that ensures a peaceful transfer of power. Yet beneath these shared demands lies a deeper crisis of trust — among political actors themselves, and between them and the interim government institutions now steering the transition.

The political landscape that emerged after the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2024 is marked by fragmentation and mutual suspicion. None of the major actors fully trust the others or the mechanisms intended to guarantee neutrality. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jamaat-e-Islami, and the newly formed National Citizen Party (NCP) — the three parties that now dominate post-Hasina politics — have each questioned in different ways whether the current system can deliver an election free from manipulation.

At a recent roundtable, senior representatives of these parties said the upcoming vote must meet international standards and that any flawed election should be annulled and reheld. The BNP, the historical archrival and main opposition to Hasina's Awami League, was represented by Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed, who said voters would "guard the election themselves," reiterating the party's commitment to transparency and to forming a national consensus government to implement its 31-point reform plan. Jamaat-e-Islami, a former BNP ally and the country's largest Islamist party, was represented by Naib-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, who said that if the election proves unfair, the Chief Adviser should cancel it and call a new one. Akhter Hossen, member secretary of the National Citizen Party (NCP) — a student-led party formed earlier this year from organizations that spearheaded the 2024 uprising leading to Hasina's ouster — emphasized the need to end Bangladesh's entrenched cycle of ruling parties clinging to power and called for greater youth and women's participation. [The Daily Star 1]

However, opposition criticism of the Election Commission's neutrality has only deepened. After meeting Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, the BNP urged the removal of officials it considers politically compromised and expressed concern over civil servants' role in polling administration. The party also proposed that the referendum on the July National Charter — the reform framework underpinning the interim transition — be held alongside the general election to enhance legitimacy. [Dhaka Tribune]

The mutual distrust among political forces was further visible when a BNP proposal to bar staff of several Islamic banks and hospitals from election duties — citing alleged links to a "right-leaning party" — drew sharp objections from Jamaat-e-Islami. Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar condemned the move as politically motivated and warned that such allegations risk eroding public confidence ahead of the vote. [The Daily Star 2]

At the same time, Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader told a delegation from the International Republican Institute (IRI) on October 23 that a neutral and fair election "will not be possible under the current caretaker government," citing widespread public skepticism over its impartiality. He warned that excluding major political forces could lead to political instability or even "a situation akin to civil war," noting the country's fragile economic conditions and rising unemployment. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

The Jatiya Party, Bangladesh's third-largest political force and a long-time kingmaker that previously served as the official parliamentary opposition during Sheikh Hasina's final term in power, has recently faced calls from several parties to be banned from contesting the next election over its perceived alignment with the former Awami League government.

Jatiya Party General Secretary Shameem Haider Patwary further claimed that more than half of Bangladesh's 55 registered parties had been excluded from Election Commission consultations, undermining confidence in the electoral process. He also rejected proposals for a national referendum, calling it unconstitutional, as the constitution contains no mechanism for such a vote without parliamentary approval. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Bangladesh: Interim government advances major electoral reforms as Election Commission finalizes polling logistics for February 2026 vote

(lm) Bangladesh's interim administration under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has advanced a dual-track electoral overhaul combining legal reform and logistical preparation ahead of the 13th national parliamentary election, expected in February 2026. The government has approved sweeping amendments to the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972, while the Election Commission (EC) has completed the finalization of polling centers and booths and is moving to coordinate security and administrative readiness.

The revised RPO introduces extensive changes to transparency, campaign finance, and candidate eligibility. A key amendment requires that political parties contesting within an electoral alliance must use their own registered symbols rather than a shared emblem — ending a decades-old practice in Bangladeshi coalition politics. [The Daily Star 1]

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the change aims to enhance accountability and voter clarity, though the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — historically the main rival to the Awami League of ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina — and Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party, have warned that the amendment could weaken coalition cohesion and disadvantage smaller partners. Following the reform's announcement, a BNP delegation formally rejected the change to Article 20 of the RPO, arguing that the amendment was enacted without sufficient

consultation and undermines established coalition practices. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

The revised law also expands disclosure and enforcement mechanisms. Candidates must now publicly declare assets, income, and liabilities under oath, with penalties for false statements. The EC gains the authority to annul constituency results in cases of systemic irregularities. New provisions bar fugitives from candidacy, reinstate the "no vote" option in uncontested races, and formally empower the armed forces as law enforcement authorities during elections — restoring a clause removed in 2009 but applied informally in later polls.

Financial and transparency rules have been tightened. Campaign spending is now capped at BDT 2.5 million (USD 22,000) or BDT 10 (USD 0.09) per voter. Political donations are limited to BDT 5 million (USD 44,000) annually, while contributions above BDT 50,000 (USD 440) must be made via bank transfer. Parties are required to publish audited accounts, and the government is reviewing proposals for expanded election monitoring using CCTV, police body cameras, and drones. [The Daily Star 1]

Meanwhile, the EC has finalized the list of 42,761 polling centers and 244,739 booths across the country, with each center serving about 3,000 voters. Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said the commission is "90 to 95 percent ready," though the registration of political parties and observer organizations remains slower than expected. Twenty-two parties have been preliminarily cleared, and field verifications are ongoing. The EC expects to complete both registration processes by the end of October.

The commission is also addressing procedural questions regarding the National Citizen Party (NCP) after denying it the "Water Lily (Shapla)" symbol, stating that it was not included in the official list. Akhtar said the EC would later clarify its decision but reaffirmed that allocations would follow established procedures. [The Daily Star 4]

In preparation for the vote, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin is set to chair a coordination meeting on October 30 with 31 senior officials — including secretaries from key ministries and agency heads — to ensure logistical and security readiness. Earlier consultations this month with law enforcement agencies, journalists, and civil society aimed to strengthen inter-agency coordination and safeguard electoral integrity. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Interim government moves to finalize full judicial independence ordinance

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has approved in principle the draft Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, 2025, a long-anticipated reform aimed at completing the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch.

Once enacted, the ordinance will transfer authority over the appointment, transfer, promotion, and discipline of lower court judges from the Law Ministry to the Supreme Court, granting the judiciary both administrative and financial autonomy. The apex court will also gain full control over its own budget, including development expenditures.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul called the step "historic," noting that judicial independence has been discussed for over two decades. He cited the Masdar Hossain case — a landmark 2007 Supreme Court ruling that first mandated the separation of the judiciary from executive control under Article 22 of the Constitution, which enshrines the independence of the judiciary as a fundamental state principle — as the foundation for the reform that successive governments failed to fully implement.

Further inter-ministerial consultations — particularly with the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Public Administration — are expected before the ordinance is submitted for final approval by the Council of Advisers.

At the same meeting, the council also approved draft ordinances amending the Anti-Corruption Commission Act [see separate article in this edition], establishing a July Uprising Memorial Museum, and introducing a Spatial Planning Ordinance. It additionally endorsed reforms to streamline post-handover management of government housing projects and approved the establishment of a Bangladesh Consulate General in Detroit, Michigan, as part of broader administrative modernization efforts. [The Daily Star] [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Interim government approves sweeping Anti-Corruption Commission reform

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has approved in principle the Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, a landmark reform designed to strengthen the independence, reach, and

accountability of the country's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). The draft law, endorsed by the advisory council on October 23, consolidates earlier reform proposals aimed at reversing restrictions imposed under the administration of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina while granting the commission new authority to pursue corruption cases involving Bangladeshi citizens abroad and foreign nationals residing in Bangladesh.

The ordinance repeals Section 32 (Ka) of the ACC Act 2004, which had required government approval before legal action could be initiated against judges and public servants—a safeguard that critics long viewed as politically motivated. Inserted by the Hasina government in 2013 and declared unconstitutional by the High Court in 2014, the provision nonetheless remained on the books and, according to the ACC Reform Commission, undermined institutional independence. The repeal restores the ACC's authority to file cases directly, aligning with the commission's own 2024 reform blueprint submitted to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Beyond restoring prosecutorial independence, the ordinance expands the ACC's jurisdiction and institutional scope. The body will be empowered to investigate corruption involving Bangladeshi citizens overseas and foreign nationals within the country—extending its mandate into cross-border financial crime and illicit enrichment. The law also introduces special courts in every district where the ACC operates and clarifies key legal definitions such as "known income." Officials said the mechanisms for international enforcement would be developed in subsequent regulations.

The amendment further reconfigures the commission's structure and appointment process, reducing commissioners' terms from five to four years and mandating that at least one of the three members be a woman. A seven-member selection panel—chaired by the most senior judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division—will oversee appointments through a process involving public notices, asset declarations, and interviews. The panel will include a female judge nominated by the chief justice, the comptroller and auditor general, the chairperson of the Public or Judicial Service Commission, one lawmaker each from the ruling and opposition parties, and an anti-corruption expert nominated by the president.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the reform aims to make the ACC "more transparent, accountable, and efficient," reflecting the interim government's broader anti-corruption mandate under the July National Charter.

However, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman, who chaired the 2024 ACC Reform Commission, welcomed the repeal but criticized the government for excluding several key recommendations. These included the creation of a Selection and Review Committee to enhance appointment transparency, mandatory disclosure of shortlisted candidates, biannual performance evaluations, and expanding the commission from three to five members. He described the omissions as "frustrating" and reflective of the same unilateralism that had characterized past governments. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Interim government accelerates media reforms before cabinet closure

(lm) Bangladesh's interim administration has announced an accelerated push to finalize key media-sector reforms before the expected closure of the cabinet at the end of November. Information Adviser Mahfuj Alam said the government aims to implement 13 of the 23 "urgent and feasible" recommendations from the Media Reform Commission, including a long-awaited minimum wage for journalists, new regulations for private television and OTT platforms, and ordinances to safeguard journalists' rights.

Alam confirmed that the minimum wage announcement is expected next week and that the rate of government-funded advertisements will be doubled—on the condition that media outlets comply with the new salary floor. He said artificially low journalist pay, currently averaging BDT 12,000–15,000 (USD 98–123), fosters "a moral crisis" in the profession. The government will also begin publishing verified newspaper circulation data to curb falsification and link future state advertising support to transparency and labor compliance. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Islamist party leader issues rare unconditional apology for actions since 1947

(lm) Shafiqur Rahman, head of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, has issued an unconditional public apology for all suffering caused by the party "on whomever, wherever, since 1947 till date," marking a rare acknowledgment of historical wrongdoing by Bangladesh's largest Islamist political organization.

Speaking at an event in New York on October 22, Rahman stated: “For all the suffering caused by us… we apologise unconditionally.” He emphasized that the apology extends beyond the party’s role in the 1971 Liberation War, encompassing all of Jamaat’s political actions and decisions since its founding in pre-partition India.

Jamaat-e-Islami, founded in 1941 as a South Asian Islamist movement advocating governance guided by Islamic principles, has long faced criticism in Bangladesh for its alleged collaboration with Pakistani forces during the 1971 war. The party was barred from contesting elections after a 2013 High Court ruling revoked its registration for contravening the country’s secular constitution. However, in June 2025, the Supreme Court overturned that decision, ordering the Election Commission to restore the party’s registration, thereby allowing Jamaat to participate again in national elections.

Rahman noted that previous Jamaat leaders, including Ghulam Azam, the party’s long-time chief who was convicted of war crimes in 2013, and Maulana Motiur Rahman Nizami, executed in 2016 for crimes committed during the war, had also offered apologies. “This time, I am doing so again—unconditionally, without any qualification,” Rahman said, adding that such apologies acknowledge that “mistakes have been made, knowingly or unknowingly.” [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Main opposition leader expected to return as party enforces strict discipline ahead of election

(lm) The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — the country’s main opposition force and historical rival to the Awami League — is consolidating its internal structure and finalizing candidate lists ahead of the February 2026 general election, amid renewed speculation over the return of its acting chairman Tarique Rahman.

Speaking via video link from London, Rahman directed BNP members to unite behind officially endorsed candidates, warning that disciplinary measures would be taken against anyone defying the party’s nomination decisions. Addressing nomination seekers from the Chattogram and Rangpur divisions, he stressed that “party discipline must prevail” and that internal unity was essential to secure electoral success under the BNP’s single-candidate-per-constituency strategy. The BNP leadership has instructed selected candidates to show restraint in celebrations and to

seek the cooperation of those not chosen, emphasizing organizational cohesion. [The Daily Star]

Rahman, the eldest son of BNP founder and former President Ziaur Rahman and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, has led the party from exile in the United Kingdom since 2008. His legal position has changed significantly since a series of High Court and Supreme Court rulings between late 2024 and mid-2025 overturned all prior convictions, including corruption, money laundering, and the 2004 grenade attack case. With no active criminal charges remaining, party officials now say Rahman could return to Bangladesh by November, marking his first appearance in the country in 17 years.

Speaking to reporters in Dhaka, senior BNP leaders said the party is preparing to approve candidates in 200 constituencies within the month. They confirmed that Rahman intends to contest the election, with his choice of constituency to be decided later, and added that discussions with the National Citizen Party (NCP) — a youth-led party that emerged from the 2024 uprising — are ongoing, though no formal alliance has yet been announced. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Student-led movements navigate leadership reshuffles and rebranding

(lm) Bangladesh's student-based political movements that emerged from the 2024 uprising that ousted the government of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina continue to redefine their leadership and identity amid growing speculation over internal realignments.

The National Citizen Party (NCP) — formed earlier this year out of the student and civic movements that drove the 2024 mass uprising — has denied reports that its chief coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary resigned from his post. In a statement issued on October 24, the party called the claims "baseless and inaccurate," confirming that Patwary remains in charge of internal operations and the registration process with the Election Commission.

The clarification followed media reports suggesting Patwary had stepped down amid discussions to appoint Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain, a former coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and current adviser to the interim government, as the new Director of Election and Organizational Affairs — a position currently held by Patwary. [Dhaka Tribune]

Meanwhile, another prominent youth network, the Jatiyo Chhatra Shokti, announced its rebranding on October 23, marking what its leadership described as a revival of "anti-establishment" student politics. Formerly operating as the Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad (BGCS), the group is led by Abu Baker Mojumdar, a Dhaka University organizer who coordinated youth mobilization during the 2024 protests. Mojumdar said the restructuring seeks to rebuild grassroots capacity and restore resistance politics free from government influence. Tracing its origins to the Students Against Discrimination movement, which catalyzed the fall of the Awami League government, Chhatra Shokti has reorganized its nationwide network, reducing its administrative zones and pledging to expand district-level outreach. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Communist Party calls for neutral interim government, warns against foreign control of strategic terminals

(lm) The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) has demanded the immediate restructuring of the interim administration to make it fully non-partisan, saying only a politically neutral caretaker setup can guarantee a free and fair national election in February 2026. In a statement following its central committee meeting in Dhaka, the CPB said that anyone in the government with party affiliations—including members of newly formed political groups—should resign to restore public trust.

The party also argued that the interim government has no constitutional mandate to hold a referendum or issue constitutional orders on unresolved political matters, and reaffirmed that the country's four core principles—nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism—are non-negotiable.

The CPB further raised concern over the reported leasing of three container terminals—two in Chattogram, Bangladesh's main seaport on the Bay of Bengal, and one in Keraniganj, near Dhaka—to foreign entities, warning that such actions could jeopardize national control over critical infrastructure. [The Daily Star]

Founded in 1948, the CPB is one of Bangladesh's oldest leftist parties but now holds no seats in parliament. It last had representation in the 1991 and 1996 general elections and remains active mainly through labor

unions and student organizations rather than electoral politics.

Bangladesh: High Court seeks explanation over denial of bail for former chief justice facing multiple criminal cases

(lm) The High Court of Bangladesh has asked the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and other authorities to explain within two weeks why former Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque should not be granted bail in five separate cases, including one connected to a killing during the 2024 student-led uprising. The rule was issued on October 26, following bail petitions from Haque's lawyers, who cited his health condition after a cardiac arrest in detention.

Haque, who served as chief justice from September 2010 to May 2011, was arrested on July 24, nearly a year after the July 2024 uprising that led to the fall of the Awami League government. He has since been shown arrested in multiple cases, including a murder case over the death of a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) youth activist during the protests, two cases in Narayanganj alleging unlawful verdicts and fabrication of judicial documents, and a case filed by the ACC over alleged illegal land acquisition. [The Daily Star] [Dhaka Tribune]

Haque is known for presiding over the 2011 Supreme Court verdict that abolished the caretaker government system, which had previously been used to oversee elections in Bangladesh. The ruling significantly changed the country's electoral framework and has remained a central reference point in political debates since its issuance.

Bangladesh: Petition seeks termination of India's transit and transshipment privileges

(lm) A writ petition has been filed with the Bangladesh High Court requesting the cancellation of transit and transshipment privileges granted to India, as well as the disclosure of all related agreements. The petition argues that the arrangements are detrimental to Bangladesh's national interests and should be revoked. It follows an earlier legal notice issued in April 2025, which demanded government action to terminate the agreements if they were found to be discriminatory.

According to the petitioner, India has already withdrawn the transshipment facilities it had previously extended to Bangladesh, reinforcing calls within Dhaka for reciprocal cancellation. The case is expected to be heard soon by a dual bench of the High Court. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Chief Adviser rebukes senior officials for repeated violations of foreign travel restrictions

(lm) Bangladesh's interim administration under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has again ordered senior officials to comply with foreign travel restrictions. The October 21 circular, the third of its kind since late 2024, reflects the government's frustration that advisers and secretaries continue to undertake foreign trips without authorization or justification — sometimes traveling abroad simultaneously from the same ministry. The Chief Adviser's Office said the violations contradict existing directives and undermine the government's credibility as it seeks to enforce cost control and institutional accountability. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Law adviser calls for institutional reform to end enforced disappearances

(lm) Bangladesh's Law Adviser Asif Nazrul has called for comprehensive institutional and legal reforms to end the practice of enforced disappearances, describing it as "worse than murder" and rooted in systemic failures rather than isolated abuses. Speaking at a workshop on October 27 in Dhaka, Nazrul emphasized that the "impartial and courageous role of the judiciary" is key to dismantling what he termed the "culture of enforced disappearance."

The workshop brought together around 90 participants, including judges and trainee magistrates, to discuss prevention strategies and the strengthening of institutional oversight. The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances was established by the interim government earlier this year to investigate past cases and propose systemic reforms. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Interim government advances major labor law reform to

expand union rights and align with ILO standards

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has approved in principle a draft Labour (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, signaling a significant policy shift toward greater labor rights compliance and international standards alignment. The reform follows Dhaka's recent ratification of three key International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including Convention 121 on employment injury benefits and Convention 189 on domestic workers' rights, and is widely seen as part of efforts to improve Bangladesh's global reputation in labor governance and supply-chain responsibility.

The draft ordinance would lower the threshold for forming trade unions, allowing groups as small as 20 workers in enterprises of up to 300 employees to apply for registration — a substantial relaxation from the previous rule requiring 20 percent workforce support. The move could expand union presence in the country's export-oriented manufacturing sector, particularly the ready-made garment (RMG) industry, where only a small fraction of officially registered unions remain active.

Beyond union formation, the draft introduces broader social protection measures, including recognition of domestic workers as formal workers, prohibition of blacklisting, stronger anti-harassment and maternity welfare provisions, and a new compensation fund for workplace accidents. It also extends basic labor rights to employees of non-profit institutions and mandates gender pay equality. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: IMF welcomes reserve recovery as central bank signals stronger private-sector support

(lm) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has praised Bangladesh for rebuilding its foreign exchange reserves, calling it a key milestone under the ongoing USD 5.5 billion loan program. The Fund said the reserve build-up is central to reducing balance-of-payments risks as the country continues to face external financing pressures.

According to IMF data, reserves stood at USD 27.35 billion as of October 16, up from USD 19.93 billion a year earlier, reflecting higher inflows and central-bank dollar purchases. An IMF mission is expected in Dhaka this month for the fifth program review, which will

assess the sustainability of the reserve accumulation and whether the interventions align with the central bank's declared exchange-rate regime. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Bank signaled readiness to expand support for the private sector through policy and credit reforms. At a recent business forum, the central bank said its SME lending framework had been eased and would be further adjusted based on feedback from enterprises. Officials emphasized that Bangladesh's monetary policy is not yet credit-oriented and that upcoming reforms aim to strengthen this link to drive private-sector growth.

The central bank also underscored the need for timely, accurate economic data to inform policy decisions and identify underlying weaknesses, positioning stronger information and lending mechanisms as part of broader financial-sector modernization. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: Interim government plans merger of six investment agencies to streamline investor services

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has announced plans to merge six key investment bodies within nine months in an effort to simplify approvals, reduce bureaucratic overlap, and attract greater foreign direct investment.

The initiative, led by the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) and backed by the Chief Adviser's Office, aims to create a single investor-focused institution by unifying the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority, Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, and the Public-Private Partnership Authority under one structure. A foreign consulting firm, expected to be contracted in early November, will oversee the merger through diagnostic, design, and implementation phases, with a final institutional blueprint expected by February 2026.

Officials describe the move as a response to persistent complaints from investors who face long approval times and multiple redundant procedures. Despite modest recovery to USD 1.71 billion in foreign direct investment in the fiscal year 2024–25, inflows remain below one percent of gross domestic product, making Bangladesh one of the least competitive destinations in Asia.

Observers note that a similar consolidation in 2016, when the Board of Investment and the Privatisation Commission were merged into BIDA, produced limited results, as deeper bureaucratic barriers remained unaddressed. Furthermore, analysts point out that integrating agencies such as the economic zones authority and the hi-tech park authority could be challenging, as these bodies manage land and infrastructure projects that require specialized expertise. The inclusion of the Public-Private Partnership Authority may also complicate coordination due to its distinct focus on project structuring and financial modelling. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Authorities reject reports of foreign control over major port

(lm) The Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) has formally denied reports that the government plans to transfer ownership or operational control of port terminals to foreign entities, following domestic controversy over alleged privatization efforts. The clarification comes amid heightened regional competition among India, China, and Japan for infrastructure influence in Bangladesh's maritime and logistics sectors.

In a statement issued after local demonstrations and media speculation, the CPA stressed that Chattogram Port—the country's main maritime hub on the Bay of Bengal, handling around 90 percent of Bangladesh's external trade—remains entirely under state ownership and control. While private or foreign firms may be contracted for operational management or capacity upgrades, no strategic control, equity participation, or leasehold rights are being offered.

The CPA's response follows reports that the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) and other facilities could be leased to foreign operators under new efficiency schemes. Officials described such claims as "unfounded," asserting that any future partnerships would be limited to technical or logistics cooperation under Bangladeshi regulatory oversight. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Interim home adviser pledges probe into police favoritism, tighter controls on SIM use ahead of polls

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has vowed to investigate alleged bias in police postings and

promotions following concerns that favoritism could undermine neutrality ahead of the national elections. Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the administration remains committed to ensuring a "level playing field" and has directed the inspector general of police to act against officers engaged in posting-related trades or partisan appointments.

Speaking after the 15th meeting of the Law and Order Advisory Council, Jahangir also announced plans to limit the number of mobile SIM cards per individual to curb fraud and criminal activity, reducing the current cap of ten to seven before the election and eventually to two. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Severe funding shortfalls strain police operations

(lm) Bangladesh's police stations are struggling to perform basic investigative and operational functions due to chronic budget shortages that have forced officers to depend on informal funding sources, according to multiple station officials and senior police administrators.

A Police Reform Commission report submitted to the interim government in January recommended increasing operational allowances, establishing an audit and inspection wing, and allocating funds directly to district superintendents to improve transparency and oversight.

Experts cited in the report warned that without adequate state funding, police officers are being forced to rely on unofficial or unlawful channels to carry out essential duties, which in turn undermines accountability and public trust. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Army to relocate temporary patrol base amid protests by hill insurgent group

(lm) The Bangladesh Army will relocate a temporary patrol base in the Bormachhari area of Khagrachhari District, part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in southeastern Bangladesh, following protests organized by the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) — a long-standing hill insurgent and political group. The decision reflects both a tactical recalibration and the enduring volatility of the CHT, where low-intensity

conflict between state forces and armed ethnic factions has periodically resurfaced despite the 1997 peace accord.

The patrol base was established on October 18, around 500 meters west of the Arya Kalyan Bihar Buddhist temple, on land administered by the Forest Department, following a September 28 UPDF-linked attack in Ramsu Bazar that left three civilians dead. The army described the deployment as part of a broader long-term counterinsurgency operation aimed at re-asserting state presence in remote border areas historically used as insurgent corridors.

After the deployment, the army reported that UPDF fighters withdrew to forested terrain around Kalapahar and Fatikchhari — zones known for limited state oversight and proximity to the Indian border. On October 24, roughly 1,000 demonstrators, including women and children, gathered near the site, clashing with troops and alleging that the base had been built on monastic land belonging to Arya Kalyan Bihar. The military rejected the claim, asserting that the outpost was located on state-owned forest land. [The Daily Star]

Bhutan: World Bank report links youth migration to limited job prospects and low wages

(lm) A new World Bank report finds that increasing numbers of young and educated Bhutanese are seeking work abroad due to limited job opportunities and low wages at home. While many migrants say they would return if conditions improved, the report warns that income expectations are far higher than what Bhutan's labor market can provide.

The study shows that most current migrants are in their late twenties and well educated, with more than half holding university degrees. The education and civil service sectors have been the main sources of migration, though private-sector employees now make up a growing share of aspiring migrants. Both groups tend to come from relatively better-off households and are motivated more by opportunity gaps than by poverty.

Aspiring migrants expect salaries roughly three times their current income to stay in Bhutan, while those already abroad would consider returning if they could earn about 70 percent of their overseas pay. These expectations far exceed Bhutan's median monthly income of BTN 29,000 (USD 348). One in five current

migrants expect to earn over BTN 100,000 (USD 1,200) per month, a level reached by only the top one percent of workers.

The report highlights that remittances—especially from Australia—have surged sharply, peaking at USD 19.77 million in December 2023 before settling at USD 12.05 million by October 2024. Around 11.3 percent of Bhutanese households now receive remittances, which have significantly reduced poverty, particularly in rural areas. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Civil service merges planning and economic development offices to drive local growth

(lm) Bhutan's Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) has merged the Planning Unit and Economic Development Sector in all districts (dzongkhags) into a unified Planning and Economic Development Sector (PEDS) to strengthen coordination and accelerate locally driven economic growth. The reform aims to streamline decision-making, align local plans with national economic priorities, and enhance implementation efficiency under the forthcoming 13th Five-Year Plan. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Gender gap in political representation widens despite stable civil service parity

(lm) Bhutan is facing growing concern over declining female participation in politics and local government, even as women maintain near-equal representation in the civil service. According to the Royal Civil Service Commission's 2024–25 Annual Report, women make up about 41 percent of the country's 30,025 civil servants, yet their presence in leadership and elected positions remains disproportionately low.

Only nine women currently serve as gups, two sit in the National Assembly, and one in the National Council. Analysts attribute this underrepresentation to persistent social barriers, including fear of losing elections, lack of spousal and financial support, and cultural stereotypes that discourage women from contesting public office. Many women also face practical obstacles, such as the need to resign from stable jobs before running for office and the absence of campaign funding or facilities like crèches in Parliament. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Rising fuel imports narrow energy trade surplus despite growth in hydropower exports

(lm) Bhutan's narrowing energy trade surplus in 2024 underscores an emerging structural vulnerability for one of South Asia's most hydropower-dependent economies. Fuel import costs surged to BTN 15.18 billion (USD 182 million), rising more than 35 percent year-on-year, while electricity exports increased by only 12 percent to BTN 19.96 billion (USD 240 million). The result is a diminishing net advantage in the country's energy balance, according to the government's latest Environmental Accounts Statistics.

Although hydropower remains Bhutan's largest export and a key driver of GDP—accounting for nearly 12 percent of economic output—domestic electricity demand and fossil fuel consumption have expanded faster than export earnings. Industrial users consumed more than 90 percent of domestic power, while fuel imports reached 264 million liters, led by rising vehicle demand for diesel and gasoline.

Fuel re-exports to Indian vehicles transiting Bhutan's border towns such as Phuentsholing and Gelephu increased by over 26 percent, partially offsetting import costs but underscoring the country's role as an energy corridor rather than an energy hub. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Central bank disburses USD 588,000 in concessional education loans

The Bank of Bhutan (BoB) has disbursed around BTN 49 million (USD 588,000) in education loans under the Economic Stimulus Programme (ESP), a government initiative designed to boost post-COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery through targeted financial support for individuals and businesses.

The ESP education loan covers degree and diploma programs in Bhutan and India but excludes vocational courses outside India, aiming to make higher education more accessible to students who might otherwise be unable to afford it. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Government unveils USD 450 million data center plan to anchor digital economy by 2034

(lm) Bhutan has announced plans to establish a USD 450 million hyperscale data center as part of its long-term strategy to transform the country into a digital economy hub by 2034. The initiative, outlined in the Bhutan Industrial Development Roadmap 2025 and the Bhutan Digital Strategy 2024, positions data centers as a cornerstone of economic diversification, foreign investment, and high-skilled job creation.

The project envisions a 50–100 megawatt facility developed through foreign direct investment (FDI), with potential sites including Trashiyangtse, Bumthang, Trongsa, Lhuntse, Mongar, Haa, and Zhemgang—areas with access to stable hydropower and fiber networks. Once operational, the sector is expected to contribute up to 4 percent of GDP and create over 3,000 skilled jobs.

Bhutan's government projects that the digital economy will contribute USD 300 million (5 percent of GDP) by 2029 and USD 600 million (6 percent of GDP) by 2034. Data infrastructure is viewed as a critical enabler for fintech, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and e-commerce development, complementing the planned Gelephu Mindfulness City, envisioned as a regional business hub.

However, several constraints threaten the plan's viability. Bhutan lacks a submarine internet cable or backup network, faces high bandwidth costs—currently around USD 7 per Mbps, compared to regional averages below USD 5—and must manage growing pressure on its hydropower capacity as domestic electricity consumption rises. The government aims to reduce connectivity costs through a third international gateway via India and Bangladesh and to adopt a National Data Center Strategy with open licensing and stronger data protection laws to attract investors. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Police urge stronger community role in tackling drugs, digital crime, and cross-border threats

(lm) The Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) has called for greater public involvement in addressing rising crime, drug abuse, and emerging cyber threats, emphasizing that community cooperation is vital for sustaining national safety.

During outreach programs in Phuentsholing, a key border town with India, the RBP reported a decline in overall crime in Chukha District, with cases dropping from 342 in 2023 to 243 in 2024, and drug-related

offences down from 527 to 405. Senior police officials said that limited manpower and growing digital risks make citizen engagement crucial to effective law enforcement.

Authorities expressed growing concern over the impact of unregulated online content on Bhutanese youth, linking exposure to harmful material—including deepfakes and explicit content—to cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and mental health risks. Parents were urged to play a stronger role in supervision and guidance.

The RBP also warned against cross-border crimes such as drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and counterfeit currency circulation, and encouraged businesses in border areas to install CCTV surveillance to deter theft and smuggling. [Kuensel]

India: Nationwide voter roll revision sparks political tensions as West Bengal reshuffle deepens controversy

(lm) India's Election Commission formally launched on October 27 the second phase of its Special Intensive Revision (SIR), a nationwide exercise to comprehensively verify, update, and revalidate voter rolls ahead of the 2026 election cycle. Covering more than 510 million voters across twelve states and union territories, the revision will run from November 4 to December 4, with draft lists to be published on December 9 and final rolls released on February 7, 2026.

As the SIR unfolds across key states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, Puducherry, and West Bengal—all scheduled for elections in 2026—it is poised to become a focal point in India's wider debate over electoral transparency, federal autonomy, and the balance between inclusion and integrity in democratic governance.

The nationwide rollout follows the pilot phase in Bihar, conducted from June to September 2025, which marked India's first large-scale voter roll overhaul in over two decades. That exercise removed about 6.5 million ineligible or duplicate entries and added nearly 2 million new voters, producing a final roll of roughly 74 million electors. While the Election Commission described it as a model of electoral cleansing and integrity, opposition parties and civil society groups criticized its documentation demands, warning that migrant and low-income voters risked exclusion—

concerns that directly shaped the recalibrated, inclusion-oriented national phase.

Against this backdrop, the SIR's expansion has reignited political debate. Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi welcomed the revision as crucial to preserving "sanctity in politics," whereas Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin denounced it as an exercise that could benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its regional allies in upcoming polls. In contrast, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah urged the Commission to delay nationwide implementation until after Bihar's election, citing administrative strain. The Election Commission, however, insists that the SIR is a constitutional responsibility designed to strengthen electoral accuracy and public confidence. [MoneyControl] [Business Standard] [The Indian Express]

Tensions escalated further in West Bengal, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's government executed one of its largest single-day administrative reshuffles on October 24, transferring 527 senior and mid-level officials just days before the SIR's launch. The move affected 61 Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers and 460 West Bengal Civil Service (WBCS) officials responsible for district-level electoral administration. The BJP, which governs nationally under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accused Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) of attempting to influence the SIR process by relocating key officials, while the TMC dismissed the allegation as a routine bureaucratic rotation. [The Times of India]

India: Supreme Court delays bail hearing for activists charged under anti-terror law in 2020 Delhi riots case

(lm) The Supreme Court of India on October 27 postponed the hearing of bail pleas filed by activists Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Gulfisha Fatima, and Meeran Haider, who are facing charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for alleged involvement in the February 2020 Delhi riots. The bench granted the Delhi Police until October 31 to file its reply, after rejecting the government's request for a two-week extension.

The case concerns what prosecutors describe as a "conspiracy" behind the riots, which erupted amid nationwide protests against India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The unrest left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured. The accused have been in

custody since 2020 and deny the allegations, arguing that they were exercising their constitutional right to peaceful protest.

The petitioners are challenging the Delhi High Court's September 2, 2025 order, which denied bail to nine defendants, ruling that "conspiratorial" violence disguised as protest could not be tolerated. The High Court acknowledged that freedom of speech and peaceful assembly are protected under Article 19(1)(a) of India's Constitution but emphasized that these rights are subject to reasonable legal restrictions to preserve public order. [The Times of India]

India: Growth forecast raised to 6.7 percent as fiscal stimulus and easing inflation offset external headwinds

(lm) India's economy is now expected to grow by 6.7 percent in the 2025–26 fiscal year, according to a Reuters poll, reflecting sustained domestic demand and fiscal measures that have offset the drag from external pressures, including high U.S. tariffs on Indian exports. The revision—up from 6.6 percent last month—follows stronger-than-expected 7.8 percent growth in the April–June quarter and the government's recent Goods and Services Tax (GST) cut, which has boosted consumer spending ahead of the festive season.

Economists surveyed cited a combination of macroeconomic stability, monetary-policy flexibility, and rural sector resilience as supporting factors. A majority expect the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to lower its policy rate by 25 basis points in December, as inflation continues to ease, averaging 2.5 percent this fiscal year. The central bank is projected to maintain a broadly accommodative stance into 2026 to sustain growth momentum while guarding against external shocks.

The Indian government's September economic report similarly emphasized steady consumption and soft inflation, noting that food production remains robust despite weather-related losses. Officials also highlighted early signs of export diversification, with negotiations continuing to resolve the 50 percent punitive tariffs imposed by the United States on Indian goods. New Delhi has framed its position as one of strategic autonomy, stating it will not accept trade restrictions that limit its policy flexibility.

Analysts view the upgraded outlook as signaling renewed investor confidence in India's fundamentals, though they caution that private investment and

capital expenditure remain subdued amid global uncertainty and shifting U.S. trade policy. GDP growth is expected to stabilize at around 6.5 percent in the next two fiscal years, maintaining India's status as the fastest-growing major economy despite a more fragmented global trade environment. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

India: Government considers raising foreign investment cap in state-run banks to 49 percent amid capital, reform push

(ms) India is considering raising the foreign direct investment (FDI) cap in state-run banks from 20 percent to 49 percent, in a step toward capital market liberalization, according to a person involved in the policy discussions to Reuters. The proposal, now under review by the Finance Ministry and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), aims to attract greater foreign capital.

If approved, the change would align regulations for public-sector banks more closely with private lenders, where foreign ownership is already permitted up to 74 percent. The move follows a surge of foreign interest in India's financial sector — including major acquisitions by Dubai's Emirates NBD and Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp — amid strong economic growth and rising credit demand.

India's 12 state-run banks hold more than half of the nation's banking assets but often face capital constraints and weaker profitability compared to private peers. The government hopes the proposed policy will bolster their balance sheets and improve competitiveness while preserving safeguards, including a 10 percent cap on individual voting rights. [Reuters]

India: New USD 626 million electronics projects signal deeper push for tech self-reliance

(ms) India has approved seven projects worth USD 626 million to expand domestic production of electronic components, part of its Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to strengthen high-tech manufacturing and reduce import dependence.

The projects, cleared on October 27, involve Kaynes Circuits, SRF, Syrma Strategic Electronics, and Ascent Circuits, and will produce high-value components such as circuit boards and camera modules. Located in

Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, they are expected to create over 5,000 jobs and generate USD 4.1 billion in output.

Officials said the initiative supports India's Semiconductor Mission and global firms diversifying supply chains away from China. Electronics output is projected to rise from USD 17.5 billion in 2022 to USD 72 billion by 2027, cementing India's role as a regional manufacturing hub. [Reuters]

India: government approves USD 9 billion defense procurement package to modernize armed forces

(lm) India's Defense Acquisition Council has approved procurement proposals worth INR 790 billion (USD 9 billion) for its armed forces. The package covers the purchase of new missile systems, high-mobility vehicles, naval surface guns, and other military equipment aimed at strengthening operational capacity across services. The announcement follows a council meeting on October 23, where the decisions were formally cleared. [Reuters]

For the Indian Army, the package includes the Nag Missile System (Tracked) Mk-II, Ground-Based Mobile ELINT System, and High Mobility Vehicles equipped with material-handling cranes—enhancing anti-armor precision, battlefield intelligence, and logistics in challenging terrains.

The Indian Navy will procure Landing Platform Docks (LPDs), 30 mm Naval Surface Guns, Advanced Light Weight Torpedoes, Electro-Optical Infra-Red Search and Track Systems, and Smart Ammunition for 76 mm rapid-fire guns. These assets will strengthen amphibious, maritime-security, and disaster-relief capabilities, allowing coordinated operations with other branches of the armed forces.

For the Indian Air Force, the council granted an Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the Collaborative Long-Range Target Saturation and Destruction System (CLRTS/DS), an autonomous aerial platform capable of target detection, navigation, and precision payload delivery.

The defence ministry stated that the new procurements will expand indigenous production capacity and reinforce India's strategic deterrence posture. Defence Minister Singh also reported that domestic defense manufacturing has reached INR 1.5 trillion (USD 18 billion) in 2025, with private-sector

investment contributing INR 33 billion (USD 415 million)—reflecting accelerating progress toward a more self-sufficient and technologically advanced military. [mint]

Maldives: Addu City referendum leads to partial split as two wards vote for independent councils

(ya/lm) The southern Maldivian city of Addu held a historic referendum on October 25 to decide whether three of its wards — Hulhudhoo, Meedhoo, and Feydhoo — should form independent local councils. The vote, authorized by presidential decree and conducted under the new Public Referendum Act, marks the first referendum held under the law and the first local governance vote of its kind in the country's history. [The Sun 1]

Preliminary results showed that Hulhudhoo and Meedhoo voted decisively to separate, while Feydhoo opted to remain under the unified Addu City Council established in 2011. Meedhoo supported the split with 85.47 percent of votes, Hulhudhoo with 68.73 percent, and Feydhoo voted 74.33 percent to remain. Voter turnout reached 47 percent of the 9,576 eligible voters across the three wards, Malé, and seven overseas polling stations. [Maldives Independent]

The results set the stage for administrative restructuring, as separate councils will now be established in Hulhudhoo and Meedhoo. Despite the split, Addu will retain its city status, as Hithadhoo's population alone exceeds the 10,000-resident threshold required by law.

President Mohamed Muizzu, who first announced the referendum in September as part of a campaign pledge, said ahead of the vote that the government would "fully respect and implement the decision of the people." He stated that any new councils formed would be granted full administrative authority, financial independence, and separate budgets—estimated at MVR 25 million (USD 1.6 million) for Feydhoo, MVR 14 million (USD 910,000) for Hulhudhoo, and MVR 18 million (USD 1.17 million) for Meedhoo. [The Sun 2]

The referendum, however, drew criticism and legal scrutiny. Former Chief Justice Ahmed Abdulla Didi argued that Article 115(p) of the Constitution allows referendums only on matters of national importance, not local administrative changes, and that the presidential decree bypassed legislative review. The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)

and several civil society groups also described the process as rushed and said that restricting the vote to three wards excluded other residents of Addu who could be affected by the decision. [The Sun 3]

Addu City Mayor Ali Nizar, a member of the MDP, warned that smaller councils could face fiscal strain, noting that Addu's unified structure had increased local revenue from MVR 8 million (USD 520,000) to MVR 40 million (USD 2.6 million) over the past four years. He said separation would increase dependency on central government block grants. [The Sun 4]

In contrast, residents of Hulhudhoo and Meedhoo, which are geographically detached from the city's main island cluster, cited bureaucratic delays, limited representation, and a lack of local control under the 13-member council dominated by the populous island of Hithadhoo as reasons for their decision. [Maldives Independent]

Maldives: Mounting liquidity pressures reshape government priorities and expose fiscal fault lines

(lm/ya) The Maldives government is facing growing liquidity and fiscal stress that is reshaping both its budget priorities and institutional balance. Underspending on flagship housing projects, rising arrears to state enterprises, and a controversial bond deal involving pension assets have converged to reveal deeper structural pressures behind President Mohamed Muizzu's 2026 budget strategy.

During a visit to Lhaviyani and Kaafu atolls on October 27, Muizzu announced that next year's budget will pivot toward preventive healthcare and the completion of unfulfilled infrastructure pledges, marking a shift away from the large housing programs that dominated the 2025 budget. The move reflects tightening liquidity across the public sector, where implementation delays under the Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP)—the government's main development financing framework—have left only MVR 4 billion (USD 260 million) spent this year, down MVR 5.6 billion (USD 364 million) from 2024. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Housing, once presented as the government's cornerstone policy, illustrates the scale of the problem. Of the MVR 3 billion (USD 195 million) allocated for 2025, including MVR 1.8 billion (USD 117 million) under the PSIP, only MVR 164 million (USD 10.7 million), or about nine percent, has been utilized. At the same time, an audit presented to Parliament revealed that

the state owes MVR 9.4 billion (USD 611 million) to the Housing Development Corporation (HDC)—the state-owned enterprise managing major urban and housing projects, including in Hulhumalé. The arrears include delayed project payments of MVR 4.3 billion (USD 280 million), land allocations under the Binveriyaa housing scheme worth MVR 1.6 billion (USD 104 million), and MVR 3.9 billion (USD 253 million) in rent reductions on social housing units.

These figures point to a government struggling to maintain liquidity amid competing priorities. HDC's own receivables further expose the strain: it is owed nearly MVR 3.7 billion (USD 239 million) from businesses and residents, has filed multiple court cases to recover dues, and has begun reporting monthly to the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA). [The Sun 3] [The Sun 4]

The liquidity crunch has now escalated into an institutional controversy following a MVR 2.5 billion (USD 162 million) bond transaction between the Maldives Pension Administration Office (MPAO) and the MMA. The Finance Ministry has declined to disclose the full extent of arrears to private contractors and state enterprises, citing fragmented recordkeeping—fueling criticism over fiscal opacity. [The Sun 5]

Government officials have described the pension-fund transaction as a liquidity management tool to accelerate arrears payments without conventional borrowing. However, the opposition and financial analysts argue that it amounts to indirect money printing, undermining fiscal discipline and the independence of monetary and pension institutions.

The controversy deepened when Saruvash Adam, the MPAO board member representing the private sector, resigned on October 24, citing legal and fiduciary concerns. Former presidents Abdulla Yameen and Mohamed Nasheed, along with former economic minister Fayyaz Ismail, accused the administration of using pension assets to plug short-term gaps rather than pursuing structural reforms. [The Sun 6] [The Sun 7] [The Sun 8] [The Sun 9]

In response, Muizzu announced that MVR 2.3 billion (USD 149 million) in contractor payments and new project awards would be released within ten days, presenting it as an "economic stimulus" implemented without printing money. Yet, the absence of disclosure on the bond's maturity, repayment terms, and overall fiscal impact has kept questions of sustainability open. [The Sun 10]

Maldives: Ex-President Yameen frames political comeback as reform-driven

(lm) Former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom reignited his political campaign and became embroiled in a new procedural dispute with the judiciary as his rivalry with President Mohamed Muizzu's administration continues to widen.

On October 27, Yameen travelled to Haa Alifu Dhidhdhoo to attend a public event on the same day a Criminal Court hearing in his bribery and money-laundering case had been scheduled. His lawyers said the trip had been planned earlier and that the court was informed in advance after a previous session was cancelled. The court, however, stated that Yameen travelled without formal authorization. A power outage disrupted proceedings, and the hearing was later cancelled.

During his speech in Dhidhdhoo the same day, Yameen said his return to politics was motivated by the need to "change the situation of the Maldives," not by personal gain. He accused state institutions of failing to meet public expectations and pledged to continue speaking out against "the suffering of the people" and the erosion of trust in governance. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Yameen's trip was his first outside Malé since the High Court overturned his 11-year prison sentence earlier this year, citing procedural flaws in his conviction for money laundering and bribery linked to the lease of Aarah island. While that ruling freed him from prison, separate charges remain before the Criminal Court.

Since his release, Yameen has become increasingly outspoken in his criticism of President Muizzu's administration. Over recent weeks, he has claimed that the government is "completely dry" and lacks liquidity to fund development projects, estimating a shortfall of at least MVR 20 billion (around USD 1.3 billion). He has also accused the government of appointing "unsuitable people" to key oversight bodies such as the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Auditor General's Office, saying this has weakened institutional accountability.

In earlier comments, Yameen denounced new foreign-exchange rules requiring large businesses and resorts to convert foreign currency earnings into rufiyaa, calling the measure "unlawful" and damaging to the tourism sector.

Yameen and Muizzu were once political allies under the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM)–People's

National Congress (PNC) coalition, which Yameen led during his 2013–2018 presidency. Their relationship deteriorated after Yameen's release from prison, with the former president accusing Muizzu of sidelining his loyalists and departing from the coalition's original direction. Yameen has since founded the People's National Front (PNF) and announced plans to contest the 2028 presidential election.

Maldives: Lawmaker linked to illegal cigarette imports amid tobacco smuggling surge and enforcement failures

(lm) The Maldives is facing a growing wave of tobacco-related crime and enforcement gaps as authorities prepare to implement a nationwide generational smoking ban on November 1. The ban, ratified in May 2025, prohibits the sale and consumption of tobacco products by Maldivian citizens born on or after January 1, 2007, including through online or vending-machine sales. It follows the December 2024 prohibition of vaping devices and e-cigarettes and forms part of President Mohamed Muizzu's broader strategy to reduce smoking through public awareness and preventive health measures rather than punitive enforcement.

The unfolding investigations have placed renewed scrutiny on Customs and parliamentary oversight mechanisms, exposing governance weaknesses that threaten to undercut one of the region's most ambitious anti-tobacco reforms.

Amid this context, it has emerged that Hithaadhoo MP Mohamed Siruhaan previously held shares in a company accused of illegally importing cigarettes in late 2023. A court had ordered the suspension of the shipment, yet the products were later removed from bonded storage and exported without clearance. Officials later found the warehouse deactivated, with roughly 575 cases missing and unpaid import duties amounting to MVR 47 million (USD 3 million). The case was referred to the Attorney General's Office in February 2025. [The Sun 1]

Deputy Speaker Ahmed Nazim, citing findings from the Security Services Committee, warned that cigarette and vape smuggling has surged alongside declining import-duty revenue. He said illicit cigarette volumes now exceed legal imports, accusing Customs of systemic failure to curb smuggling. The committee recommended stricter enforcement protocols, mandatory asset declarations for Customs officials and

their families, and corrective measures with fixed deadlines. [The Sun 2]

The growing scale of illicit trade has also been highlighted by the ongoing investigation into the theft of 13.6 million smuggled cigarettes from the Hulhumalé seaport earlier this year. Police have detained five suspects, including two major business figures and senior officials linked to Customs and a state enterprise. Parts of the stolen containers were recovered from Thilafushi on October 19, and travel bans have been imposed on 12 individuals. [The Sun 3] [The Sun 4]

President Muizzu has said that the upcoming smoking ban will focus on preventive health, public awareness, and improved institutional coordination between the Health Protection Agency, Customs, and police. A substantial portion of the 2026 state budget has been earmarked for education and enforcement programs aimed at reducing tobacco consumption and dismantling the parallel black market for cigarettes. [The Sun 5]

Maldives: Police investigation into major Customs corruption case still ongoing after nearly two years

(ya) The Maldives Police Service continues to investigate a large-scale corruption case involving around MVR 400 million (USD 26 million) in suspicious transactions linked to 23 officers of the Maldives Customs Service, according to a report by the Parliament's Security Services Committee released on October 27. The inquiry, one of the country's largest corruption probes in recent years, has faced repeated delays despite early suspensions of implicated officers.

The case dates back four years, with the police first notifying Customs in December 2023 that 21 officers were under investigation for unexplained bank transfers. That number rose to 23 in August 2024 following additional findings. Customs has suspended all those named and initiated internal disciplinary reviews for violations of the agency's code of conduct and ethics, but the committee report notes that these internal proceedings have also been slow to conclude.

Police attributed the prolonged timeline to the scale of the investigation, citing the high number of suspects, large volume of financial records, and the need for forensic review of seized electronic devices. Statements from all relevant individuals have yet to be

completed, and investigators have declined to provide a projected end date.

The report also references a parallel corruption probe into the Maldives Correctional Service, where 18 prison guards were accused of accepting MVR 70 million (USD 4.5 million) in bribes to smuggle drugs and contraband into Maafushi Prison—though only five suspects were ultimately charged. [The Sun]

Maldives: Transport minister says lawmakers pressured him to approve illegal vehicle registrations

(lm) Transport Minister Mohamed Ameen told Parliament on October 27 that he had repeatedly received personal requests from members of Parliament to have their vehicles registered illegally. Summoned for questioning over irregular vehicle registration practices, Ameen stated that such actions are no longer possible under current procedures, emphasizing that the administration has tightened regulations and closed loopholes allowing unlawful registrations. [The Sun]

Maldives: Heated exchange in parliament over stalled Islamic Centre project

(lm) A parliamentary session on October 22 turned contentious after Islamic Minister Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed clashed with lawmakers from the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) during questioning over a stalled Islamic Centre project in Hithadhoo, Addu City.

When MDP parliamentary group leader Ibrahim Nazil claimed that the project, initiated under the previous administration, had been suspended due to non-payment, Minister Shaheem dismissed the statement as “categorically false.” He asserted that all contractor payments had been settled and attributed the delay to awarding the project to a firm “that lacks capacity.”

Shaheem further stated that the current administration had cleared MVR 170 million (USD 11 million) in outstanding dues left by the former government and that the Islamic Ministry had been MVR 50 million (USD 3.3 million) in debt when he took office. His remarks prompted loud protests from opposition benches, leading Deputy Speaker Ahmed

Nazim to repeatedly call for order as exchanges escalated.

The disruption ended with one lawmaker being named and removed from the chamber, after members from both the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) and MDP continued to shout over each other. [The Sun]

Maldives: Criminal Court judge suspended amid Judicial Service Commission inquiry

(lm) The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) has suspended Criminal Court Judge Hussain Faiz Rashad for 60 days in connection with an ongoing inquiry, though the reason for the suspension has not been disclosed.

Judge Faiz was previously suspended in November 2021 after leaked audio recordings allegedly captured him discussing the 2019 money laundering trial of former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. That suspension was lifted a month later when the JSC determined that the voice in the recordings did not match his.

Faiz, formerly president of the Employment Tribunal, was transferred from the Civil Court to the Criminal Court in February 2019. [The Sun]

Maldives: Parliament appoints new Judicial Service Commission chair amid leadership shake-up

(ya) The Maldives' Parliament has appointed Husnee Mubarik, chair of the Judiciary Committee, as its new representative to the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), with 58 votes in favor. Mubarik replaces Hussain Riza Adam, who resigned abruptly from both the chairmanship and his seat on the Commission without public explanation.

Riza's departure followed growing criticism over the JSC's recent decisions, including the suspension of three Supreme Court justices and the promotion of a junior candidate to the High Court over senior judges—moves widely questioned for alleged political interference and erosion of procedural safeguards. His resignation also came shortly after the removal of the Commission's vice president, intensifying perceptions of internal instability. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

In a parallel development, Yazmeedh Mohamed, the president's representative on the JSC, has been elected vice president, succeeding High Court judge Mohamed Niyaz, who stepped down earlier last week. Yazmeedh, appointed to the Commission in February 2025, previously contested the 2024 parliamentary election under the ruling People's National Congress (PNC), further consolidating the administration's influence within the judiciary's oversight body. [The Sun 4]

Maldives: Parliament appoints head of new unified media regulator

(ya) The Maldives' Parliament, where the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) holds a supermajority, has appointed Mohamed Farushath, former secretary-general of the Maldives Media Council (MMC), as president of the newly established Maldives Media and Broadcasting Commission (MMBC). The appointment, passed by a 49–9 vote, marks a key step in implementing the new media law that dissolved the Maldives Broadcasting Commission (BroadCom) and the Maldives Media Council, consolidating oversight under a single body.

The seven-member MMBC is composed of three parliamentary appointees—Farushath, Safa Shafeeq (former BroadCom president), and Aminath Sarahath Izzath (former BroadCom member)—and four members elected by registered media outlets: Hussain Sageef (former MMC president), Zamath Ahmed Waheed (former BroadCom member), Simaha Naseem (journalist at *Vaguthu*), and Abdul Azeez Ibrahim. All members were selected through an interview process requiring a minimum qualifying score. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Under the new law, Parliament has the authority to appoint the commission's chairperson and to dismiss any member, including those elected by the media. Journalists have protested the legislation, calling it a threat to press freedom, while the government of President Mohamed Muizzu has said the law is intended to protect the public from defamation, disinformation, and misinformation and to promote accountability in the media sector.

Maldives: President Muizzu appoints new leadership to National Integrity Commission

(ya) President Mohamed Muizzu appointed four new members to the National Integrity Commission (NIC) on October 26, following the expiry of the previous commissioners' terms. The new members are Shuaib Abdul Rahman, Shifaz Ali, Ali Mohamed Manik, and Fathimath Shareef.

On October 27, the President's Office confirmed Shuaib Abdul Rahman as the new president of the NIC, succeeding Gasim Abdul Kareem, whose term ended the previous day. The terms of three other members — Vice President Ashiyath Shiuna, Shuaib himself, and Aiminath Shadia — also expired simultaneously. The commission continues to include Maryam Insha Faisal, who was appointed in December 2024.

The NIC, established under the National Integrity Commission Act, functions as an independent oversight body tasked with investigating misconduct within law enforcement institutions such as the police and correctional services. It holds the authority to initiate investigations independently. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Parliament debates social protection reforms, splits on health and pension access proposals

(ya) The Parliament of the Maldives has taken contrasting positions on two social welfare proposals introduced by North Galolhu MP Mohamed Ibrahim (Kudoo), both aimed at expanding support for vulnerable groups.

Lawmakers unanimously accepted the MP's resolution calling for consideration of Aasandha health insurance coverage for foreigners married to Maldivian citizens. The motion argued that under the Constitution, such individuals are entitled to equal rights as Maldivians, except for voting and candidacy, yet remain excluded from the national health scheme despite long-term residence and employment. Kudoo emphasized that many spouses face serious chronic illnesses and high medical costs, urging the government to adopt special measures to ensure equitable access to healthcare. [The Sun 1]

In contrast, parliament rejected Kudoo's separate bill to amend the Pension Act, which would have allowed individuals suffering from major illnesses—such as cancer—to receive early pension disbursements before reaching the required age or service thresholds. The proposal included creating a medical certification panel and mandating payment within 30 days of

approval, but was voted down in its preliminary stage, with 52 of 57 lawmakers opposing it. Members of the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) criticized the bill as politically driven and lacking sufficient procedural and fiscal clarity. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Audit reveals USD 92,000 paid for unlawful civil service dismissals

(lm) The Auditor General's Office reported that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) paid MVR 1.42 million (USD 92,000) in 2022 to compensate for wrongful dismissals, unpaid salaries, and allowances across 10 government institutions. The payments were ordered by the Employment Tribunal and the courts after finding violations of the Civil Service Act, related regulations, and the Employment Act in 36 cases of improper termination.

Institutions involved included the Malé City Council, several atoll and island councils, schools, and government departments. The largest single payout—MVR 368,264 (USD 24,000)—was made to a dismissed school principal, while another case involving 15 civil servants led to a collective payment of MVR 345,207 (USD 22,000).

The report found that the CSC lost all 10 appeals it filed against tribunal rulings and even failed to appeal one case due to a missed filing fee. The Auditor General's Office urged the CSC to introduce disciplinary measures for officials responsible for these administrative lapses and to create mechanisms to ensure accountability when courts or tribunals find dismissals unlawful.

According to CSC's 2022 financial statements, the commission operated on a budget of MVR 30.3 million (USD 1.96 million) that year, with nearly the entire amount spent. [The Sun]

Maldives: Parliamentary inquiry exposes governance failures in state utility provider

(lm) A parliamentary inquiry has revealed widespread management and staffing irregularities within the state-owned Fenaka Corporation, the Maldives' main electricity and water utility serving outer islands. The company, which is heavily indebted and has faced corruption allegations across multiple administrations,

is now undergoing internal restructuring while struggling to address chronic power outages in Addu City, the country's second-largest urban area located in the southernmost atoll.

During testimony before the Public Accounts Committee on October 23, Fenaka's Managing Director Mohamed Najah said a comprehensive restructuring is under way and should be completed by the end of 2025. Najah confirmed that several department heads accused of misconduct have been replaced and that company rules permitting recruitment without job postings will be revised. [The Sun 1]

Findings from the Auditor General's Office showed that half of all Fenaka employees hired between 2022 and 2024 were recruited without public announcements, with some not interviewed at all. The workforce grew from 3,500 employees in 2020 to 6,600 in 2023, a 78 percent increase, pushing payroll costs up by nearly 40 percent in 2022 and 2023. Auditors also noted large discrepancies in staffing between islands with similar service demands. [The Sun 2]

Addressing Addu's situation, Najah said the city—home to the largest population outside the capital—has faced power interruptions on 89 days over the past year. He told lawmakers that a new powerhouse project will be awarded to a contractor later this year, financed through a sovereign-guaranteed loan, but a permanent solution will take at least one year. Temporary power generators are being deployed to maintain supply in the meantime. [The Sun 3]

Fenaka's governance crisis has also been shaped by past misconduct cases. Its former managing director Ahmed Saeed Mohamed was sentenced to four years in prison in September for corruption and faces multiple additional charges.

Maldives: Import duty revenue falls sharply below projections

(lm) State data show that revenue from import duties in 2025 reached only MVR 2.4 billion (USD 156 million) as of mid-October, representing just 47 percent of the projected MVR 4.6 billion (USD 299 million) for the year. According to the Finance Ministry, this marks a shortfall of MVR 238 million (USD 15.5 million) compared to 2024, raising concern over fiscal performance with only two months remaining in the fiscal year.

The Economic Ministry has not provided a clear explanation for the decline, though officials emphasized that it is unrelated to the free trade agreement with China. Some lawmakers have instead pointed to higher import duties on cigarettes—now priced at MVR 240 (USD 15.6) per box—as a factor that may have encouraged black-market activity, reducing legal import volumes.

In parallel, state capital expenditure has also slowed: only MVR 4 billion (USD 260 million) has been spent on development projects so far, compared to MVR 5.6 billion (USD 364 million) in the previous year, amounting to just 32 percent of the annual allocation. [The Sun]

Maldives: China-linked firm contracted for Addu City bridge survey and design

(ya) The Ministry of Construction and Infrastructure (Maldives) signed a USD 1.025 million contract with T.Y. Lin International Engineering Consulting Company (China) to conduct survey and design work for the proposed bridge linking Hithadhoo and Hulhumeedhoo in Addu City. The contract covers topographic and bathymetric surveys, detailed design, technical specifications, and tender documentation, with completion targeted within six months.

The contract signing on October 26 involved Construction Minister Abdulla Muthalib and T.Y. Lin President Chen Xiaohu. It follows the termination of a February 2024 agreement with Egypt's The Arab Contractors, which failed to meet survey and financing obligations.

The bridge initiative is part of President Mohamed Muizzu's broader infrastructure development agenda. The ministry announced plans to conduct community consultations before finalizing the design and stated that procurement followed Ministry of Finance regulations. [The Sun]

Maldives: Police service now present on all residential islands, fulfilling presidential pledge

(lm) The Maldives Police Service has been expanded to cover all inhabited islands, fulfilling a campaign pledge by President Mohamed Muizzu to ensure nationwide law enforcement access. The announcement was

made during his visit to Laamu Gan on October 21, where he confirmed that the opening of a new police post in Raa Rasgetheemu marked the completion of full territorial coverage.

According to the president, when his administration took office in November 2023, 66 residential islands lacked any police presence and depended on neighboring islands for assistance—an arrangement he described as inadequate for basic public safety. At that time, only 17 islands had dedicated police stations.

Muizzu stated that the government is now working to establish permanent police facilities on 130 islands by the end of 2025, ensuring that every inhabited community receives services from a dedicated, locally based station rather than shared regional units. [The Sun]

Maldives: Prosecutor General halts new rule allowing destruction of police case files after non-prosecution

(lm/ya) The Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) has ordered the Maldives Police Service to suspend the destruction of case files in investigations where prosecution is not pursued. The directive follows a recent amendment to the Police Record Keeping Regulations, gazetted by the Ministry of Homeland Security and Technology on October 21, which had permitted paper documents from such cases to be destroyed one year after a non-prosecution decision.

The amendment to Article 21 allowed the Head of the Administrative Department in charge of police records to authorize destruction after one year, while Article 23 required all files approved for disposal to be scanned and archived digitally in a format preventing duplication or later recovery. Oversight of this process was assigned to the Professional Standards Command and the Administrative Department.

According to the PGO, the destruction process will remain suspended until new guidelines are issued. Existing rules continue to require that police retain case files for at least eight years in serious criminal cases and three years in lesser offenses. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Authorities report sharp rise in digital fraud

(ya) The Maldives Police Service reported that MVR 372,515 (USD 24,200) was lost across 35 online fraud cases between October 20 and 26, according to data from the Anti-Scam Centre (Maldives). The cases included 13 business frauds, 6 money-exchange scams, 9 identity-theft incidents, and 6 phishing or fake employment schemes conducted through platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and messaging apps. The Anti-Scam Centre said it successfully recovered MVR 148,782 (USD 9,700) during the same period. [The Sun]

Nepal: Transitional government struggles to convert moral mandate into lasting legitimacy

(lm) Nepal's interim administration under Prime Minister Sushila Karki—formed after the September 8–9 "Gen Z movement" toppled the previous government—continues to grapple with the challenge of transforming protest-born legitimacy into stable governance ahead of national elections scheduled for March 2026. The former chief justice, appointed amid public outrage over corruption and repression, faces mounting fiscal, political, and institutional strain as her administration seeks to reconcile reformist promises with governing realities.

Karki's government arose from an unprecedented youth-led uprising triggered by a brief social media ban but fueled by long-standing frustration over elite impunity and economic hardship. The protests left at least 76 people dead and more than 2,500 injured, forcing the previous administration from power. Seeking to anchor her legitimacy in transparency and reform, Karki pledged to restore public trust, ensure justice for victims, and hold credible elections. Yet six weeks into her tenure, her government has struggled to sustain momentum amid administrative missteps and growing disillusionment.

On October 21, Karki met at Baluwatar with 18 representatives of the injured protesters, assuring them that her government would act "decisively yet lawfully" against corruption and repression. She emphasized that her administration would stay within constitutional limits while advancing the spirit of the Gen Z movement. The protesters, led by Rupin Khadka, urged the immediate prosecution of officials linked to past abuses and warned that they would return to the

streets if the government failed to act. Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal briefed them on ongoing investigations, while other ministers pledged accelerated follow-up. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Five days later, on October 26, Karki reshuffled her cabinet for the third time, appointing two new ministers viewed as popular among young voters—Bablu Gupta, 28, as minister for youth and sports, and Dr. Sudha Sharma, a physician and author known for her work in maternal and child health, as minister for health and population. Both had publicly supported the September protests.

The reshuffle, however, also revealed the fragility of her administration. Khagendra Sunar, initially nominated as minister for labour, employment, and social security, was dropped after revelations that he faced multiple criminal cases and allegations of abusive conduct, while another nominee, Ganapatilal Shrestha, was excluded following a dispute over his assigned portfolio.

The controversy followed an earlier scandal involving Sangita Kaushal Mishra, a former senior health official, who was disqualified in mid-October after the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) filed graft charges against her and 14 others. [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Beyond cabinet politics, Karki's broader challenge lies in addressing the demands of the Gen Z movement and their families. Her office is negotiating a formal accord with protest representatives that would grant political recognition to the September uprising and codify its reform agenda, focusing on anti-corruption, institutional reform, and justice for victims. The draft—coordinated by chief adviser Ajaya Bhadra Khanal—is partly modeled on the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord that ended Nepal's civil war and integrated Maoist combatants into the political process. In parallel, the government has disbursed NPR 1.5 million (USD 10,950) to each of the 53 families of the deceased and NPR 20,000 (USD 146) to over 2,300 injured protesters while establishing "Gen Z clinics" to provide free medical treatment. [The Kathmandu Post 5] [The Kathmandu Post 6]

However, implementation has been slow. Families of the injured have reported spending tens of thousands of rupees on medicines unavailable in hospitals, while reimbursement delays and poor communication have left many in debt. Eleven individuals remain hospitalized, and more than 200 injured protesters have yet to receive official identification cards or

financial assistance. A forensic report released on October 28 confirmed that most protesters were shot above the waist, intensifying calls for accountability and exposing the excessive use of lethal force by security forces during the demonstrations. [The Kathmandu Post 7]

Karki's fiscal strategy—announced in mid-October—includes freezing NPR 120 billion (USD 876 million) in development spending to redirect funds toward relief and stabilization, but this has provoked resistance from provincial administrations in Lumbini, Karnali, and Sudurpaschim. Local officials accuse the federal government of centralizing power and undermining Nepal's cooperative federalism, arguing that stalled projects and funding delays have jeopardized reconstruction efforts and preparations for next year's elections. [The Kathmandu Post 8]

Meanwhile, public trust in the interim government's integrity continues to erode. Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah, who played a key role in facilitating Karki's appointment, has repeatedly urged the prime minister to act faster and strengthen law enforcement. He has also criticized the lack of action against former Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli and former Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak, both accused of ordering the violent crackdown in September. Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal, previously Shah's legal adviser, faces growing criticism for his handling of internal security and corruption cases. [The Kathmandu Post 9]

The credibility problem has deepened following revelations on October 28 that neither Karki nor her ministers have publicly disclosed their property details, a measure not legally mandatory but long considered a transparency benchmark in Nepal. Critics argue that this omission, coupled with the perceived inactivity of the CIAA, contradicts the reformist agenda that propelled Karki to office. [The Kathmandu Post 10]

Amid these tensions, Karki reiterated her government's commitment on October 27 to hold free and fair elections on March 5, 2026, during a public address in Bhaktapur. She pledged to ensure that Nepalis could vote "without fear" and called on all political parties to cooperate in maintaining stability. Her statement followed sharp criticism of Home Minister Aryal during a cross-party meeting at Baluwatar, where leaders accused him of politicizing the security apparatus and restricting the movements of opposition figures. Karki acknowledged the concerns, emphasizing that her administration remains committed to "lawful governance and credible reform." [The Kathmandu Post 11] [The Kathmandu Post 12] [The Kathmandu Post 13] [The Kathmandu Post 14]

Nepal: Government seeks dialogue with pro-Hindu campaign leader amid concerns over planned protests

(lm) The interim government of Prime Minister Sushila Karki has invited a prominent pro-Hindu campaign leader, Durga Prasai, for talks after he announced plans for mass demonstrations calling for the restoration of Nepal as a Hindu state. Prasai, a businessman and political activist known for leading large-scale nationalist and religious mobilizations, had earlier organized a violent protest in March that left at least two people dead.

The government's decision followed a high-level security meeting chaired by Karki on October 25, attended by Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal, Home Secretary Rameshwar Dangal, and the chiefs of the Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and the National Investigation Department. The meeting reviewed security risks linked to the upcoming agitation, with officials warning that right-wing, pro-monarchy, and anti–Gen Z groups might attempt to infiltrate or exploit the movement.

The Home Ministry said it remains open to dialogue with all parties and urged protest organizers to express their demands peacefully, cautioning that renewed unrest could jeopardize preparations for the March 2026 elections. Authorities have instructed the Kathmandu Chief District Officer to initiate talks with Prasai while reinforcing intelligence and security coordination across the country.

Home Minister Aryal stated that while citizens are free to express political demands, protests must remain non-violent and must not infringe upon the rights of others or damage public property. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Unified Socialist party to discuss leftist unity and election strategy at October 29 meeting

(lm) The CPN (Unified Socialist) will convene its central committee meeting in Kathmandu on October 29 to deliberate on efforts to unite leftist and socialist forces and to refine its strategy for the upcoming parliamentary elections, expected to be held in March 2026. Party officials said the meeting will focus on finalizing talks with various communist factions,

addressing internal ideological and organizational divisions, and determining the party's position on electoral cooperation and candidate mobilization. [The Kathmandu Post]

Before the dissolution of parliament on September 12, the Unified Socialist held 10 seats in the 275-member House of Representatives. The parliament was dissolved following the resignation of then–Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, whose government collapsed amid the youth-led Gen Z movement that triggered widespread protests over corruption and governance failures.

Formed in 2021 as a splinter group from Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist), the Unified Socialist has been exploring prospects for broader left unity within and beyond the Socialist Front —an alliance of left-leaning parties that joins the Unified Socialist with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), the Janata Samajbadi Party, and the Communist Party of Nepal (Mashal)—established to promote socialist coordination and electoral cooperation. Oli has since urged the party to reunite with his faction as part of a larger left consolidation effort.

Nepal: Transitional justice process stalls amid missing regulations and staff shortages

(lm) Nepal's transitional justice process remains at a standstill nearly six months after the reconstitution of its two key bodies—the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP)—as both lack the regulations and personnel required to begin investigations into tens of thousands of human rights-related crimes from the 1996–2006 civil conflict. The commissions were reactivated in May under the previous KP Sharma Oli government but have yet to commence fieldwork due to what officials describe as an absence of political will and administrative support.

The commissions' leadership says they cannot proceed until the government endorses implementing regulations under the amended Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, which has been pending since August 2024. Staffing shortfalls have further stalled operations: the TRC currently has 89 sanctioned positions, 21 of which are vacant, and is seeking 240 additional posts to form 60 investigation teams nationwide. Officials report that repeated appeals to

the ministries of law, finance, and home affairs have gone unanswered.

The TRC has so far registered 78,909 cases—including 15,191 new complaints submitted after a recent call for filings—while the disappearance commission has 2,500 pending cases. Both commissions have a four-year legal mandate, but almost half a year has already elapsed without progress, leaving them roughly three and a half years to complete their work.

The delay follows a turbulent political transition triggered by the Gen Z movement, which ousted the Oli administration and brought Prime Minister Sushila Karki's interim government to power in September 2025. While the commissions are pressing for operational clarity, sections of the victims' community have called for the replacement of current office bearers, arguing that their appointment process lacked transparency and independence. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Surge in missing teenage girls in eastern districts linked to social media misuse

(lm) Police in eastern Nepal have reported a disturbing rise in the number of missing teenage girls in recent months, particularly in Sunsari, Morang, and Jhapa districts. These three districts form part of Nepal's southeastern industrial and border belt, adjacent to India's Bihar and West Bengal states, and are known for their dense population, cross-border mobility, and growing urban centers such as Biratnagar and Itahari.

Authorities say that excessive and unsafe use of social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram has played a major role in these disappearances, often enabling manipulation, deceit, and, in some cases, sexual violence or trafficking. Security forces are coordinating with Indian authorities amid concerns about cross-border movement and have urged families to strengthen supervision and communication with adolescents, alongside greater public awareness of online risks. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Dom families in Madhesh province face eviction and caste-based violence despite legal protections

(lm) In Madhesh Province's Siraha District, members of the Dom community, one of Nepal's most marginalized Dalit castes, continue to face violent caste-based discrimination despite constitutional guarantees of equality. Two major incidents this year have underscored the persistence of untouchability and social exclusion in the province.

In February, local officials in Aurahi Rural Municipality demolished the home of a Dom family that had lived on public land for nearly 30 years. The demolition was reportedly carried out to "purify" the site for a planned religious ritual, with even the soil being discarded as "impure." The act, which sparked national outrage, led to the arrest of the rural municipality chairperson, a former ward chair, and a local priest, all of whom were later released on bail.

In September, another Dom family in Sukhipur Municipality was assaulted by neighbors who accused them of being "untouchable" and demanded they leave their settlement. Although police have filed caste-based discrimination charges against several perpetrators, no arrests have been made.

Observers note that the Dom community, traditionally engaged in bamboo craft and ritual services essential for festivals such as Chhath, remains both economically and socially marginalized. Many families earn temporary income—around NPR 20,000–30,000 (USD 146–219)—from selling bamboo items during the festive season but face discrimination even while their products are used for religious worship. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Industrialists protest renewed power cuts amid dispute over unpaid dues

(lm) Nepal's industrial sector is once again in conflict with the government as Energy Minister Kulman Ghising has ordered electricity cuts to industries that have failed to pay longstanding dues for using dedicated and trunk power lines. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) began disconnecting supplies on October 21, initially targeting six companies and expanding the action to 18 more by the end of the week.

Between 2016 and 2018, industries reportedly accumulated around NPR 5.5 billion (USD 40.2 million) in unpaid charges. While some firms have started paying in instalments, 25 industries still owe NPR 5.48 billion (USD 39.9 million) with Jagdamba Steel, Nepal's

leading steel producer; Reliance Spinning Mills, the country's largest textile manufacturer; and Shivam Cement, a major domestic cement producer, among the biggest debtors. Industrialists argue the charges are based on flawed billing and should be verified by the Lal Commission and time-of-day meter data. They have formed the Federation of Victimised and Harassed Industries (Nepal) to protest what they describe as government overreach. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Hundreds of weapons looted during Gen Z protests remain missing

(lm) More than 550 weapons looted during the nationwide Gen Z protests on September 9 remain unaccounted for.

The unrest, during which protesters attacked and set fire to several police stations, resulted in the seizure of 1,276 firearms. Of these, only 720 have so far been recovered by the Nepal Police, the Nepali Army, and the Armed Police Force. The missing cache includes 285 heavy weapons such as INSAS and SLR rifles, along with 271 small firearms. The INSAS (Indian Small Arms System) and SLR (Self-Loading Rifle) are standard-issue military rifles commonly used by South Asian security forces.

The protests also triggered large-scale prison breaks, with 14,043 inmates and detainees escaping from 28 prisons, juvenile reform centers, and police facilities. Nearly 5,000 remain at large, raising concerns about renewed criminal activity. Security agencies have briefed the government that the combination of looted weapons and escaped inmates continues to endanger public safety, especially as demonstrations inspired by the Gen Z movement have resumed in several regions.

Police have so far arrested 237 people accused of looting, vandalism, and disorder during the unrest. Most of the arrests occurred in all provinces except Koshi, with several suspects later released on bail while others face ongoing legal proceedings. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Police launch delayed forensic probe into Gen Z arson attacks amid suspicions of chemical use

(lm) Nepal Police have initiated a long-delayed forensic investigation into the arson attacks that occurred during the Gen Z uprising on September 8–9, which severely damaged several state institutions and private enterprises, including the government's administrative complex, the Supreme Court, the Parliament Building, the President's Office, and major firms such as Kantipur Media Group and Bhat Bhateni Supermarket.

The Gen Z movement, which began as a protest against social media restrictions and corruption, rapidly escalated into violence following police crackdowns. The synchronized arson of government and private buildings has since fueled suspicions of infiltration or political manipulation.

Against this backdrop, investigators are now examining whether chemical accelerants were used in a coordinated manner, a theory supported by both local and international reports, including the *New York Times*, which cited indications of premeditated arson. Police sources confirmed that ashes and debris from key sites are being tested at the Nepal Police Forensic Science Laboratory. The probe follows evidence that activists exchanged over 114,000 messages on Discord servers, discussing petrol bomb production and target selection in the days leading up to the unrest.

Forensic specialists have cautioned that the six-week delay in evidence collection may have compromised chemical traces, as most sites were cleaned immediately after the protests. Officials acknowledged that early cleanup operations likely destroyed material evidence that could have determined whether the fires were spontaneous or orchestrated. Despite these limitations, the inquiry committee has been directed to expedite testing and submit its findings to the national commission investigating the September unrest. [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: Coalition-backed power shift underway in Azad Jammu and Kashmir as new government takes shape

(my/lm) A coalition-backed political transition is unfolding in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), a self-governing territory administered by Pakistan that has its own legislature and prime minister but remains part of the broader Kashmir region disputed between Pakistan and India. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is preparing to form a new regional government with the parliamentary support of the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N), following a planned no-confidence motion against incumbent AJK Prime Minister

Chaudhry Anwarul Haq. If confirmed, this would mark Azad Jammu and Kashmir's fourth change of leadership in just over four years.

On October 26, President Asif Ali Zardari—who serves as co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)—and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N), discussed the PPP's plan to replace the current AJK administration. Although the two represent different parties, the PPP and PML-N currently govern together in a federal coalition in Islamabad. Prime Minister Sharif subsequently tasked a three-member PML-N AJK Affairs Committee to engage with the PPP and evaluate whether his party should formally back the leadership change. [The Express Tribune]

On October 27, both parties announced that the PML-N would support the PPP's no-confidence motion but would not join the new government, instead remaining in opposition. In a joint press conference in Islamabad, senior leaders from both sides said the move sought to ensure political stability and uphold democratic procedure in AJK, where previous coalition experiments had been marked by instability. [The News International]

The PPP consolidated its position in the 53-member AJK Legislative Assembly after ten lawmakers—including several ministers—defected from other parties and joined its ranks, increasing its strength from 17 to 27, the minimum needed for a simple majority. Party sources said the new majority also includes members from a 20-member forward bloc, with additional backing expected from Sardar Atiq of the Muslim Conference and Hasan Ibrahim of the Jammu Kashmir Peoples Party.

Following these defections, the PPP announced that Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari – the son of President Zardari – would soon unveil the party's nominee for AJK prime minister, with Chaudhry Yasin widely seen as the frontrunner. President Zardari, after meeting the new entrants in Islamabad, described the transition as an "extraordinary and challenging step," expressing confidence that his party would strengthen governance and stability in the territory.

Prime Minister Anwarul Haq has acknowledged the pending no-confidence vote as "the beauty of democracy," pledging to continue his duties until formally replaced. Under AJK's constitution, if the prime minister resigns or is ousted, a new leader must be elected within 14 days. [DAWN] [Geo News]

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister pledges police modernization amid tensions with federal government

(my) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Sohail Afridi announced plans on October 26 to strengthen provincial police capacity and provide modern equipment to restore peace in the province. Speaking at a rally in Karak district, Afridi said his administration is investing in new vehicles and intelligence capabilities, pledging to align his security agenda with the "vision of Imran Khan", the jailed former prime minister.

Afridi stated that the provincial government had ordered 70 bulletproof vehicles for police—40 of which have been delivered—under a procurement plan worth PKR 1.89 billion (USD 6.6 million). The order includes armored personnel carriers and various types of pickup trucks to support counterterrorism operations. He also announced plans to establish a special branch dedicated to enhancing intelligence gathering.

The chief minister, a member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), criticized the federal government—led by the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N)—for what he described as "stepmotherly treatment" toward KP, accusing Islamabad of withholding funds promised after the merger of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Afridi claimed that the region was promised PKR 100 billion (USD 350 million) in development assistance that has yet to be delivered.

He also demanded a meeting of the National Finance Commission (NFC) to address KP's fiscal share following the FATA merger and alleged that the federal government owes the province PKR 550 billion (USD 1.9 billion). Afridi further claimed that political attacks from senior federal ministers were part of a "narrative" against him due to his middle-class and tribal background. [DAWN]

Pakistan: Government reopens new gas connections for domestic consumers after four-year ban

(my) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced on October 26 the reopening of new gas connections for domestic consumers across Pakistan, ending a nearly four-year ban. The decision follows a federal cabinet resolution in September that lifted restrictions on

domestic gas connections and authorized the supply of regasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG) to households.

Speaking at a ceremony in Islamabad, Sharif said the move fulfills a longstanding public demand for access to affordable and reliable fuel, noting that the previous administration had struggled to expand connections amid nationwide shortages. According to government data, hundreds of thousands of applications are already pending for new connections across the country.

Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik stated that while RLNG remains more expensive than conventional gas, it is 30 to 35 percent cheaper than liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), making it a viable alternative for domestic users. The decision is part of the government's broader effort to stabilize the energy sector and improve household access to consistent fuel supply.

The state-run Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) reported reducing line losses to 4.93 percent and recording a profit of PKR 29 billion (USD 101.5 million) in the previous fiscal year, reflecting progress in energy efficiency and operational recovery. [DAWN] [Daily Pakistan]

Pakistan: Government projects 3.5 percent growth amid inflation pressures and flood-related disruptions

(lm) Pakistan's economy is expected to expand by around 3.5 percent in the current financial year, according to Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, who cautioned that climate change and rapid population growth remain major risks to long-term development. The revised forecast is slightly lower than the earlier government estimate of 4.2 percent, reflecting the impact of recent monsoon floods that killed more than 1,000 people and devastated up to 2.5 million acres of farmland and factories, particularly across Punjab's rice and cotton belt.

Aurangzeb said that despite the extensive damage, the economy is showing signs of stabilization, supported by easing inflation, rising foreign exchange reserves, and credit rating upgrades from Fitch, S&P, and Moody's earlier this year. He added that privatization efforts, including the long-delayed sale of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), are progressing and expected to conclude by year-end. At the same time, he warned that environmental degradation and population pressures could derail Pakistan's ambition to reach a USD 3 trillion economy, prompting Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif to direct the Ministry of Climate Change to develop a 300-day action plan for mitigation and adaptation. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Meanwhile, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has kept its key policy rate unchanged at 11 percent for the fourth consecutive meeting, maintaining a cautious stance amid persistent inflationary pressures and ongoing flood-related disruptions. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) noted that the pause follows a cumulative 1,100-basis-point rate cut since mid-2024, after inflation peaked near 40 percent. Although earlier reductions aimed to spur growth, the SBP has opted to hold rates steady since June, as headline inflation reached 5.6 percent, exceeding the central bank's 5–7 percent target.

Flood damage, coupled with border closures with Afghanistan since October 11, has disrupted trade in key agricultural goods and intensified supply-chain constraints. Analysts expect the SBP to maintain its current stance through the end of 2025, balancing inflation control with the government's effort to sustain modest growth and protect fragile external accounts. [Arab News 3]

Aurangzeb also sought to reassure investors that confidence in Pakistan's reform trajectory remains intact, citing new market entries by Saudi Aramco and Wafi Energy, even as some multinationals like Procter & Gamble and Microsoft scale back operations in response to global headwinds. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Government establishes independent Tax Policy Office to meet IMF reform benchmark

(lm) Pakistan has established an independent Tax Policy Office (TPO) under the Finance Division, fulfilling a key International Monetary Fund (IMF) requirement to separate tax policy from tax collection. The reform corrects a structural issue that long saw the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) both design and enforce taxes —an overlap viewed by international partners as undermining fiscal transparency and policy discipline.

The new office will act as the government's central tax policy unit, responsible for revenue forecasting, economic modeling, and oversight of international tax treaties. Reporting directly to the finance minister, it will shape tax policy for the 2026–2027 federal budget

to ensure alignment with Pakistan's macroeconomic and international obligations.

Veteran tax expert Dr. Najeeb Ahmed Memon has been appointed as the TPO's first Director General, operationalizing the body that was approved in February 2025 but delayed pending leadership and staffing. Several specialized directors have also been appointed to manage business, international, direct, indirect, and personal taxation, supported by a new professional pay scale to attract qualified professionals.

The TPO's creation fulfills an IMF structural benchmark under the Extended Fund Facility, intended to enhance revenue mobilization, broaden the tax base, and curb discretionary exemptions. The FBR will now focus solely on tax administration, while the TPO assumes full responsibility for policy formulation—an institutional division modeled on international best practice. Further operational procedures are expected to be finalized with IMF and Cabinet oversight. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government unveils maritime-industrial plan to revive steel sector and cut import costs

(lm) Pakistan's Maritime Affairs Ministry has announced a new maritime-industrial initiative aimed at reviving the dormant steel sector and reducing the country's dependence on imported steel, which currently costs about USD 6 billion annually. The plan proposes integrating ship recycling, steel production, and green industrial practices into a single framework projected to save Pakistan up to USD 13 billion over the next decade.

At the center of the proposal is the revival of the long-idle Iron Ore and Coal Berth (IOCB) at Port Qasim, to be transformed into a modern ship recycling and repair complex equipped with a floating dock for Aframax-class vessels. Steel recovered from dismantled ships would either feed the Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM)—inactive since 2015—or be reprocessed near Port Qasim into high-grade industrial steel. Officials said the plan would also strengthen maritime infrastructure by allowing the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) to conduct maintenance domestically rather than abroad. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Police officers and militants killed in renewed violence across Balochistan province

(lm) A renewed wave of militant attacks has struck Balochistan, Pakistan's resource-rich southwestern province, leaving several police officers and militants dead in recent days.

On October 27, a police officer and two militants were killed after heavily armed men stormed the remote town of Bhag in Kachi district. The attackers targeted the local police station, a Levies paramilitary post, a government-owned bank, and nearby offices in a coordinated assault. The Levies, a federal paramilitary force operating mainly in Pakistan's tribal and rural areas, assists in maintaining law and order where regular police presence is limited. Security forces repelled the attackers, killing two militants, and the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) later recovered weapons and grenades from the site. [Arab News 1]

Just a week earlier, on October 20, two police officers were killed in a drive-by shooting in Rakhshan division, the second such attack in the area within a week after another officer's killing in Kharan district. [Arab News 2]

The surge in violence underscores persistent instability in Balochistan, where Baloch separatist groups—notably the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)—have intensified attacks on security forces and infrastructure linked to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, has long been the center of an insurgency driven by grievances over economic marginalization and resource distribution. While Islamabad maintains that it has prioritized Balochistan's development, it continues to accuse Afghanistan and India of supporting militant networks—allegations both Kabul and New Delhi deny.

Pakistan: Authorities arrest suspected members of banned Shia militia group

(lm) Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has detained two suspected militants linked to the Zainabiyoun Brigade, a Shia militia group banned in March 2024 for activities deemed threatening to national security. The group, composed mainly of Pakistani Shia fighters and reportedly backed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was designated a terrorist organization both by Pakistan

and the United States, the latter citing its recruitment of Pakistani fighters for the Syrian conflict.

Authorities believe the Zainabiyoun network continues limited operations in Karachi and other recruitment hubs, including Parachinar, Quetta, and Gilgit-Baltistan, though it is being systematically dismantled. Pakistan plans to raise the issue through diplomatic and security channels amid growing concern over cross-border militant activity. [Arab News]

Pakistan: naval chief reaffirms maritime defense readiness and inducts new hovercraft fleet

(my) Pakistan's naval chief, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, reaffirmed the Pakistan Navy's full preparedness to defend the country's maritime borders during a visit to forward posts in the Creeks Area on October 25, 2025. Reviewing operational readiness, the admiral emphasized that Pakistan could safeguard its sovereignty "from Sir Creek to Jiwani," highlighting the navy's defensive posture along the entire coastline—from Sir Creek, a disputed marshland border with India in southeastern Sindh province, to Jiwani, a strategic port near the Iranian border in southwestern Balochistan.

Admiral Ashraf described maritime security and sea lines of communication (SLOCs) as vital to both national sovereignty and economic stability, stressing that the navy serves as the "vanguard of peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region" and a key stakeholder in regional maritime security.

During the visit, the navy inducted three 2400 TD hovercraft into the Pakistan Marines, marking a step forward in the force's modernization drive. The new platforms can operate across diverse environments—including shallow waters, sand dunes, and marshy littoral zones—where conventional vessels cannot. This dual land-sea mobility is expected to enhance the Marines' capacity for rapid deployment and coastal defense, particularly in the Creeks Area. [Arab News] [The News International]

Seychelles: Patrick Herminie sworn in as sixth president, pledges unity and social justice

(lm) Dr. Mathew Antonio Patrick Herminie was sworn in as the sixth President of the Republic of Seychelles on October 27, marking a peaceful transfer of power from outgoing President Wavel Ramkalawan.

Taking the oath of allegiance and office before Chief Justice Rony Govinden under Article 57 of the Constitution, President Herminie outlined a vision of national unity, social justice, and economic inclusion under the guiding theme “For the many, not the few.” He pledged to eradicate poverty, promote equality, and restore dignity for all Seychellois through collective effort and responsible citizenship.

Launching his “First 100 Days” plan, Herminie announced immediate actions to address the most urgent needs of families, emphasizing that the administration would be guided by diligence, compassion, and evidence-based policymaking. He urged the country’s youth to take leading roles in science, technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence, calling them “the center of our development.”

On foreign policy, Herminie vowed to uphold national sovereignty and independence while maintaining Seychelles’ traditional principle of “friends to all and enemies to none.” [State House, Seychelles]

Sri Lanka: Opposition bloc launches joint campaign amid weakened party standings

(lm) A coalition of opposition parties — including the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, United National Party, and National Freedom Front — has announced a nationwide campaign against the government, beginning with a major rally in Nugegoda, a politically symbolic suburb of Colombo known for hosting large opposition gatherings, on November 21.

At the announcement, alliance leaders said they would *“emulate the allies who united against Hitler during World War II.”* The remark was meant as an appeal for unity among ideologically diverse parties — not a comparison between the government and Hitler — but rather a call to overcome past rivalries to challenge the dominant National People’s Power (NPP) government.

The bloc unites parties that have seen steep electoral decline. The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), once the ruling party, fell from 145 seats to just three; the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United National Party (UNP) retain only a handful of seats,

while the National Freedom Front (NFF) lacks independent representation. The Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) remains the largest conventional opposition group but also lost ground, dropping from 54 to 40 seats.

Government figures dismissed the new alliance as weak and fragmented. Deputy Labour Minister Mahinda Jayasinghe said the NPP welcomed the opposition's alignment, arguing it would make it easier for voters to "defeat fraud and corruption altogether as one group." [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Parliamentary committee approves Budget 2026

(lm) Sri Lanka's Committee on Public Finance (COPF) has approved the Budget 2026 estimates, although it noted that clarifications are still required for certain expenditure heads. The government has committed to addressing these issues during the committee stage of the budget process. [Daily Mirror]

Under the established timeline, the Appropriation Bill 2026 was presented for its first reading on September 26, and the budget speech (second reading) is set for November 7, followed by a parliamentary debate from November 8–14 and a committee stage review from November 15 to December 5. The final vote is expected on December 5, 2025.

The 2026 budget marks the first full-year fiscal plan under President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's administration, which faces the dual challenge of maintaining IMF program compliance while pursuing growth and social recovery measures after years of crisis-driven austerity.

Sri Lanka: Government launches nationwide probe into illegal land grabs by politicians

(lm) Sri Lanka's Ministry of Lands has announced a major investigation into illegal land acquisitions by politicians, Deputy Minister Aravinda Senarath told Parliament on October 23. Senarath said evidence suggests that political figures across the country have illegally occupied or transferred public land, with inquiries now being launched to identify and recover such properties. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government rejects international human rights mechanism, pledges domestic process instead

(lm) Sri Lanka has formally informed the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that it opposes the establishment of an international mechanism to address alleged human rights violations, Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya told Parliament on October 24.

The Prime Minister said such mechanisms "create divisions among communities," adding that the government would instead establish a domestic mechanism to investigate and address rights abuses. She noted that Colombo remains open to cooperation with international organizations but will retain national ownership over accountability processes. [Daily Mirror]

The statement underscores the government's continued rejection of international oversight, a long-running point of contention between Sri Lanka and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Since UNHRC Resolution 46/1 (2021) mandated evidence collection on Sri Lanka's wartime and post-war abuses, successive administrations have resisted external investigations, citing sovereignty concerns.

Sri Lanka: Petition challenges tourism board's alleged endorsement of LGBTIQ-inclusive initiatives

(lm) A group of nationalist activists has filed a writ petition before Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal challenging the legality of an alleged endorsement by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) and the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) of projects promoting LGBTIQ-inclusive tourism.

The petitioners claim that a letter dated September 9 from the SLTDA and SLTPB endorsed a proposal by the advocacy group Equal Ground to promote LGBTIQ-friendly tourism initiatives. They argue that the move sparked widespread opposition from religious leaders and nationalist groups, prompting the Prime Minister to tell Parliament that the government had no intention of promoting such projects.

Despite that clarification, the petition alleges that the tourism bureau's chairman has not withdrawn the endorsement and has publicly defended it. The

petitioners contend that the initiative violates the country's constitutional and cultural framework, citing a 2024 Supreme Court ruling that equality protections apply only on the basis of sex—not gender identity—and referencing Article 9 of the Constitution, which gives Buddhism the foremost place in Sri Lanka's legal order. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Minister addresses concerns over Muslim nurses' attire and burial delays

(lm) Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism, Vijitha Herath, has affirmed that there are no legal restrictions preventing Muslim nurses from wearing attire consistent with their religious obligations in public hospitals. The assurance followed consultations with Muslim civil society and religious leaders as part of a broader government dialogue addressing issues affecting the Muslim community. Representatives said that difficulties over head and leg coverings had discouraged some women from joining or remaining in the nursing profession. Herath clarified that existing regulations already allow religious dress to be worn within the framework of uniform standards. [Daily Mirror 1]

At the same meeting, Muslim representatives raised concerns about continuing delays in performing burial rites, citing outdated administrative procedures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, Sri Lanka imposed a temporary ban on burials, requiring all COVID-19 victims to be cremated — a policy that sparked international and domestic criticism for violating Islamic burial traditions. Although the ban was lifted in 2021, some local authorities reportedly continued to follow complex certification procedures, slowing the process.

Herath confirmed that a circular had been issued to restore pre-pandemic burial procedures and instructed officials to ensure compliance nationwide. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Prisons commissioner calls for execution of convicted drug traffickers amid overcrowding crisis

(lm) Sri Lanka's Commissioner of Prisons, Jagath Weerasinghe, has urged the government to carry out death sentences against convicted drug traffickers,

citing the country's escalating prison overcrowding and worsening narcotics crisis. Speaking on October 23 at a public awareness event, Weerasinghe said prisons built to house 10,500 inmates are now holding over 36,000 detainees, with more than 65 percent linked to narcotics offenses.

He described drug abuse as spreading at an "alarming rate," warning that the prison population could exceed 40,000 if current arrest trends continue. The commissioner said he had asked the political leadership to convey to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake that those convicted of serious drug offenses should be executed to deter trafficking.

Sri Lanka retains the death penalty in law but has maintained an unofficial moratorium on executions since 1976. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Police criticized for public release of suspect videos

(lm) Legal concerns have emerged after Sri Lankan police released multiple videos showing recently arrested suspects being paraded and questioned on social and mainstream media platforms. The footage, circulated before any formal identification procedures or court hearings, has sparked criticism from legal professionals who warn that such actions violate due process and risk undermining prosecutions.

According to legal experts, publicly exposing suspects before identification parades breaches procedural safeguards under criminal law and can render key evidence inadmissible in court. They cautioned that these actions may weaken the integrity of investigations and erode public confidence in the justice system.

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka is expected to review the incident formally. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Energy minister annuls extension of Power Reforms Secretariat director amid internal rift

(lm) Energy Minister Kumara Jayakodi has revoked a one-year service extension granted to Pubudu Niroshan, Director General of the Power Sector Reforms Secretariat, exposing tensions within the government over administrative authority. Niroshan,

originally appointed by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake for a one-year term ending on October 15, 2025, had his tenure extended by Ministry Secretary Udayanga Hemapala without ministerial approval. Jayakodi subsequently cancelled the extension, stating that the power to appoint or renew the Director General's position rests solely with the minister. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: World Bank calls for stronger data systems to improve social welfare targeting

(lm) The World Bank has called on Sri Lanka to strengthen and regularly update its beneficiary data system to ensure transparency and accuracy in selecting recipients of the Aswesuma Social Security Programme—the country's main welfare initiative for low-income and vulnerable households.

At a recent parliamentary meeting attended by members of Parliament, the Finance Ministry, and World Bank representatives, the delegation emphasized that inclusion in the national database should not automatically qualify individuals for benefits. Instead, data should be verified and analysed to identify genuinely eligible recipients.

The World Bank described a reliable digital registry as a long-term investment for effective social protection and reiterated its readiness to provide technical assistance and international expertise. Lawmakers, in turn, proposed that local committees play a role in selecting beneficiaries and that final lists be publicly displayed in villages to enhance accountability.

Officials implementing the program acknowledged operational challenges stemming from limited communication with local administrators but said corrective measures are underway to strengthen coordination and ensure the program's effective delivery. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Declining marriages, births, and rising migration signal worsening demographic outlook

(lm) Sri Lanka is experiencing a sharp demographic contraction marked by falling marriage and birth rates, rising mortality, and sustained outward migration,

according to new data from the Department of Population and Statistics.

In 2024, only 139,290 marriages were registered—a 5.5 percent drop from 2023 and well below pre-pandemic levels. Births also fell steeply to 220,761 in 2024, down from 247,900 in 2023 and 301,706 in 2020, reflecting a continuous decline over recent years. Meanwhile, deaths rose to 220,761 in 2024, compared to 181,239 in 2023, further narrowing the natural population growth margin.

Migration is compounding the demographic pressures. The country recorded negative net migration of 222,715 between mid-2022 and mid-2023, and 176,932 the following year, with more people leaving than arriving. As a result, Sri Lanka's mid-year population fell by 120,555 in 2024, bringing the total to 21.76 million. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government outlines plan for USD 15 billion digital economy anchored in 'super ROI' strategy

(lm) Sri Lanka is advancing an aggressive digital transformation strategy aimed at building a USD 15 billion digital economy within the next few years, according to Hans Wijesuriya, Chief Adviser to the President on Digital Economy and Chair of the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA).

Speaking at the launch of the Institute of Policy Studies' "State of the Economy 2025" report, Wijesuriya said the initiative—described as a "super return on investment (ROI)" strategy—seeks to deliver high economic impact with limited fiscal expenditure by creating shared digital public infrastructure (DPI) rather than fragmented agency-level systems.

The plan centers on a horizontal platform model comprising a national digital ID, data exchanges, digital signatures, and federated payment architectures. These core systems will be exposed through open APIs, enabling entrepreneurs and small firms to rapidly develop digital services in priority sectors such as tourism, logistics, and trade.

The foundational DPI layer is targeted for completion within two to four years, with nationwide broadband connectivity expected by 2030. The government intends to use open-source software and cloud infrastructure to reduce costs, funding the core DPI directly while leveraging private-sector investment for

broader infrastructure like telecom and data-center expansion.

Officials stress that regulatory modernization is essential to the plan's success. Alongside new legislation on cybersecurity, data protection, and intellectual property, reforms are being pursued in procurement and business processes to eliminate barriers that hinder innovation and delay payments to small enterprises. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Exports hit USD 12.98 billion in first nine months, nearing annual target amid sectoral rebound

(lm) Sri Lanka's exports rose to USD 12.98 billion between January and September 2025, a 7 percent year-on-year increase, according to provisional figures from the Export Development Board (EDB). The country has already achieved 72 percent of its 2025 export target, indicating that it is broadly on track to meet year-end goals despite weak global demand and domestic cost pressures.

Growth was driven by stronger performance in key goods sectors: apparel (USD 4.01 billion, up 6 percent), tea (USD 1.16 billion, up 10 percent), and coconut-based products (USD 909 million, up 42 percent). Exports of food and beverages also expanded by 25 percent, while ICT/BPM services rose 27 percent, reflecting gradual diversification beyond traditional commodities. September alone saw exports rise 12 percent year-on-year to USD 1.46 billion, marking one of the best monthly results since 2022.

The United States remained Sri Lanka's largest market, with USD 2.25 billion in export earnings (up 3 percent year-to-date), followed by India, which recorded 23 percent growth, underscoring deeper regional integration under new trade facilitation policies.

The data highlight two trajectories: the resilience of core export industries following several years of crisis-driven contraction, and limited progress in high-value diversification, which remains dependent on policy stability, exchange-rate management, and access to credit. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Local council assassination deepens security crisis amid arrests and political fallout

(ss) Sri Lanka's internal security climate has sharply deteriorated following the October 23 assassination of Lasantha Wickramasekera, chairman of the Weligama Pradeshiya Sabha—a local government body in the southern Matara District—and opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) politician. The killing, the first political assassination under the National People's Power (NPP) government, has reignited public concern over rising gun violence and alleged links between politics and organized crime.

Wickramasekera, known locally as "Weligama Lasa," was shot dead inside his office by two gunmen posing as visitors. The incident marked the 103rd shooting reported this year, with 52 fatalities. Opposition lawmakers accused the government of failing to uphold law and order, revealing that the slain chairman had previously written to the police chief warning of assassination threats and requesting protection, which was reportedly denied. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Responding in Parliament, Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala described the killing as an act of gang warfare, claiming that the chairman had been implicated in underworld activities, drug trafficking, and several court cases. He said the information came from underworld figures extradited from Indonesia. The government maintains that the shooting reflects the criminal rivalries afflicting local politics rather than a politically motivated attack. [Daily Mirror 3]

Authorities have since arrested three suspects, including the alleged gunman, during operations involving the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID), and the State Intelligence Service (SIS). The main suspect was detained in Maharagama, while two others were apprehended in Galle by the Matara District Crime Investigation Bureau. [Daily Mirror 4] [Daily Mirror 5]

Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara told Parliament that no detained underworld figures will die in police custody, referencing the 2020 killing of Makandure Madush—a notorious Sri Lankan underworld leader involved in drug trafficking—whose death during police custody allegedly prevented key revelations about political links to organized crime. He said the Public Security Minister would soon disclose the names of politicians implicated in these networks. [Daily Mirror 6]

Sri Lanka: Opposition MP disputes police claims of underworld links amid death-

threat probe

(lm) Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) parliamentarian Jagath Vithane has denied allegations by Inspector General of Police Priyantha Weerasuriya that he maintains connections with organized-crime networks, calling the claims “fishy” and politically motivated.

The dispute follows an investigation launched after Vithane reported receiving death threats. [Daily Mirror 1]

The police chief stated that preliminary findings indicated possible links between the MP and individuals associated with criminal and drug-trafficking groups, prompting the provision of temporary police protection. He further warned that some figures connected to organized crime have entered politics to expand their influence and urged parties to block such candidates.

Vithane rejected the allegations, insisting he has no ties to the underworld and announcing plans to pursue legal action against what he described as an attempt to discredit him or incite violence. [Daily Mirror 2] [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Chief of National Intelligence retires after brief tenure

(lm) Major General Ruwan Wanigasooriya retired from his post as Chief of National Intelligence (CNI) on October 27 upon reaching the age of 60. He had assumed the position in January 2025 after a long career in the Sri Lanka Army. [Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka]

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

Brunei: Consumer Price Index edge up 0.03 percent in September 2025

(ga) Brunei's consumer price index (CPI) rose 0.03 percent in September 2025 compared to the same month in 2024, driven by a 0.4 percent increase in the food and non-alcoholic beverages index, while the non-food index fell 0.1 percent, according to the Department of Economic Planning and Statistics (DEPS).

Key contributors to the food index increase included fruits (up 3.9 percent, mainly fresh tropical fruits), coffee, tea and cocoa (3.7 percent), and fish and seafood (1.7 percent, mainly fresh prawns). The non-food index decline was led by lower prices in clothing and footwear (1.4 percent), miscellaneous goods and services, particularly vehicle insurance (1.3 percent), and furnishings and household maintenance (0.7 percent).

Month-on-month, the CPI rose 0.4 percent from August 2025, with the food index up 0.2 percent and the non-food index up 0.5 percent, driven by higher costs in fish and seafood, non-alcoholic beverages, clothing, footwear, and transport. The CPI measures changes in prices of a fixed basket of goods and services based on average household expenditure from the Household Expenditure Survey (HES). [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei: Chinese-made aircraft approved

(dql) Brunei has officially allowed its airlines to operate Chinese-manufactured planes, marking a milestone for Shanghai-based planemaker COMAC. The move, formalized in new rules by Brunei's aviation regulator, adds China's Civil Aviation Authority (CAAC) to its list of recognized regulators, alongside U.S., European, Canadian, and Brazilian authorities.

The decision supports GallopAir, a Brunei-focused start-up backed by Chinese investment, which has ordered 15 C909 regional jets and 15 C919 narrow-body aircraft—the first C919 order by a non-Chinese airline.

The C909, China's first jet-engine-powered regional aircraft, has been in commercial production since 2016, while the larger C919 is designed to compete with the Airbus A320neo and Boeing 737 MAX. Delivery timelines remain uncertain. [Reuters]

Cambodia: Government enforces nationwide ban on e-cigarettes, shisha

(dql) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet has imposed a comprehensive nationwide ban on e-cigarettes, vaping devices, and shisha, citing their growing use among young people and associated risks to health, social stability, and drug prevention efforts. The directive, issued on October 21, mandates strict enforcement across ministries and provincial authorities to eradicate the import, sale, use, and promotion of these products. [Khmer Times]

The move reflects the government's concern that vaping could act as a gateway to drug addiction and traditional tobacco use. The ban is supported by nine coordinated measures involving multiple ministries, including Health, Education, Interior, and Commerce, to curb distribution, raise awareness, and strengthen monitoring.

Hun Manet's order also instructs authorities to enforce disciplinary measures against civil servants and security personnel found using such products, while violators in the private sector risk license revocation and legal penalties. [Kiripost]

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco use claims around 15,000 lives in Cambodia each year—equivalent to nearly 290 deaths per week. The health crisis also carries significant economic costs, estimated at KHR 2.7 trillion (about USD 663 million) annually, disproportionately affecting low-income households and straining families, communities, and the national economy. [Camboja News]

Cambodia: Former Nation Power Party leader questioned over alleged

embezzlement of party funds

(dql) The Phnom Penh Municipal Court has questioned Sun Chanthy, founder and former president of the Nation Power Party (NPP)—an opposition party without seats in the parliament, over allegations of fraud involving more than USD 70,000 in party funds. The case, filed by 19 former members of Candlelight Party (CP)—Cambodia's largest opposition party that was barred from participating in the July 2023 general election—accuses Chanthy of misappropriating campaign funds collected in 2023 while serving as CP's executive chairman in Kampong Thom.

According to the complaint, Chanthy allegedly diverted the funds to establish the NPP after resigning from the CP. His lawyer denied wrongdoing, arguing that the contributions were legitimate and properly recorded by the CP's accounting team.

Investigating Judge Hok Pov ordered Chanthy, 44, to be returned to prison following the questioning. If convicted, he faces six months to three years in prison. Chanthy is already serving a two-year sentence for incitement under a separate conviction handed down in December 2024. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Justice ministry reviews over 1,000 prisoner pardon requests ahead of national holidays

(dql) Minister of Justice, Koeut Rith, chaired a meeting on October 21 to review 1,064 prisoner requests for commutation and pardon ahead of the Water Festival and Independence Day in November. The session involved representatives from the Ministries of Social Affairs, Veterans Affairs, Youth Rehabilitation, Justice, Interior, as well as correctional and youth rehabilitation centre officials.

Of the requests, 553 were submitted for the Water Festival and 511 for Independence Day, originating from 24 provincial and Phnom Penh prisons, four correctional centers, and several youth rehabilitation facilities. The committee also discussed prison overcrowding and potential mitigation measures.

While the number of prisoners to be pardoned or released was not disclosed, the process aligns with Cambodia's tradition of granting royal pardons on major national holidays. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Cabinet approves 2026 budget

(dql) The government approved a draft 2026 budget of KHR 40,913 billion (USD 10.16 billion), marking a 7.8 percent increase from 2025, during a cabinet meeting last week led by Prime Minister Hun Manet. The proposed spending represents 18.85 percent of GDP and aligns with projected economic growth of 5 percent in 2026, following an estimated 5.2 percent expansion in 2025.

GDP per capita is expected to rise to USD 3,020, up from USD 2,858. Key drivers of growth include garments, footwear, and travel goods for exports, tourism, agriculture, and the construction and real estate sectors.

Defense spending is expected to increase, reflecting plans for armed forces modernization, military conscription which will begin in 2026, and capacity building.

The budget also aligns with Cambodia's Pentagon Strategy-Phase 1, supporting six priority programs, five key measures, and five core policy priorities to advance domestic development while engaging regional and global frameworks. The draft law now awaits National Assembly approval, Senate review, and royal endorsement by King Norodom Sihamoni.

The draft budget still requires approval by the National Assembly and Senate before royal endorsement by King Norodom Sihamoni. [Khmer Times] [Cambodianess]

Cambodia: Phnom Penh police launch intensified crackdown on online scams and cybercrime

(dql) Cambodia's capital is stepping up efforts to combat online scams and cybercrime, with Lt. Gen. Chuon Narin, Deputy Commissioner General and Phnom Penh Municipal Police Commissioner, ordering all 14 district police chiefs to intensify monitoring and enforcement. He noted that foreign nationals are using Cambodia as a base for technology-based crimes.

The directive followed a meeting reviewing October security operations and setting priorities. [Khmer Times 1]

Chuon's order came shortly after Phnom Penh courts ordered the detention of three Indonesian men—accused of running online investment and romance

scams. The arrests followed a police operation on October 17, where 17 foreigners were detained and authorities seized 131 computers, 215 phones, a laptop, and other equipment used in fraudulent activities targeting overseas victims.

Since its launch on June 27, the nationwide anti-tech-fraud campaign has sent 80 suspects to court, reflecting the Royal Government of Cambodia's commitment to safeguarding public security and enforcing strict legal measures against technology-based crime. [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia: Over 200 suspects arrested in human trafficking and sex exploitation cases in 2025

(gm) Cambodian authorities have arrested 205 suspects, including 19 foreigners, in 147 cases of human trafficking and sexual exploitation during the first nine months of 2025, according to the Ministry of Interior.

The ministry said the operations, conducted nationwide under the ministry's anti-trafficking program, led to the rescue of 483 victims and the repatriation of 157 Cambodian nationals, including 36 minors, trafficked abroad.

Of the 147 cases, 55 involved human trafficking, resulting in 79 arrests and 200 victims rescued, while 92 related to the sex trade, with 126 suspects detained and 283 victims freed. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Finance Minister accuses regions of hoarding USD 14 billion, instead of investing in public

(gp/ms) Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa has accused a number of regional governments of holding large sums of idle funds in banks instead of spending them on public programs. He said that a total of IDR 234 trillion (USD 14 billion) in regional government funds remained parked in banking accounts across Indonesia, slowing economic activity and weakening fiscal stimulus.

According to ministry data sourced from Bank Indonesia, the balance includes IDR 134.2 trillion (USD 8 billion) from regencies, IDR 60.2 trillion (USD 3.6

billion) from provincial governments, and IDR 39.5 trillion (USD 2.4 billion) from city administrations.

Among the provinces cited, Jakarta reportedly held IDR 14.68 trillion (USD 870 million), East Java about IDR 6.8 trillion (USD 400 million), and West Java around IDR 4.1 trillion (USD 247 million).

Purbaya said the central government's concern is that such funds, when left idle, reduce fiscal impact at the local level. He also indicated that the Audit Board of Indonesia (BPK) may review how these balances are being managed.

The finance minister emphasized that his figures came directly from Bank Indonesia, which compiles regional government account data regularly. He said the responsibility to reconcile discrepancies rests with regional administrations.

West Java Governor Dedi Mulyadi strongly rejected the allegations, saying that no such deposits exist and that his government manages its finances transparently. After consulting both Bank Indonesia and the Home Affairs Ministry, he said the province holds no fixed-term deposits of the kind described by the minister.

The provincial administration confirmed that around IDR 3.8 trillion (USD 230 million) of its funds are currently kept in current (giro) accounts, not in interest-bearing deposits. The governor said these funds are used continuously for salaries, infrastructure projects, utilities, official travel, and contracted services.

Dedi said Bank Indonesia's clarification proved that the provincial government was not earning interest from idle funds, and that all cash balances were tied to operational needs. He argued that the finance ministry's data was either outdated or misinterpreted, and that officials should have verified the figures before making public claims.

The dispute reflects a long-running issue between the central government and regional administrations over budget absorption. The Finance Ministry considers high regional cash balances a sign of slow disbursement, while local leaders often view them as temporary holdings for planned spending.

In West Java's case, the provincial government says the current balance is a reflection of ongoing cash flow, not unutilized funds. The finance minister, on the other hand, maintains that even funds in current accounts represent underused resources that could be better mobilized to stimulate regional growth.

The controversy has emerged as the central government continues to push for faster regional spending to support national economic growth. Large balances in regional bank accounts are seen as a drag on fiscal performance, particularly when infrastructure projects and social programs face delays.

Economists note that while regional treasurers often hold funds in current accounts to ensure liquidity, the scale of the unspent balances suggests deeper structural issues, such as procurement bottlenecks and overly cautious fiscal planning. [Asia News Network] [Jakarta Globe] [VOI]

Indonesia permits foreign leadership in state-owned enterprises amid governance debate

(gp/ms) The Indonesian government has introduced a new policy allowing foreign nationals to serve as executives in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), a move that President Prabowo Subianto says aims to bring international expertise and improve corporate performance. The policy marks a major shift in Indonesia's management of its vast network of SOEs, which play a central role in sectors such as energy, transportation, and banking.

Supporters argue that opening SOE leadership to foreigners could enhance efficiency, attract foreign investment, and strengthen competitiveness in global markets. However, the reform has also sparked concerns among civil society groups and anti-corruption advocates.

Wana Alamsyah, Head of the Legal and Investigation Division of ICW has warned that the appointment of foreigners as SOE executives poses several challenges, as such individuals may offer transparency to Indonesian authorities, and investigations against them may require the assistance of their home countries. According to Almsyah, "There have been at least two cases involving foreigners, and state-owned enterprises were hampered by the assistance from foreign countries." The first case concerned the former CEO of Garuda Indonesia, Emirsyah Satar, who was found to have received a USD 2 million bribe from Rolls-Royce to purchase several aircraft. But the briber, a British national, was not further prosecuted because the crime occurred outside Indonesia's jurisdiction. Another case was committed by the former CEO of Bank Mandiri, Edward Cornelis William Neloe — who is suspected of transferring most of his assets to a Swiss

bank — which resulted in state losses of USD 120 billion. [South China Morning Post] [Tempo]

Indonesia: Four senior officials resign from North Sumatra Government

(ms) Four senior officials in Indonesia's North Sumatra provincial administration have resigned in recent months, deepening turmoil in the administration of Governor Bobby Nasution, the son-in-law of former president Joko Widodo.

The officials — heads of the provincial communications, finance, housing, and food agencies — submitted their resignations over the past months, with the latest two stepping down in October, according to local media reports. Bobby, confirmed the departures but said they would not disrupt government operations.

The shake-up follows a series of corruption allegations and internal disputes that have dogged Bobby's administration since he took office in February. One official, Ilyas Sitorus, quit in March — a day before being named a suspect in a USD 108,000 corruption case involving digital library software procurement. Others cited personal reasons or disagreements with the governor.

Analysts say the resignations expose growing instability and governance challenges in the province, one of Indonesia's largest, and add pressure on the young governor, who is seen as part of President Prabowo Subianto's broader political network.

The controversy underscores ongoing concerns about corruption and weak accountability in regional governments across Indonesia. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Civil outcry grows over military impunity and Suharto's rehabilitation attempt amid alleged human rights decline under President Prabowo

(ms) Indonesian rights groups have raised alarm over what they describe as a sharp deterioration in human rights and civilian oversight during President Prabowo Subianto's first year in office, pointing to lenient military court rulings and a government proposal to name former dictator Suharto a national hero as emblematic of a wider democratic regression.

The criticism followed a report by Amnesty International Indonesia, which said the administration has overseen a "massive erosion of human rights" under the guise of populist and security-driven policies. Amnesty's executive director Usman Hamid said that while Prabowo has claimed economic success, his policies "benefit only a small circle of elites" and have excluded public participation. [The Jakarta Post 1]

Civil-society groups say the government's growing reliance on the Indonesian Military (TNI) to fill senior bureaucratic roles and expand regional command structures has blurred the line between civilian and military authority. The concern deepened this month after several soldiers convicted in fatal assaults against civilians received light sentences from military tribunals — verdicts that activists say reflect a pattern of impunity dating back to the New Order era.

The Civil Society Coalition for Security Sector Reform, made up of 20 organizations including the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) and Imparsial, has urged the government to amend the 1997 Military Tribunal Law, which allows the TNI to try its members internally. Rights groups argue that this law conflicts with Article 65 of the 2004 TNI Law, which stipulates that soldiers accused of general crimes should face civilian courts. "Until these trials are transparent and held under civilian jurisdiction, impunity will persist," the coalition said. [The Jakarta Post 2]

The controversy over military accountability coincides with a political storm over the government's decision to include Suharto among 40 nominees for national hero status, alongside pluralist former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid and murdered labor activist Marsinah. The nomination, submitted by Social Affairs Minister Saifullah Yusuf and pending approval from President Prabowo, has drawn condemnation from human-rights groups who called it an "attempt to distort history." [Antara] [The Jakarta Post 3]

The issue has particular resonance because Prabowo himself was a key figure in Suharto's final years in power. A former army general and commander of the elite Kopassus special forces, Prabowo was long considered part of Suharto's inner circle — and was married to Suharto's daughter, Titiek Suharto. He was discharged from the military in 1998 after being accused of involvement in the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists during the unrest that toppled the regime. While he has consistently denied wrongdoing, his political career since has been shaped by both his proximity to and his break from Indonesia's most controversial ruler.

Activists argue that honoring Suharto — whose 32-year rule was marked by mass killings, enforced disappearances, and corruption — would undermine Indonesia's post-1998 democratic reforms and disrespect victims of his regime. The inclusion of both Suharto and his critics on the same shortlist has further fueled accusations of political opportunism.

For rights advocates, the controversies form part of a broader pattern: the revival of military influence, the weakening of legal accountability, and the sanitizing of authoritarian history. Analysts warn that these trends could reverse two decades of progress since Indonesia's democratic transition.

"The overlap between impunity and historical revisionism is not accidental," said a Jakarta-based political analyst. "It reflects a government that is comfortable invoking the stability of the past while eroding the safeguards of the present."

The government has yet to comment on the calls for legal reform or on the Suharto nomination, but critics say both issues will test Prabowo's commitment to the rule of law and his ability to distance himself from the legacy of the military establishment he once served.

Indonesia: Controversial history rewrite to be launched in December

(ms) Indonesia's Culture Minister Fadli Zon announced that the government's long-delayed national history rewrite project will be launched on December 14, coinciding with National History Day, despite ongoing controversy over alleged historical revisionism and the omission of past human rights abuses.

The project, consisting of 10 to 11 volumes, aims to become the country's official historical reference across all education levels. The ministry said the manuscripts are now in the final editing stage.

Originally slated for release on August 17, the books were delayed amid backlash from historians and rights activists who accuse the government of attempting to sanitize Indonesia's violent past. Critics warn that the project risks erasing key historical events such as the 1965–66 anti-communist massacres, the 1998 riots targeting ethnic Chinese, and the abductions of pro-democracy activists, for whose involvement Prabowo was dismissed from the military at the time.

Analysts describe the initiative as part of a wider pattern of historical revisionism under Prabowo, who

has also overseen efforts to name former dictator Suharto—his late father-in-law—a national hero. Activists like Ita Fatia Nadia have called the new texts an “attempt to whitewash” Indonesia’s history, while former attorney general Marzuki Darusman warned they could mark a return to Suharto-era control over historical narratives.

The controversy has reignited debates about Indonesia’s democratic backsliding and freedom of expression, with critics arguing that a “positive” retelling of history undermines accountability and public memory. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Indigenous communities marginalized as forests face militarized control under President Prabowo

(ms) Environmental and Indigenous rights groups warn that President Prabowo Subianto’s administration is deepening Indonesia’s ecological crisis by expanding corporate and military control over forests and natural resources, while sidelining Indigenous participation in climate policy.

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) said massive deforestation and mining expansion have been driven by “oligarchic control,” with about 10 million hectares of mining land now held by corporations, nearly half controlled by just 55 business groups. Recent legal changes — including the amended TNI Law and Presidential Regulation No. 5/2025, which established a forest task force led by the defense minister and TNI commander — have further militarized environmental governance, WALHI warned.

According to the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), up to 70 million Indigenous Indonesians live in forests and coastal regions most affected by deforestation, rising seas, and climate disasters. Yet, experts say they remain excluded from decision-making. “There is no real mechanism that allows Indigenous communities to withhold consent to activities affecting their lands,” said Imam Ardhianto, an anthropologist at the University of Indonesia.

Activists say the government’s approach prioritizes elite and security interests over community rights, threatening biodiversity and the people who have long protected it. [The Jakarta Post 1] [The Jakarta Post 2]

Indonesia: Energy Ministry partners with universities to strengthen mineral and coal sector

(ms) Indonesia's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources is partnering with four leading universities to expand geological research on minerals and coal, a move reflecting the government's dual strategy of strengthening energy security while advancing industrial downstreaming.

The agreement involves Padjadjaran University (Unpad), the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Gadjah Mada University (UGM), and Veteran National Development University (UPN). Under the collaboration, researchers will gain access to the Geological Agency's data, technology, and field facilities to map potential deposits and study resource efficiency.

Deputy Energy Minister Yuliot Tanjung said the initiative is focused on applied research rather than mining permits, emphasizing the need to bridge university innovation with industrial practice. The program aims to improve data quality for national planning and support energy resilience at a time when Indonesia faces growing domestic demand and rising scrutiny over coal dependency.

The cooperation comes as President Prabowo Subianto's administration prioritizes resource-based industrialization and energy independence, while gradually integrating renewables into the national mix. Indonesia remains one of the world's largest coal exporters, yet seeks to position mineral exploration — including nickel, bauxite, and rare earths — as key to its long-term transition strategy. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Mandate on 10 percent bioethanol blend in gasoline by 2027

(ms) Indonesia will require all gasoline sold nationwide to contain at least 10 percent bioethanol (E10) starting in 2027, Energy Minister Bahlil Lahadalia announced on October 24, as part of the country's push to cut fuel imports and strengthen domestic renewable energy capacity.

The government estimates it will need 1.4 million kilolitres of bioethanol annually for the program, all sourced from domestic production using cassava, corn, and sugarcane. Current national production capacity stands at about 303,000 kilolitres, with output

in 2024 reaching just 160,000 kilolitres, signaling a need for expanded investment.

Bahlil said the move follows the success of the biodiesel forty (B40) program, which saved an estimated USD 40 billion in foreign exchange between 2020 and 2025 by reducing diesel imports.

To prepare for implementation, Indonesia has partnered with Brazil, the world's leading bioethanol producer, to share regulatory and technical expertise. Brazil mandates blends ranging from E30 to E100 depending on the region.

State energy company Pertamina confirmed it is ready to support the transition, calling the E10 program a key step toward achieving energy sovereignty and reducing carbon emissions under President Prabowo Subianto's energy transition agenda. [Bio Energy Times] [Reuters]

Indonesia: Central bank pausing rate cuts, open to further easing

(gp) On October 22, Bank Indonesia (BI) held its benchmark interest rate at 4.75 percent, pausing after three consecutive monthly cuts of 25 basis points each. Since September 2024, Bank Indonesia has lowered rates six times totaling 150 basis points, but commercial banks have only reduced their lending rates by an average of 15 basis points this year. According to BI Governor Perry Warjito, "After six rate cuts, our focus now is on strengthening transmission of monetary policies that we have carried out." To do so, BI will expand liquidity incentives from December 1, offering banks that commit to cutting their lending rates an additional 50 basis point reduction in reserve requirements. [Reuters]

Despite the pause, Warjiyo stated that further rate cuts remain "still open," noting that inflation has been maintained within the central bank's target range. He also pointed out that current and projected economic growth remains below national output capacity, suggesting room to stimulate domestic demand.The rupiah has weakened 3 percent against the dollar this year, and BI recorded USD 5.26 billion in net portfolio outflows between September and October 20. The rate decision took into account the rupiah's movements amid market uncertainties, including the impact of U.S. tariffs on global trade. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Palm oil producers suffer amid international pressures

(gp) Palm oil prices have declined for three consecutive sessions, with benchmark prices falling 0.58 percent to IDR 17.4 million (USD 1,048) per metric ton, pressured by weakening vegetable oil prices in China and softer demand from India following the Diwali festival. Despite the recent decline, prices remain 1.1 percent higher over the past month, but still 3.8 percent lower than a year ago. Notably, Indonesia — the world's largest palm oil producer — is facing increased competition from Malaysia, which has seen a 7.7 percent month-on-month increase in such exports. [The Malaysian Reserve]

Despite growing challenges to Indonesian exporters, the country's rising domestic biodiesel consumption is helping offset weaker international demand, with national biodiesel usage reaching 10.57 million kiloliters so far in 2025, up nearly 10% year-on-year. Further, Indonesia's potential B50 biodiesel mandate could significantly impact export volumes. The program would require approximately 17 million tonnes of palm oil for blending — up three million tonnes from the current B40 mandate. When considering the 10 million tonnes needed for food use, this would leave only about 22 million tonnes available for export, a significant decline from Indonesia's historical annual exports of 24-28 million tonnes over the past five years. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: USD 9 million in state-land sale graft case seized

(ms) Indonesian prosecutors have seized IDR 150 billion (USD 9.03 million) in connection with an alleged corruption scheme involving the sale of land from the state-owned plantation firm PT Perkebunan Nusantara I (PTPN I). The funds were reportedly returned by the suspects as goodwill and as a concrete measure to restore state finances.

The land in question — about 8,077 hectares — was sold in 2022–2023 by PTPN I's subsidiary PT Nusa Dua Properti (NDP) to a developer, PT Deli Megapolitan Kawasan Residensial (DMKR), itself a joint-venture with private developer PT Ciputra Land. Investigators have arrested NDP's director, Iman Surbaki, and two officials from the land agency, alleging certificate conversions and misuse of authority.

The case comes amid President Prabowo's broader push to overhaul the state enterprise sector. Within October alone he has moved to drastically centralize and streamline Indonesia's SOEs — announcing a plan to cut the number of state firms from about 1,000 to roughly 200 and replacing the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises with a new regulatory agency. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: First hybrid-propulsion warship commissioned

(ms) The Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) has commissioned its first warship powered by a hybrid propulsion system, marking a major step toward greater efficiency and domestic defense innovation. The 60-meter Fast Attack Craft-Missile (FACM) *KRI Belati (622)* officially entered service on October 24 in a ceremony at the Navy's Sealift Command headquarters in North Jakarta.

Built by local shipbuilder PT Tesco Indomaritim over 34 months, *KRI Belati* combines conventional propellers and waterjets, allowing for more flexible and fuel-efficient operations across different mission profiles. It can also operate on biofuel, making it Indonesia's first warship designed for partial renewable energy use, with future FACMs are expected to adopt similar hybrid propulsion systems to reduce operational costs and environmental impact.

The *KRI Belati* was showcased during a fleet review in Jakarta Bay earlier this month, featuring more than 50 Indonesian Navy ships. Equipped with advanced Turkish-made systems such as HAVELSAN's ADVENT Combat Management System and ASELSAN's CENK 200-N radar, the vessel underscores Indonesia's growing defense partnerships and technology diversification.

Armed with Roketsan Atmaca anti-ship missiles and a Leonardo Marlin 40 remote weapon station, the 500-tonne craft reaches speeds of up to 30 knots and carries a crew of 62. The ship's construction, officials said, highlights Indonesia's drive for defense self-sufficiency and the expansion of its domestic shipbuilding capabilities.

Following its commissioning, *KRI Belati* has been assigned to the 3rd Fleet's Fast Boat Unit, responsible for operations in Indonesia's eastern maritime region — a strategically vital area for the protection of national waters and regional sea lanes.

The hybrid warship program forms part of Indonesia's broader naval modernization agenda under the Defense White Paper 2024–2029, which prioritizes local production, maritime security, and greener technologies in line with global defense sustainability trends. [Naval News]

Laos: Bank of Laos unveils five-year strategy focused on oversight, digital banking, and regional integration

(ms) The Bank of Laos (BOL) has launched a new five-year strategy for 2026–2030, prioritizing stronger financial oversight, digital innovation, and cross-border connectivity to ensure long-term monetary stability and inclusive growth.

At the Fifth Party Congress held on October 26 at the Banking Institute Conference Hall in Vientiane, Governor Bounkham Vorachit outlined the strategy under the theme *"Strengthen Party leadership to ensure monetary stability, develop a resilient financial system, and modernize financial services for inclusive growth."*

The plan emphasizes improving financial governance, enhancing transparency, and expanding digital banking to support both efficiency and inclusion. The reforms follow a series of corruption cases within the banking sector that have damaged public trust and exposed systemic weaknesses in internal supervision and loan management.

According to the BOL, 21 cases of financial misconduct were uncovered in 2024 across state-owned banks, including Nayoby Bank, BCEL, and the Agricultural Promotion Bank. The violations involved fraudulent loans, misuse of funds, and falsified financial records. Losses were estimated at nearly 1.6 billion kip (about 74,000 dollars), with only 137 million kip (around 6,300 dollars) recovered. A total of 167 officials were disciplined, and several senior managers suspended pending investigation.

The BOL is also advancing regional financial integration, expanding cross-border QR code payment systems with Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, South Korea, and China to facilitate seamless cashless transactions for tourists and businesses.

Delegates elected a 17-member Party Executive Committee, reappointing Bounkham Vorachit as Secretary, Vathana Dalaloy as Deputy Secretary, and Aloun Bounyong as Chair of the Party Inspection Committee. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Key airports get upgrade to strengthen tourism

(ms) Laos is accelerating efforts to boost tourism with simultaneous upgrades to its Pakse and Luang Prabang international airports, underscoring the sector's designated role as a key pillar of national economic growth.

In southern Laos, Pakse International Airport in Champasack Province began major renovations on October 3, funded by the Lao Airports Authority and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. The 270-day project includes expanded arrival and departure halls, upgraded electrical and air-conditioning systems, new sanitation facilities, and a larger parking area. The improvements are designed to ease congestion and enhance the travel experience for tourists visiting attractions such as Vat Phou, the Bolaven Plateau, and the Si Phan Don (4,000 Islands) region.

Further north, the Luang Prabang International Airport will undergo a large-scale expansion under a public–private partnership led by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport and the International Finance Corporation. The plan calls for a new international terminal, extended domestic facilities, and upgraded airfield infrastructure. Four shortlisted bidders — from China, Turkey, and South Korea — attended a pre-bid conference in Vientiane on October 21.

Both projects form part of the government's strategy to modernize transport infrastructure, attract more regional flights, and support sustainable tourism growth. Champasack Province alone welcomed over 570,000 visitors in the first nine months of 2025, a 17 percent year-on-year rise, reflecting Laos' renewed focus on becoming a major Southeast Asian travel hub. [The Laotian Times 1] [The Laotian Times 2]

Malaysia: New policy on food security and agriculture to be introduced

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has announced that the government is finalizing a new agriculture policy aimed at addressing growing food security challenges through a coordinated, evidence-based, and mission-driven approach.

The policy will focus on boosting agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable agro-food systems,

advancing regional food diplomacy, encouraging healthy nutrition, and fostering inclusive economic growth. It will also be supported by new legislation to improve coordination among ministries and agencies involved in food security efforts.

Anwar emphasized that under the 13th Malaysia Plan —the country's five-year national development blueprint for 2026-2030, the agricultural sector must adopt more sustainable, resilient, and technology-driven methods. The announcement followed a Cabinet Committee meeting on the National Food Security Policy, which discussed strategies to strengthen Malaysia's overall agricultural industry. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Special guidelines for handling sexual crimes against minors introduced

(tl) Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman introduced the updated Special Guidelines for Handling Sexual Crimes Against Children, which aim to improve how authorities manage cases involving minors.

First introduced in 2017, the revised guidelines focus on four key areas: ensuring ethical investigations that reduce trauma, making child-friendly court procedures through tools like video recordings and live-links, appointing legal guardians or witness support for victims, and providing ongoing psychosocial and rehabilitation support after trials.

Azalina noted that while the guidelines are not yet legally binding, they could later be formalized as mandatory procedures to strengthen protection for child victims. [Malay Mail 1]

Moreover, Azalina said that the government may table the Anti-Bullying Tribunal by December to strengthen measures against school bullying. The Cabinet has endorsed the bill's key policies, and a draft is expected by November. The tribunal will act as a quasi-judicial body addressing civil matters such as compensation, apologies, or corrective actions, rather than criminal cases, following the model of the Sexual Harassment Tribunal, which has proven effective in raising awareness and deterrence. [Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia: Prime Minister supports regulated caning at schools amid rising school violence and bullying

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told Parliament that he personally supports reinstating caning as a disciplinary measure for students but stressed that it should be strictly regulated and not allow public caning. He noted that caning, if done responsibly, could help curb misbehavior among students amid growing concerns over bullying and school violence.

However, Anwar acknowledged differing views and said the government would consult experts, including the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), before making any policy decision. Suhakam's Children's Commissioner, Farah Nini Dusuki, warned that corporal punishment risks causing harm and urged for alternative solutions.

Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek announced several immediate steps to improve school safety, such as installing CCTV cameras, increasing police patrols, and limiting students' social media use.

The debate follows a recent case in Penang where two teachers were charged with caning a student. Anwar commented that prosecutors could review the charge depending on the case's severity but stressed he could not intervene as the matter is now in the court. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Authorities crack down on online child exploitation network

(tl) Malaysian authorities have uncovered a large-scale online child sexual exploitation network, confiscating about 888,000 digital files of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in a joint operation between the police and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. The bust marked a sharp rise from the 40,000 files seized in a similar operation last December.

A total of 31 male suspects, aged between 12 and 71, were detained. Those arrested included students, teachers, engineers, and other professionals.

Investigations revealed that suspects used platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr to circulate CSAM, with some profiting from paid access via e-wallets and QR payments. In total, 82 digital devices were seized, and 29

investigation papers were opened. Seventeen suspects have been charged in court, while the rest were released on bail. [Free Malaysia Today]

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Myanmar: Election body disqualifies party chairwoman from general election

(su) The Union Election Commission (UEC) has disqualified Dr. Thet Thet Khine, chairwoman of the People's Pioneer Party (PPP), from contesting the upcoming elections for allegedly violating Section 8(d) of the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law.

The section stipulates that a candidate must be free from any improper financial obligations to the state or to any private individual. This provision is designed to ensure that candidates are not unduly influenced or indebted to external parties, thereby maintaining the integrity and independence of the electoral process.

The PPP leader, who had filed her nomination for Yangon Region No. 2 Amyotha Hluttaw constituency, was removed from the candidate list following scrutiny by the election body. The UEC said the period for appeals against disqualification had expired and that the decision was final.

Thet Thet Khine, a former National League for Democracy lawmaker and current minister in the junta administration, is among 86 out of 5,023 parliamentary candidates barred from contesting on grounds of non-compliance with electoral laws and constitutional provisions. The parliamentary elections are scheduled to begin on December 28. [Eleven Media Group]

Myanmar: Prime Minister Nyo Saw launches early election campaign

(anl) On October 25, Prime Minister Nyo Saw, a former lieutenant general and close ally of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, visited his Yangon constituency, urging locals to support the regime's vote in the upcoming general election and promising a range of development projects.

During his visit, Nyo Saw pledged vocational training programs, farmland allocations, irrigation projects, and support for poultry and pig farming—even though the official campaign period had not yet begun. His promises were widely seen as an early bid to secure support for the junta's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

Analysts noted that Nyo Saw's visit, following a similar tour by Min Aung Hlaing, amounted to coordinated campaigning for the ruling party, which is expected to dominate the polls after the junta dissolved the 2020 election-winning National League for Democracy (NLD) and other major opposition parties.

A graduate of the Defense Services Academy (23rd intake), Nyo Saw also serves as chairman of the military conglomerate Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (MEHL) and is regarded as one of Min Aung Hlaing's most trusted advisors. His candidacy continues the military tradition of retired generals contesting seats in Cocokyun under the USDP banner.

The constituency, home to fewer than 1,000 residents —mostly military families and government staff—has consistently delivered victories for the USDP. Previous representatives include former navy commander U Aye Pe (2010), ex-navy chief Thura Thet Swe (2015), and former deputy defense minister Aung Thaw, a classmate of Min Aung Hlaing, in 2020.

Other top regime figures have also begun pre-campaign activities ahead of the October 28–December 26 campaign window. Information Minister Maung Maung Ohn recently visited his Tatkon Township constituency in Naypyitaw, distributing Buddha statues, calendars, and food, while USDP leaders, including party chief Khin Yi and several retired generals, have been campaigning online. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Factory closures mount as US tariffs and junta controls hit garment sector

(su) At least six garment factories in Yangon's industrial zones have closed since August, while others have reduced operations amid declining US orders following Washington's tariff hike on Myanmar-made apparel from about 20 percent to 40 percent.

The United States, Myanmar's fourth-largest apparel market, imposed the tariff increase in August, compounding pressures from sanctions, fuel shortages, and foreign currency controls. Labor groups report that affected factories include several Chinese-owned sites in Shwepyitha, Hlaing Tharyar, and Shwe Lin Ban industrial zones.

According to the Federation of General Workers Myanmar, factory owners are downsizing rather than closing completely to avoid paying large severance

packages. Overtime hours have been cut, and layoffs are increasing as the availability of raw materials shrinks under import restrictions.

The garment industry, employing nearly 800,000 workers, operates under the Cutting, Making, and Packaging (CMP) model and remains vulnerable to international trade shifts. The Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association said in August that 56 of its 589 member factories had suspended operations, warning that more closures could follow if export demand and currency policies remain restrictive. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: HRW urges Malaysia to act on abduction of refugee family

(anl) On October 22, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on the Malaysian government to press for the release of Myanmar refugee and activist Thuzar Maung and her family, who were abducted from Kuala Lumpur in July 2023 and recently confirmed to be in Myanmar junta custody.

In July 2023, unidentified men abducted Thuzar Maung, her husband, and their three children from their home in Ampang Jaya, Kuala Lumpur. CCTV footage showed a car with fake license plates entering and leaving the compound, and all family phones were later switched off.

The UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances urged Malaysia to conduct an impartial investigation, warning that Maung's activism placed her at serious risk if returned to Myanmar. However, Malaysia later claimed no evidence of abduction and informed INTERPOL and Myanmar authorities of the family's disappearance.

On October 17, Myanmar's military regime announced it had detained Thuzar Maung and her family for "illegally re-entering" the country, citing a counterterrorism arrest warrant issued in January 2023.

HRW condemned the case as a potential act of transnational repression, urging Malaysia to reopen its investigation and demanding accountability. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: SpaceX cuts Starlink access to scam centers after AFP report

(anl) On October 22, SpaceX cut internet service to more than 2,500 Starlink devices operating in scam compounds across Myanmar, following an AFP investigation that exposed the rapid spread of the company's satellite network within the illicit industry.

Sprawling scam centers, where online fraudsters target foreigners through romance and business cons, have flourished along Myanmar's lawless border regions amid the ongoing civil conflict sparked by the 2021 military coup.

Despite a crackdown earlier this year that led to the repatriation of around 7,000 workers and Thailand's move to impose a cross-border internet blockade, AFP found that construction of new compounds continues —and that Starlink receivers have been widely installed to sustain operations.

Data from APNIC, the regional internet registry, showed that Starlink traffic surged in Myanmar between July and October, overtaking other providers. Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee has launched an investigation into Starlink's role in facilitating the centers.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that Southeast Asia's online scam industry defrauded victims of up to USD 37 billion in 2023. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: PDF members accused of abducting USDP member, killing village administrator in Mandalay Region

(su) Members of the People's Defense Force (PDF) allegedly abducted a Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) member and killed a village administrator in Nyaung-U Township, Mandalay Region, on October 16, according to junta media reports.

Authorities said that about ten PDF members entered Yamsan Village in the afternoon and abducted 69-year-old U Myint Kyaw, a local USDP member. Around the same time, a separate group of five armed men arrived in nearby Hteepu Village and shot village tract administrator U Lwin Ko at his home, accusing him of being an informant. He died from gunshot wounds.

Security forces are conducting operations to locate the abducted USDP member and apprehend those responsible for the shooting. [Eleven Media Group]

Myanmar: Junta airstrike kills two civilians in Northern Shan State

(anl) On October 20, a junta airstrike killed two civilians and injured two others in Mongngawt, a town under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in northern Shan State.

Residents reported that a military aircraft dropped two bombs, one near the town's market and another close to the old police station. The blast near the market killed a man and a woman, while two others sustained serious injuries. Several nearby houses were also damaged.

According to local monitoring groups, at least 46 civilians have been killed in airstrikes across TNLA-controlled regions since early October. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta airstrikes target Kachin Independence Army positions

(su) The Myanmar military launched airstrikes on October 22 against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, as fighting intensified around the country's key jade-mining region.

A regime Y-12 aircraft reportedly dropped around 30 bombs on KIA Battalion 6 territory near Kansi village, about 16 kilometers north of Hpakant town, according to the KIA. Local media reported that the bombardment lasted roughly half an hour. The KIA said there were no casualties and that the area had not seen ground clashes at the time of the attack.

Pro-junta channels claimed the strike targeted a KIA training outpost, reporting 30 dead and 50 injured, though these figures could not be independently verified. The airstrike followed clashes between junta and KIA troops near Seng Taung and Yumar villages earlier in the week.

The KIA and allied forces currently control 14 towns across Kachin State, including major rare-earth mining areas such as Chipwi and Pang War, and parts of northern Shan State. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Fierce clashes erupt near Naypyidaw as PDF seizes key junta bases in Bago Region

(anl) On October 20, the People's Defence Force (PDF) under the Naypyidaw Military Region Command seized several junta bases in Ywathit village, Yedashe Township, Taungoo District, Bago Region. In response, the junta launched airstrikes and artillery bombardments against PDF positions.

According to the group, PDF fighters captured the main military outpost and nearby positions on the eastern bank of the Sittaung River. The assault reportedly killed several junta troops, including Deputy Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Nyi Nyi Naing from the Air Defence Force, while two soldiers were taken prisoner. The Naypyidaw Region PDF confirmed the operation on October 21.

Yedashe, Swar, and Yenin are key strategic towns controlling access to Naypyidaw via both the old and new Yangon–Mandalay highways. The PDF noted that their capture could isolate the military's administrative capital, adding that if these towns fall, Naypyidaw will be cut off.

In an effort to retake the lost bases, the junta has reportedly deployed aircraft carrying 500-pound bombs, 120mm artillery, and paratroopers. Fighting in the area remains intense as both sides battle for control of the strategic corridor leading to Naypyidaw. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Over 1,000 fee KK Park scam hub into Thailand following military raid

(su/dql) More than 1,000 people, mostly Chinese, have fled from Myanmar into Thailand this week following a raid on the KK Park scam compound by Myanmar's military on October 24. The compound, one of Myanmar's largest cyberscam hubs, is located near the Thai border and had been operating without proper permits. Thai authorities reported that arrivals included nationals from India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and over a dozen other countries. Most of the migrants were men.

The Myanmar junta seized Starlink satellite devices during the raid, which have been widely used at such scam centers. SpaceX disabled over 2,500 Starlink terminals in Myanmar's scam compounds to prevent further illicit activity. Thai authorities in Tak province are screening arrivals to determine whether they were trafficked or voluntarily involved, with potential prosecution for illegal border crossing for those not deemed victims. Footage showed people crossing the river on foam boxes to reach Thailand, while locals

reported chaos and armed personnel during the raids. [Barron's]

Meanwhile, the military detained 151 additional foreign nationals from ten countries. The detainees are being held at an indoor sports hall in Myawaddy pending deportation, with officials citing ongoing coordination with foreign embassies. [Eleven Media Group]

Myanmar: Karen National Union rejects junta's allegations of ties to KK Park scam operation

(anl) On October 26, the Karen National Union (KNU) firmly rejected accusations by the military junta that it profited from land leases and security fees related to the KK Park online scam compound near the Thai Myanmar border.

In a statement, the KNU denounced claims made by junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Htun and "certain media outlets," which alleged that the organization was financially involved in the cyber-scam operations around Myawaddy. The KNU clarified that a 100-acre plot of land had previously been leased by the Mu La Ei Ahlin Company and Trans-Asia International Holding Group (Thailand), but that partnership was terminated in December 2022.

According to the KNU, the leased land lies about three kilometers away from the 500-acre KK Park compound, making the two sites entirely distinct. To substantiate its claim, the group released satellite imagery showing the separation and reiterated that it has "no connection to the KK Park online scam in any way."

The KNU further accused the military regime of spreading disinformation to obscure its own political, economic, and military involvement in online scam networks operating inside Myanmar. The KK Park complex has been widely reported by human rights groups and regional media as a major hub for forced-labour cyber-fraud operations, which target victims across Asia, the United States, Europe, and Australia. [Mizzima]

Philippines: Flood control scandal widens, USD 88.5 million assets frozen

(ghd) The sprawling investigation into the Philippines' flood control scandal has intensified, with the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) facing public pressure to probe high-profile figures. Calls have been made for the ICI to investigate First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos and Special Envoy Maynard Ngu, a move the Marcos administration has dismissed as a "fishing expedition." In response, the ICI stated it would only invite Araneta-Marcos if a "reliable and competent basis" is established and that it is currently working to verify a private citizen's accusations. [Inquirer1] [Inquirer2] [Inquirer3] [Inquirer4]

Amid growing calls for transparency, the ICI is drafting new rules of procedure to allow the livestreaming of future hearings. Officials clarified that these rules must be finalized before any public broadcasts can begin, correcting earlier reports that livestreaming would start next week. ICI Commissioner Alex Reyes also confirmed that recordings of past closed-door sessions will not be released. Operationally, the ICI is coordinating with the police and engineers to validate alleged "ghost projects," and it has received a formal request for assistance from a local government in Bulacan. [Inquirer5] [Inquirer6] [Inquirer7] [Inquirer8] [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

The investigation was complicated by a fire at a Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) office in Quezon City. Although the blaze was initially attributed to a short circuit, Ombudsman Jonvic Remulla publicly questioned that conclusion and has ordered the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to conduct an independent probe. DPWH officials, including Secretary Manuel Dizon, have assured the public that all crucial flood-control documents remain safe at the agency's Central Office, not at the facility that burned. [Inquirer9] [Inquirer10] [Inquirer11] [Inquirer12] [Manila Bulletin3] [Manila Bulletin4]

In separate developments, the Ombudsman has begun returning certain flood-control project cases to the justice department and confirmed that a former lawmaker is willing to testify. The Ombudsman's office and the DPWH have also identified Rep. Eric Yap as a person of interest in the ongoing probe. [Inquirer13] [Inquirer14] [Inquirer15] [Manila Bulletin5]

The financial fallout from the scandal is substantial. The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) has frozen approximately USD 88.5 million in assets linked to the case. The DPWH has also signed agreements with the AMLC and the Philippine Competition Commission to form a joint task force for recovering stolen public funds. Meanwhile, the Commission on Audit flagged approximately USD 5.27 million in additional "ghost

projects" in Bulacan and formally recommended the prosecution of the DPWH officials and contractors involved. [Inquirer16] [Inquirer17] [Inquirer18] [Manila Bulletin6] [Manila Bulletin7]

The DPWH has also filed graft and malversation charges against two contractors and several of its own officials. Secretary Dizon has asked the NBI and private business groups to conduct background checks on all DPWH executives. Separately, the Bureau of Customs announced it will auction thirteen luxury cars seized from the Discaya family, contractors who are linked to the scandal, on November 15. A civilian-led investigation into the public works scandal has also been launched. [Inquirer19] [Inquirer20] [Inquirer21] [Manila Bulletin8]

Public frustration over the scandal has continued to grow. Weekly demonstrations continue around the country, culminating in a protest where demonstrators stormed the ICI headquarters to demand accountability. [Manila Bulletin9]

Indonesia: ICC rejects former presidents Duterte's challenge, clearing path for drug war trial

(ms/ghd) Judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) have rejected former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's challenge to the court's authority, allowing his trial to proceed over alleged crimes committed during his deadly war on drugs.

Duterte, who led the Philippines from 2016 to 2022, was arrested in March and transferred to The Hague under an ICC warrant accusing him of overseeing thousands of extrajudicial killings during his anti-narcotics campaign. Human rights groups estimate that between 6,000 and 30,000 people—mostly poor Filipinos accused of drug use or dealing—were killed by police and vigilantes. The ICC has charged Duterte with crimes against humanity, including murder and persecution.

Duterte's legal team argued that the court lacks jurisdiction because the Philippines withdrew from the Rome Statute—the treaty that created the ICC—in 2019, two years before the formal investigation began. They claimed that only a full investigation, not the earlier preliminary examination, could place the case under ICC jurisdiction.

In its ruling, the court said the preliminary examination launched in 2018, while the Philippines was still a

member, was enough to bring the situation “under consideration.” Under Article 127(2) of the Rome Statute, a country’s withdrawal does not affect ongoing proceedings. The judges also noted that Manila’s cooperation in Duterte’s arrest shows continued recognition of the court’s authority.

The decision is a major setback for Duterte’s defense and a landmark for victims’ families who have long sought justice for killings during his presidency. The ICC will next decide whether there is sufficient evidence to confirm the charges and move to trial. Judges are also assessing Duterte’s claim that he is unfit to stand trial due to cognitive decline, with a medical report expected later this month. [Reuters] [Grande Pinnacle Tribune]

Philippines: Infrastructure spending slumps amidst graft probe

(ghd) Government spending on infrastructure projects contracted sharply in August, slowing disbursements as tighter scrutiny takes hold amid an expanding probe into alleged corruption within the sector. This slowdown poses a significant challenge to the country's economic growth targets.

Latest data from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) revealed that capital outlays fell by ten percent year-on-year in August to USD 1.94 billion. Within this, spending on nationally-funded infrastructure projects plummeted by nearly 22 percent to USD 1.46 billion. This brought total capital outlays for the first eight months of the year down 3.8 percent to USD 16.72 billion compared to the same period last year. Direct infrastructure spending from January to August saw a 5.6 percent decline, amounting to USD 13.75 billion.

The DBM attributed the downturn primarily to the "ongoing validation of the status of implementation, quality and completion of infrastructure projects." This increased scrutiny, following the eruption of the massive flood control scandal, has reportedly delayed the submission of progress billings by contractors and slowed down the processing of payments. Adverse weather conditions also disrupted construction activities, further contributing to the slump.

This slowdown complicates the Marcos administration's goal of achieving 5.5 to 6.5 percent economic growth this year, which relies partly on robust infrastructure spending. Economists at the University of Asia and the Pacific now project a "tepid"

5.3 percent growth in the third quarter, citing the impact of typhoons and negative sentiment from the corruption probe, though they anticipate a rebound to 5.7 percent in the final quarter as conditions potentially improve and the typhoon season ends. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Plunder cases filed against former president, senator

(ghd) Former Senator Antonio Trillanes IV has revived and updated plunder and graft charges against former President Rodrigo Duterte and Senator Christopher Go, filing the complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman on October 21. The charges accuse Duterte and Go, the former president's longtime aide, of involvement in allegedly anomalous government contracts awarded during Duterte's term.

The updated complaint reportedly covers billions of pesos' worth of infrastructure projects, particularly in the Davao region, which Trillanes says were awarded under questionable circumstances suggesting possible favoritism toward entities connected to Go's family. Media reports note that Go's family-owned construction firms, such as CLTG Builders, had previously secured several public works contracts in the area, an issue raised in earlier complaints and investigative reports.

Trillanes describes the filing as a revival and expansion of his earlier plunder complaint, incorporating additional details about alleged irregularities in public infrastructure spending during Duterte's administration. The new case seeks to hold Duterte and Go accountable under the Anti-Plunder Law and the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

While neither confirming nor denying the cited contracts and amounts in the complaint, Go welcomed the filing as an opportunity to finally address the allegations against him. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Politician couple face plunder raps over USD 10.24 million in projects

(ghd) Criminal charges for plunder and graft have been filed with the Office of the Ombudsman against Tarlac Representative Noel Rivera, his wife, Vice Mayor Evelyn Rivera, and public works department engineer Neil Farala. The complaint was filed by the anti-corruption

group United Pilipino Against Crime and Corruption (UPACC) and accuses the respondents of violating anti-graft laws, including charges of unexplained wealth and plunder.

It alleges that construction contracts worth about USD 10.24 million were awarded from 2018 to 2025 to a company allegedly owned or controlled by Rep. Rivera. The complaint also alleges that the vice mayor is a treasurer or incorporator in the same firm. Furthermore, UPACC claims that the couple secured at least thirteen contracts for public works in Tarlac, such as flood control projects and construction of health centers.

The complaint also includes charges against Farala, whom UPACC accuses of facilitating or being part of the scheme. Among the allegations are violations under the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, Unexplained Wealth, as well as administrative offenses such as grave misconduct and serious dishonesty. The respondents are facing both criminal and administrative accountability under the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: New Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao parliament speaker elected

(ghd) The Bangsamoro Parliament has elected Mohammad Yacob as its new Speaker, filling the vacancy created by the passing of the previous Speaker, Pangalian Balindong, on October 2 due to illness.

Yacob's election comes at a critical juncture for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The region's first regular parliamentary elections were postponed following a Supreme Court ruling that struck down the redistricting law and ordered new districting, directing elections to be held no later than March 31, 2026.

As Speaker, Yacob will preside over the 80-member Bangsamoro Parliament (Transition Authority) and lead its proceedings during this extended transition period. Among the chamber's key tasks will be complying with the Supreme Court's directive on redistricting and overseeing stability and legislative continuity through to the elections. [Inquirer1]

Meanwhile, a clan war erupted in the Special Geographic Area (SGA) of the BARMM, resulting in the death of a village councilman. Following the violence,

authorities intervened and successfully seized seven firearms from the area.

Clan feuds, often rooted in long-standing land disputes or political rivalries, remain a significant security challenge in parts of the BARMM. [Inquirer2]

Philippines: House Speaker reconstitutes committee on review of assets, net worth statements

(ghd) House Speaker Faustino Dy III has formally reconstituted a special committee tasked with reviewing and processing requests for the Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALNs) of members of the House of Representatives.

This move comes shortly after newly appointed Ombudsman Remulla lifted the barriers to accessing SALNs for executive branch officials and urged the legislative and judicial branches to follow suit. Speaker Dy had previously expressed the House's openness to establishing its own clear and "very liberal" rules for releasing lawmakers' SALNs.

The reconstitution of the Committee on Review and Release of SALNs is the concrete step taken by the House leadership to establish a formal process for handling such requests. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Elections commission annuls proclamation of Davao del Sur vice governor

(ghd) The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) Second Division has annulled the proclamation of Marc Cagas IV as the duly elected Vice Governor of Davao del Sur following the May 2025 elections. The ruling stemmed from a pre-proclamation controversy filed by Cagas's opponent, Omar Ranain, who questioned the validity of Cagas's election. The division sided with Ranain's petition effectively reversing Cagas's win, pending any further appeals before the COMELEC en banc or higher courts.

The annulment is closely tied to Cagas's previous graft and malversation case involving the alleged misuse of his pork barrel fund in 2008, when he served as congressman. In 2016, the Office of the Ombudsman charged Cagas with graft and malversation for

channeling USD 128 thousand of his pork barrel to NGOs without proper bidding or documentation.

In July 2022, Cagas entered into a plea-bargain agreement, admitting to lesser offenses, namely fraud against the public treasury, failure to render accounts, and falsification of public documents, in exchange for dropping the heavier graft and malversation charges.

The COMELEC division's decision voiding the proclamation took into account doubts about Cagas' eligibility arising from the pork barrel case. Ranain is now seeking formal recognition as the duly elected Vice Governor. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Anti-graft court acquits former senator, others in graft charges

(ghd/ms) The Philippines' anti-graft court, the Sandiganbayan, has acquitted former senator and current Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Juan Ponce Enrile of 15 counts of graft linked to the alleged misuse of approximately USD 2.95 million in public funds. The decision, issued on October 24, clears Enrile of all remaining corruption cases pending before the court.

The charges stemmed from the 2013 "pork barrel" scam, one of the country's largest corruption scandals, in which lawmakers were accused of diverting their Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) — a discretionary fund meant for local development projects — to nonexistent or bogus nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) controlled by businesswoman Janet Lim Napoles. Prosecutors alleged that Enrile and other officials received kickbacks in exchange for facilitating the fund transfers.

However, the Sandiganbayan ruled that the prosecution failed to prove Enrile's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The court said Enrile's endorsement of the NGOs was "merely recommendatory" and did not show "manifest partiality or evident bad faith" required under Philippine anti-graft laws. The responsibility for accrediting the NGOs and disbursing funds, the ruling noted, lay with the implementing government agencies.

This acquittal follows Enrile's previous acquittal on 2024 of a related plunder charge. In that instance, the Sandiganbayan ruled that the prosecution had not proven he received the required minimum threshold amount for a plunder conviction. While Enrile and Reyes were absolved of any civil liability in the graft cases, the court did order Napoles and several other

co-accused to jointly repay the government for the funds, totaling over USD 2.95 million, plus interest. Napoles remains incarcerated due to other convictions stemming from the pork barrel scam. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin1]

In a related charge, the Sandiganbayan has convicted former government official Gondelina Amata, Napoles, and former Senate political officer Michael Lim Benjamin for the misuse of approximately USD 247 thousand in pork barrel funds from former Senator Gregorio Honasan in 2009. The three were found guilty of graft, malversation of public funds, and malversation through falsification of public documents. The conviction stemmed from Amata signing an agreement with a bogus NGO linked to Napoles, which was created to divert the funds. [Manila Bulletin2]

Philippines: Budget deliberations continue, with Congress diverging amid scandal

(ghd) As Congress deliberates the proposed USD 114 billion national budget for 2026, the Senate and House of Representatives are taking markedly different paths. The Senate is reportedly considering an unprecedented move to approve a budget smaller than the one proposed by the executive. Senate President Vicente Sotto III described the potential reduction as a “precautionary measure”, citing concerns about alleged overpricing and budget mismanagement at the Department of Public Works and Highways, which is currently at the center of an infrastructure corruption probe. [Inquirer1]

Meanwhile, the House has quietly boosted its institutional budget by USD 170 million. Lawmakers reportedly increased their internal allocation in their version of the 2026 budget, drawing criticism from civil-society groups who say the move appears opaque and inconsistent with transparency goals. [Inquirer2]

Philippines: Ombudsman’s attempt at enforcing against senator thwarted by “secret” order

(ghd) An attempt by Ombudsman Jonvic Remulla to enforce a 2016 dismissal order against Senator Joel Villanueva was abandoned after Remulla announced the discovery of a "secret decision" from 2018 that had already exonerated the lawmaker. [Inquirer1]

The case stems from Villanueva's time as a party-list representative, when he was implicated in the alleged misuse of USD 170 thousand in pork barrel funds. In 2016, then-Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales found Villanueva administratively liable and ordered his dismissal from service. [Inquirer2] [Manila Bulletin]

On October 22, 2025, current Ombudsman Remulla announced he would formally ask Senate President Vicente Sotto III to enforce this 2016 dismissal order. Villanueva immediately decried the move, calling it "harassment and oppression" and stating that the case had already been dismissed long ago. [Inquirer3]

Just a day later, Remulla reversed his stance, explaining that his office had been "surprised" to uncover a 2018 order signed by his immediate predecessor, Samuel Martires. Remulla claimed this document was not in the regular case files and had been "kept secret," effectively stopping the 2016 dismissal from being enforced. Remulla stated that this 2018 decision, which reversed the original order and cleared Villanueva, is now final, and his office can no longer pursue the case. [Inquirer4]

However, Martires refuted Remulla's claim, issuing a statement on October 25 that the 2018 decision was "not a secret decision" and was part of the official records formally transmitted to Remulla when he took office. [Inquirer5]

Philippines: Energy department boosts host community share from energy projects

(ghd) The Department of Energy (DOE) has increased the financial benefits allocated to local communities that host power generation facilities and energy resource development projects, multiplying their direct share five-fold. This change comes through amendments to the Energy Regulations (ER) 1-94 program.

The direct financial share allocated to host communities will increase from PHP 0.005 (approximately USD 0.000086) to PHP 0.025 (approximately USD 0.00043) per kilowatt-hour based on the total electricity sales of the energy projects. This substantial increase aims to provide host local government units with greater financial resources for crucial local development projects.

These funds are intended to support initiatives such as electrification, the development of livelihood

programs, improvements in health services, and environmental enhancement projects within the host communities. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Assessment stage of funding strategies for nuclear energy push reached

(ghd) The Philippine government is advancing its plans for nuclear energy by investigating potential funding sources for these large-scale projects.

Specifically, from October 20 to 24, the Department of Energy (DOE) hosted the National Workshop on Nuclear Power Infrastructure and Financing with experts from both the public and private sectors to identify viable capital-raising methods. This initiative is part of the administration's objective to integrate nuclear power into the nation's electricity grid starting in 2032.

The DOE recognizes that financing is a major hurdle due to the massive capital and long development periods required. The workshop explored various models, including green financing and public-private partnerships. An expert from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) noted that while global interest in nuclear power is increasing, strong government involvement is crucial for financing. The Energy Secretary has also indicated that the government might start accepting applications for nuclear projects by next year. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Sovereign fund distances itself from 1MDB-linked executive

(ghd) The Maharlika Investment Corporation (MIC), which manages the Philippines' sovereign wealth fund (the Maharlika Wealth Fund), has issued a strong denial that it has any association with Patrick Mahony, the Swiss-British businessman linked to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal.

In an official statement, MIC said it "categorically denies" that Mahony has ever been engaged by MIC in any capacity — whether as advisor, consultant, affiliate or otherwise.

The 1MDB scandal involved the alleged embezzlement of billions of dollars from Malaysia's state investment fund, spawning investigations in multiple countries.

MIC's public rebuttal appears designed to reassure the public and investors of the fund's independence, integrity, and distance from any links to the scandal. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Philippines to auction idle mining assets starting November

(ghd) The Philippine government is set to auction off 50 idle mining assets, aiming to revitalize dormant sites and potentially generate revenue.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) announced the plan, which targets mining areas that have remained inactive or unproductive. The assets to be auctioned include those with cancelled or expired exploration permits, mining production agreements, and financial or technical assistance agreements. The auction process, which shall be a competitive selection process, is expected to attract new investors who can develop these sites responsibly, adhering to environmental and safety standards. For the auction, the DENR is expecting local firms, including those partnered with foreign firms, to participate.

This initiative is part of the government's effort to stimulate the mining sector while ensuring that mineral resources contribute effectively to the national economy. The auctions will be conducted in phases, starting in November. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government plans to incentives to attract electric vehicle manufacturers

(ghd) President Ferdinand Marcos' administration is reportedly planning to offer a new set of incentives aimed at attracting electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers to set up production facilities in the Philippines, thus positioning the country as a viable EV manufacturing hub. The proposed incentives would include fixed investment support and production-volume incentives.

This move is part of a broader push to nurture the country's EV manufacturing capacity, with the goal of luring global industry players, catalyzing technology transfer, and building a more robust local EV value chain.

By attracting these manufacturers, the administration hopes to boost investment, create jobs, facilitate technology transfer, and accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles domestically, contributing to both economic growth and environmental goals. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government deficit reaches six-month high

(ghd) The government's budget deficit swelled to a six-month high in September, reaching USD 4.23 billion. Nevertheless, this represents a 9.22 percent improvement compared to the deficit recorded in September of the previous year and remains below the government's USD 21.48 billion program limit for the period. The Bureau of the Treasury affirmed its commitment to fiscal discipline and stated it expects to stay within the full-year target of USD 26.6 billion.

The deficit was influenced by a six percent contraction in state revenues and a 7.5 percent decline in government expenditures. This slowdown in spending is partly attributed to the Department of Public Works and Highways tightening its scrutiny on payments to contractors amid an expanding graft probe into flood control projects.

Despite the overall drop in monthly revenue, major collection agencies reported growth. The Bureau of Internal Revenue increased its collections by 4.7 percent to USD 3.12 billion, while the Bureau of Customs saw a 5.3 percent rise to USD 1.37 billion. Analysts from BMI, a unit of the Fitch Group, noted that the spending slowdown tied to the corruption scandal makes it likely the government will meet its 5.5 percent deficit-to-GDP target for the year. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Public sector foreign loans slashed by 71 percent in third quarter

(ghd) In the third quarter of 2025, the Philippine central bank (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas or BSP) approved USD 1.10 billion in public sector foreign borrowings, a 71.1 percent drop from the roughly USD 3.81 billion cleared in the same quarter last year. Analysts suggest the sharp decline may reflect caution about potential foreign exchange losses associated with dollar-denominated debt.

Nonetheless, over the first nine months of the year, approved foreign borrowings are reported to have risen by 16.1 percent, amounting to USD 12.28 billion, compared to USD 10.58 billion in the same period in 2024.

As mandated by law, all public sector foreign loans require approval from the BSP's Monetary Board to help safeguard the country's external debt exposure. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government nears borrowing cap amid surge in domestic loans

(ghd) The Philippine government's borrowing in the first nine months of the year has reached approximately USD 40.85 billion, bringing it close to its revised full-year ceiling of USD 44.25 billion. This nine-month total, which is 4.1 percent higher than the same period last year, already represents 92.1 percent of the entire 2025 borrowing plan.

This increase is primarily driven by a significant surge in domestic borrowing, which grew by 9.2 percent to USD 33.36 billion. This was heavily influenced by a large issuance of retail treasury bonds in August. Domestic debt now accounts for nearly 82 percent of all financing, exceeding the government's 80 percent target. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: President pledges upgrades for coast guard

(ghd) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has pledged major upgrades for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) as part of efforts to bolster maritime security amid escalating tensions with China in the South China Sea.

Marcos said the government would invest in new ships, aircraft, and advanced communication systems to enhance the PCG's surveillance and patrol capabilities. He also promised improvements in personnel welfare, including better training programs, logistics, and facilities. Planned infrastructure projects include a PCG General Hospital, a Maritime Law Enforcement Training Center in Misibis, Albay, and a First Responder and Nursing Service Facility.

The announcement comes as the Philippines continues to face frequent confrontations with Chinese vessels in disputed waters, particularly around Second Thomas Shoal and Scarborough Shoal, where Chinese coast

guard and militia ships have reportedly engaged in aggressive maneuvers against Philippine vessels.

Marcos has vowed to defend Philippine sovereignty and strengthen alliances with partners such as the United States, Japan, and Australia to counter China's expansive maritime claims. The latest pledge underscores his administration's strategy of investing in coast guard modernization and international cooperation to ensure freedom of navigation and protect Filipino fishermen operating in contested areas. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Armed forces chief vows to uphold chain of command amidst destabilization attempts

(ghd) Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. vowed that the military will protect the Constitution and the duly constituted authorities. This commitment comes in response to calls from some groups urging the military to intervene over alleged corruption in government infrastructure projects.

Brawner warned that any military intervention, such as a coup d'etat or withdrawal of support, would destabilize the country, damage the economy, and harm its international standing. He insisted the AFP remains "solid, professional," and non-partisan, and while soldiers share the public's frustration with corruption, he urged citizens not to drag the armed forces into politics.

Additionally, Brawner stated that the Philippine National Police is already studying possible charges against retired generals and other individuals who have been influencing the military to defect. [Manila Bulletin]

Singapore: Competition watchdog seeks feedback on merger, settlement reforms

(ms) The Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCS) has opened public consultation on proposed updates to streamline merger reviews and revise settlement rules for anti-competitive cases.

The changes would introduce a fast-track review process for mergers unlikely to raise competition

concerns and a new settlement framework offering larger discounts and clearer appeal procedures.

CCS said the reforms aim to cut review times, reduce compliance costs, and enhance regulatory clarity. The consultation runs until November 17, following the commission's periodic review of the Competition Act. [Reuters]

Singapore: Former Citibank banker jailed over USD 2.3 billion money-laundering scandal

(ms) Singapore has sentenced former Citibank wealth manager Wang Qiming to 24 months in prison for his role in the city state's largest-ever money-laundering case, involving over USD 2.3 billion in illicit funds.

Wang pleaded guilty to four of 10 charges, including forging documents and obstructing justice. Prosecutors said he "flagrantly breached" his duties by helping conceal the movement of illicit funds despite being fully aware of anti-money-laundering procedures. His defence argued that he did not personally profit and that Citibank suffered no direct losses.

Another banker, Liu Kai of Julius Baer Group, is expected to plead guilty later this week. Both are the only financial professionals charged in connection with the scandal, which saw 10 foreign nationals jailed and deported in 2023.

The case has intensified scrutiny of Singapore's banking safeguards as the financial hub seeks to attract more global wealth. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore: Government plans energy expansion to meet growing industrial needs

(ms) Singapore's power demand is expected to grow faster over the next decade as the city-state expands its high-tech industries, electrifies transport, and develops new low-carbon energy projects, according to the Energy Market Authority (EMA).

EMA Chief Executive Puah Kok Keong told Reuters that electricity consumption will rise between 2 and 5 percent annually through 2035, up from 1.9 percent over the past decade. Growth will be driven by

advanced manufacturing, digital services, and electric vehicles, as well as soaring power use from data centers and air conditioning.

To meet the increase, Singapore plans to import about 6 gigawatts of low-carbon power by 2035, equivalent to roughly one-third of its expected electricity needs. The country currently relies on natural gas for over 95 percent of generation but aims to diversify through renewable imports and domestic solar projects.

As part of this strategy, the government announced that 300 hectares on Jurong Island will be set aside for renewable energy facilities and low-carbon fuel production. Another 20 hectares will host a new data center park capable of supporting up to 700 megawatts of capacity, powered partly by sustainable sources such as biomethane and hydrogen-ready power plants.

“Cross-border electricity projects are complex, but essential for the region’s energy transition,” Keong said. Singapore expects hydropower imports from Laos to begin soon and power imports from Indonesia by 2028.

The moves reinforce Singapore’s goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 while maintaining energy security in a fast-growing digital economy. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [W.Media]

Singapore: Core inflation rises to 0.4 percent in September, exceeding forecasts

(ms) Singapore’s core inflation edged up to 0.4 percent year-on-year in September, above economists’ expectations and up from 0.3 percent in August, official data from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) showed on September 23.

The increase was mainly driven by higher prices for retail goods and personal items, though overall inflation pressures remain subdued. Headline inflation, which includes private transport and accommodation costs, rose to 0.7 percent, up from 0.5 percent the previous month.

The pickup in prices comes amid a rise in car costs and a modest uptick in food and service inflation, while electricity and gas prices continued to decline. MAS and MTI projected core inflation to average around 0.5

percent in 2025, rising gradually to between 0.5 and 1.5 percent in 2026.

Authorities noted that imported costs are easing but warned that geopolitical tensions and supply shocks could still cause short-term price spikes. The central bank left its monetary policy unchanged earlier this month, maintaining a cautious stance amid low inflation and steady domestic demand. [Channel News Asia] [Reuters]

Singapore: City-State becomes net importer of jet fuel as exports drop sharply

(ms) Singapore turned into a net importer of jet fuel for the week ending October 22, as aviation fuel imports from China surged while exports fell sharply, government data showed.

Exports of jet fuel dropped 67 percent week-on-week, with most shipments bound for Indonesia and Australia. The increase in imports, driven largely by Chinese supply, pushed the city-state into a net import position — a rare development for Asia's largest oil trading and refining hub.

Singapore usually serves as a key exporter of refined fuels, with refineries operated by ExxonMobil, Shell, and Chevron producing a consistent surplus for regional markets. Analysts said the reversal was likely temporary, caused by refinery maintenance that cut local output and forced fuel distributors to rely more on imported supplies.

Meanwhile, diesel and gasoil net exports slipped 13 percent, with imports mainly from Malaysia and Thailand and exports directed to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar.

Traders said the short-term shift underscores Singapore's role as a balancing point in regional energy trade, where supply disruptions or maintenance cycles can swiftly alter trade flows. [Reuters] [The Business Times]

Singapore: Strong demand for public housing persists amid efforts to cool market and ensure long-term affordability

(ms/st) Singapore's latest public housing launch has underscored the city-state's persistent housing demand, with 31,095 applications submitted for just over 9,100 apartments, according to National Development Minister Chee Hong Tat. The figure — roughly three times the available units — highlights continued competition for affordable homes despite higher interest rates and an expanded government housing pipeline.

Analysts say the trend reflects broader challenges in Singapore's housing market, where resale flat prices have climbed for nearly four consecutive years, driven by limited supply during the pandemic and strong household formation. While prices have stabilized in recent quarters, affordability pressures remain, especially for younger buyers.

The government has responded with a series of measures since 2023, including accelerated flat construction, new financing options for first-time buyers, and revised eligibility rules allowing a broader range of applicants to purchase public housing. These policies have helped moderate application rates compared with 2024 but have not significantly dampened demand.

Demand remains strongest for centrally located projects and larger flats, where competition continues to outpace suburban developments. Economists say this reflects both urban lifestyle preferences and expectations of long-term value appreciation.

Chee said the next public housing exercise, scheduled for February 2026, will release around 4,600 new units along with 3,000 previously unsold flats, part of a broader plan to keep housing supply ahead of demand. [CNA]

Singapore: DBS Group Research projects economy to double by 2040, currency to reach parity with USD

(st) Singapore's economy is projected to more than double by 2040, with its gross domestic product (GDP) expected to reach between USD 1.2 trillion and USD 1.4 trillion, according to a forecast by DBS Group Research. The report anticipates average annual real GDP growth of 2.3 percent over the next 15 years, faster than most advanced economies, driven by productivity gains, steady capital inflows, and Singapore's continued current account surplus. DBS also expects the Singapore dollar to reach parity with

the U.S. dollar by 2040, citing disciplined policy and the city-state's position as a regional financial haven.

The bank said the benchmark Straits Times Index could climb to 10,000 points, extending its recent rally after surpassing 4,000 in 2025. Singapore's capital market development efforts, including a SGD 5 billion (USD 3.86 billion) initiative by the Monetary Authority of Singapore to enhance liquidity in small- and mid-cap stocks, are expected to further support long-term growth. [Reuters]

Singapore: New cybersecurity, AI, and quantum governance initiatives at global cyber summit unveiled

(ms/st) Singapore has announced a comprehensive suite of new initiatives to strengthen cybersecurity governance and prepare for emerging digital technologies, including agentic artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing, following high-level discussions at the Singapore International Cyber Week (SICW).

At the summit, Digital Development and Information Minister Josephine Teo revealed three key measures: updated Cyber Security Agency (CSA) guidelines for securing AI systems, a new intelligence-sharing framework with major technology companies, and the introduction of two quantum safety resources — the *Quantum Readiness Index* and the *Quantum-Safe Handbook* — now open for public consultation. These initiatives are designed to help governments and businesses anticipate risks linked to AI autonomy and post-quantum encryption vulnerabilities.

Teo stressed that while agentic AI can transform public services and cybersecurity operations, it also raises new questions about accountability, transparency, and human oversight. "Humans remain ultimately responsible for how these technologies are deployed," she said, emphasizing that governance must evolve "practically and collaboratively" alongside innovation.

Complementing the national agenda, Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan called for greater international cooperation to help developing nations strengthen digital resilience. He warned that cybersecurity "is only as strong as its weakest link" and urged advanced economies and tech firms to support states with limited infrastructure and expertise.

The SICW gathered policymakers, diplomats, and industry leaders from over 100 countries, all agreeing

that public-private partnerships are vital to combating escalating threats such as state-sponsored attacks, ransomware, and data breaches. Singapore also reaffirmed its commitment to regional and global coordination, deepening collaboration through ASEAN frameworks and partnerships with Microsoft, Google, Amazon Web Services, and TRM Labs to standardize safety protocols and share AI-driven cyber intelligence.

As Singapore positions itself as a global hub for digital trust and governance, the twin focus on immediate cybersecurity readiness and forward-looking AI and quantum frameworks reflects the city-state's ambition to remain a leader in secure, responsible technology development across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. . [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Moring Post 2] [The Straits Times]

Thailand: Passing of Queen Sirikit closes a defining chapter in royal diplomacy and nation-building

(bk/lm) Thailand's Queen Sirikit Kitiyakara, The Queen Mother and widow of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), passed away in Bangkok on October 24 at the age of 93 after treatment for a bloodstream infection. She had been under continuous medical care since 2019 for chronic health conditions. Her declining health after a 2012 stroke gradually removed her from public view, but she remained an enduring figure of reverence and continuity for many Thais.

Her son, King Maha Vajiralongkorn has ordered full royal funeral rites, with her remains to be enshrined at the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall in the Grand Palace. The government has declared an extensive mourning period: civil servants and state officials will wear black for one year, flags will be flown at half-mast for 30 days, and entertainment and public celebrations will be restricted for a month. [The Nation] [Thai Enquirer]

Queen Sirikit was a central figure in Thailand's postwar modernization and Cold War diplomacy. Alongside King Bhumibol, she helped project Thailand's image as a stable, Western-aligned monarchy at a time when communism was spreading across Southeast Asia. Her highly publicized state visits in the 1950s and 1960s—initiated under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat—established Thailand's royal family as global ambassadors and soft power symbols.

Beyond diplomacy, Queen Sirikit played a key developmental and cultural role at home. Through the Foundation for the Promotion of Supplementary

Occupations and Related Techniques (SUPPORT), she advanced women's economic empowerment and the preservation of Thai crafts, particularly silk weaving and rural handicrafts. Her initiatives tied the monarchy closely to grassroots livelihoods and national identity, reinforcing its legitimacy during periods of political turbulence. [Nikkei Asia]

Thailand: March 2026 election to coincide with dual referendums on charter reform and border MoUs

(lm) Thailand's Election Commission (EC) and Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul have agreed in principle to hold the next general election on March 29, 2026, together with two national referendums — one on constitutional reform and another on whether to revoke or retain the Thai–Cambodian border memorandums of understanding (MoUs) signed in 2000 and 2001. The EC estimates that holding all votes simultaneously will cost about THB 9 billion (USD 243 million), compared to more than THB 10 billion (USD 270 million) if held separately.

The decision follows Anutin's political deal with the People's Party (PP), under which his Bhumjaithai Party must dissolve parliament by the end of January and call an election within four months of taking office. Under the new Referendum Act, Thais living overseas will also be able to participate for the first time. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

At the same time, the parliamentary committee reviewing three constitutional amendment bills has been authorized to amend the drafts to ensure compliance with the Constitutional Court's earlier ruling, which prohibits any changes undermining Thailand's unity or the monarchy's role. Lawmakers selected the PP-sponsored draft as the main version under review, which envisions a Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) of 35 drafters elected by parliament from a pool of 70 candidates chosen by voters, supported by a 100-member advisory council elected directly by the public. Critics warn the model could violate the Court's decision by not adequately safeguarding Chapters 1 and 2 of the constitution, which define Thailand as an indivisible kingdom under a constitutional monarchy. [Bangkok Post 3]

The second referendum — on MoU 43 (2000) and MoU 44 (2001) — comes amid renewed nationalist pressure following border clashes and artillery exchanges along the Cambodian frontier. These MoUs, signed under the Chuan Leekpai and Thaksin Shinawatra governments

respectively, have long served as frameworks for bilateral negotiations over disputed land and maritime boundaries. Nationalist groups have urged their revocation, arguing that alleged Cambodian incursions violate the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. [AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]

Thailand: Deputy finance minister resigns amid scam-linked scandal following Western crackdown

(lm) Thailand's Deputy Finance Minister Vorapak Tanyawong has resigned after being implicated in transnational scam networks operating across Southeast Asia — a controversy erupting in the wake of a U.S.–UK-led crackdown on Cambodia's Prince Holding Group, which exposed a vast network of cyberfraud, forced labor, and cryptocurrency-based money laundering. The Western operation, which seized USD 15 billion in Bitcoin and indicted Prince Group chairman Chen Zhu (Chen Zhi), explicitly identified Thailand as a logistical and financial hub, drawing the kingdom into global scrutiny [see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]. [Bangkok Post 1]

Vorapak, a former Krungthai Bank CEO brought into Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's cabinet to stabilize economic governance, resigned one day after Anutin demanded a written explanation for his alleged links to scam networks. The scandal erupted after the investigative outlet *Whale Hunting* published corporate filings showing that Vorapak's wife received USD 2.94 million in cryptocurrency from a criminal network directed by Benjamin Mauerberger (also known as Ben Smith) — the same network Vorapak had just been appointed to investigate. The documents also revealed that the buyer behind the transfer was Li Hang, a senior executive at KuCoin, the cryptocurrency exchange that pleaded guilty to criminal money-laundering charges earlier in October. [Whale Hunting 1]

According to *Whale Hunting*, these transactions formed part of a USD 24 million pipeline that moved illicit funds through Singapore-registered shell companies to acquire stakes in Thai finance firms — effectively giving Mauerberger's network control over parts of the financial sector, including the 2021 management buy-out of Finansia Syrus Securities, a Thai brokerage firm. Vorapak insists the deal was a legitimate, bank-financed acquisition and denied any involvement with BIC Group, a Cambodia-based financial conglomerate chaired by Yim Leak, a close associate of former prime minister Hun Sen, which has been repeatedly linked by

investigators to high-risk financial operations serving scam compounds in Cambodia and Laos. [Whale Hunting 2]

The scandal has since widened to include Deputy Prime Minister and Agriculture Minister Thamanat Prompow, a veteran political operator and prolific coalition broker, who has also faced parliamentary scrutiny over alleged connections to Benjamin Mauerberger (also known as Ben Smith), a South African-Cambodian financier accused of orchestrating "pig-butchering" scams. While no official charges have been filed, media reports and parliamentary panels have flagged Thamanat's links to Mauerberger, prompting a formal summons by the House Committee on State Security and a high-profile defamation suit initiated by Mauerberger against a Thai MP. Thamanat has strongly denied any wrongdoing, calling the allegations "political attacks." [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Rare earth deal with U.S. sparks domestic pushback amid geopolitical balancing

(lm) Thailand's new memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the United States on critical minerals, signed on October 26 during the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, has drawn domestic criticism over fears that it could draw the country deeper into the U.S.–China rivalry for control over rare earth resources.

The agreement, endorsed by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and U.S. President Donald Trump, establishes a framework for cooperation on the exploration, investment, and processing of rare earth and other critical minerals such as tungsten and tin—key inputs for electric vehicles, defense technologies, and renewable energy systems. It forms part of Washington's broader strategy to secure non-Chinese supply chains after Beijing expanded export controls on rare earth materials earlier this month. The deal complements a U.S.–Malaysia accord signed at the same summit and follows an USD 8.5 billion U.S.–Australia framework announced earlier in October.

While the U.S. views the pact as a step toward "supply chain diversification and resilience," Thailand's opposition parties have voiced unease about its economic and strategic implications. Members of the Democrat Party and the People's Party argued that certain provisions could allow the U.S. preferential investment access to Thai mineral assets and privileged information on resource deposits. They

warned that such terms risk compromising national control over strategic resources and alienating China, which remains Thailand's largest trading partner.

Prime Minister Anutin responded that the MOU is non-binding and merely signals an intent to explore potential cooperation within existing legal frameworks. He said Thailand can withdraw if the arrangement proves unfavorable and that it does not alter the country's commitment to maintaining balanced relations with both Washington and Beijing. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Crucially, the rare-earth debate unfolds amid a heated national dispute over Thailand's boundary and resource-sharing memoranda with Cambodia. Last month, Prime Minister Anutin confirmed plans to hold a referendum on whether to cancel the two long-standing MoUs from 2000 and 2001, which regulate land-border demarcation and maritime resource cooperation. The referendum, expected to coincide with the 2026 general election, underscores the political sensitivity surrounding foreign agreements perceived to touch national sovereignty.

Thailand: Pheu Thai faces post-Shinawatra reckoning amid leadership vacuum and declining influence

(lm) Thailand's once-dominant Pheu Thai Party faces an existential turning point following the resignation of former Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra as party leader and the continuing imprisonment of her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, the party's founder and enduring power broker. The dual crises have exposed deep fractures within the movement and forced a reckoning over its identity, strategy, and future relevance ahead of the March 2026 general election.

Paetongtarn, removed from office in August by the Constitutional Court for an ethical violation related to her government's handling of the Cambodia border conflict and leaked communication with Cambodian leader Hun Sen, said her resignation was intended to enable a "revamp and rebuild" of the party. She remains head of the "Pheu Thai family," signaling continued influence despite formally stepping aside. Her exit came after the party's failure to retain power when the Bhumjaithai Party, led by Anutin Charnvirakul, formed a new coalition government in September 2025. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Pheu Thai is set to elect a new leader on October 31, with four contenders under consideration—Chaturon

Chaisaeng, a veteran reformist from the original Thai Rak Thai governments; Julapun Amornvivat, a Chiang Mai MP and son of former party leader Sompong Amornvivat; Cholnan Srikaew, a physician and former public health minister who briefly led the party after its 2023 coalition compromise; and Sutin Klungsang, a former defense minister known for his links to both the party's provincial networks and the security establishment. None of the candidates belong to the Shinawatra family, underscoring an attempt to project renewal and distance from dynastic politics. [Bangkok Post 3]

The party has meanwhile set a goal of winning at least 200 parliamentary seats in the 2026 election—a target widely regarded as aspirational given its declining support base, internal divisions, and credibility challenges following its controversial 2023 coalition with conservative forces. Analysts view the target as an attempt to project confidence and revive morale among supporters, but note that the party's prospects depend on its ability to modernize, appeal to younger and urban voters, and demonstrate independence from the Shinawatra legacy while retaining its strongholds in northern and northeastern Thailand. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thaksin, 76, who returned from exile in 2023 and received a royal pardon reducing his eight-year sentence to one year, remains both a unifying and polarizing figure. His decision to serve time—after previously exploiting medical exemptions to avoid full incarceration—has been interpreted as part of a longer-term bid to reestablish control over the party. However, analysts note that his once-powerful populist appeal has waned, with aging supporters and growing skepticism among younger voters. [Nikkei Asia]

Thailand: Conservative opposition outlines new policy agenda to revive support before 2026 polls

(lm) Thailand's Democrat Party, the country's oldest conservative political force, has unveiled a new policy agenda centered on economic recovery, anti-corruption and scam prevention, and restoring Thailand's international competitiveness. The initiative comes as part of an effort to rebuild the party's standing ahead of the 2026 general election under its newly reappointed leader Abhisit Vejjajiva, a former prime minister.

At a policy workshop chaired by deputy leader Korn Chatikavanij, the party emphasized three "ready-to-

implement" priorities: boosting domestic economic growth through innovation and entrepreneurship, tightening oversight against scams and graft, and positioning Thailand as a stronger regional actor. The new executive board combines veteran members with a younger generation — including Gardee Liaopairoj (digital policy), Rudklao Intawong Suwankiri (children and women's affairs), and Werapong Prapha (economic strategy) — in what party strategists describe as a bid to modernize the party's image.

The Democrat Party, which once dominated Bangkok and the South, has suffered steep electoral losses in the past decade, dropping to 25 parliamentary seats in the 2023 election. The leadership now aims to reconnect with urban middle-class voters through data-based policy design and outreach via social media influencers. However, the revival effort remains constrained by lingering factional divisions between reformist allies of Abhisit and groups loyal to previous leaders Chalermchai Sri-on and Dech-it Khaothong.

Critics have dismissed the leadership change as "old wine in an old bottle," questioning whether the party can reinvent itself after years of decline. In response, Abhisit has framed his comeback as an appeal for political integrity, urging voters "tired of politics as usual" to rally behind a renewed platform rooted in principle-based governance. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Former Senate candidate sues Election Commission over stalled collusion probe

(lm) A former Senate reserve candidate has filed a lawsuit with the Central Criminal Court for Corruption and Misconduct Cases against all seven members of Thailand's Election Commission (EC), accusing them of deliberately delaying an investigation into alleged collusion among Senate candidates from last year's upper-house election.

The plaintiff, Akkarawat Phongthanachalitkul, alleged that the EC's creation of subcommittee No. 36 was used to stall the probe for more than a year, undermining transparency and public confidence in the electoral process. He claimed the commissioners' inaction constitutes malfeasance under Thailand's Criminal Code Sections 83, 91, and 157, as well as Section 172 of the 2018 Organic Act on Anti-Corruption.

The court has accepted the complaint for preliminary review and set a hearing for November 4 to determine whether the case will proceed to trial. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Activists urge lawmakers to expand amnesty bills to include royal defamation offences

(lm) The People's Amnesty Network, a civil society coalition advocating for broader political reconciliation and legal reform, has urged parliament to expand the scope of the three political amnesty bills currently under House deliberation to include offences under Sections 110 and 112 of the Criminal Code, which concern acts of violence or insults against the monarchy.

Network representative Natchanon Pairoj submitted the appeal to parliament, arguing that the exclusion of these sections from all three bills—proposed by the United Thai Nation Party, the Thai Teachers for People Party, and the ruling Bhumjaithai Party—creates double standards that undermine efforts toward national reconciliation. Natchanon, who received a two-year prison sentence earlier this year for a Section 112 conviction, said genuine reconciliation is impossible if amnesty applies only to selective political offences.

Several lawmakers have reportedly filed reserved opinions and proposed amendments to include the royal defamation provisions during committee review. The opposition People's Party (PP) and Pheu Thai Party have both signaled that they will take the network's appeal into consideration during further deliberations on the consolidated "Social Peace Promotion Bill." [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Interior Ministry urged to probe ultranationalist activist's foundation amid financial scrutiny

(lm) Thailand's Interior Ministry, led by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul in his concurrent role as interior minister, has come under pressure to investigate the Gun Jompalang Chuai Su Foundation, amid mounting questions over the entity's legality and financial management. The foundation, linked to nationalist activist Guntouch Pongpaiboonwet (widely known as *Gun Jompalang*), is accused of possible proxy control, opaque financial operations, and irregularities in

donations and asset declarations. Prominent lawyer Decha Kittivittayanan has urged authorities to verify whether Guntouch, who is not among the registered board members, exerts de facto control over the foundation — a violation that could lead to its dissolution and state seizure of its assets.

At a press conference on October 24, Guntouch presented financial statements showing THB 207 million (USD 5.8 million) in total receipts, THB 117 million (USD 3.3 million) in expenditures, and THB 90.17 million (USD 2.5 million) in remaining assets. He admitted to administrative errors during registration, including a clause naming the Thamanat Prompow Foundation—linked to Deputy Prime Minister and Agriculture Minister Thamanat Prompow—as the beneficiary if the foundation were dissolved. Both Guntouch and Thamanat denied any political or financial relationship, asserting that the clause has since been removed. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The controversy coincides with a separate corruption scandal involving Thamanat, who has been drawn into parliamentary scrutiny over alleged links to transnational scam financier Benjamin Mauerberger (alias Ben Smith). Mauerberger's network is at the center of a U.S.–UK-led crackdown on cyberfraud and money laundering that has already forced the resignation of Deputy Finance Minister Vorapak Tanyawong, accused of financial entanglements with Cambodia-based scam operators. While Thamanat has not been charged, he faces a House Committee summons and growing public pressure following revelations of his connections to figures named in the same investigation. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Over 200 police officers, including ex-chief, face disciplinary action linked to online gambling kickbacks

(bk/lm) Thailand's Police Complaints Review Board (PCRB) has found grounds to pursue disciplinary action against former national police chief Pol Gen Torsak Sukvimol and more than 200 officers for alleged kickbacks connected to the so-called BNK Master online gambling network. The decision, issued on October 22, follows a seven-month interagency investigation that began after a petition filed by celebrity lawyer Sittra Biabungkerd in March 2024.

The BNK Master network—exposed in late 2023—was one of Thailand's largest online gambling syndicates, operating transnationally through proxy websites and

cryptocurrency transactions. It has been linked to organized crime groups in neighboring countries and to corruption within Thai law enforcement, prompting a sweeping internal crackdown in 2024.

Investigators reviewed extensive financial records suggesting that money from the BNK Master network was funneled through intermediaries and temple donations to police officials, though no direct transfers to Torsak's personal accounts were found. The accused officers will now be allowed to submit written defenses before the Royal Thai Police determines disciplinary outcomes. [Bangkok Post] [The Nation]

The ruling has reignited Thailand's most consequential police power struggle — the rivalry between Torsak and Surachate "Big Joke" Hakparn, who were long regarded as representing opposing factions within the force. When Torsak was appointed national police chief in late 2023, Surachate, then his deputy and widely seen as the senior candidate, was sidelined amid intense internal maneuvering. Their feud escalated into mutual allegations of corruption and loyalty to rival political camps, forcing then–Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to intervene publicly.

In March 2024, Surachate was dismissed from service over alleged ties to online gambling and money-laundering operations, while Torsak remained in office and oversaw the internal probes that cleared his own command structure. His retirement in September 2024 appeared to end the affair — until the PCRB's new decision effectively reverses the balance, placing Torsak's network under formal scrutiny.

Thailand: State Railway expands land recovery in Buriram province amid revived corruption-linked dispute

(lm) The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) has filed 15 new lawsuits to reclaim additional plots in the Khao Kradong area of Buriram province, escalating its long-running legal campaign to reassert control over land it considers part of the national railway corridor. The new filings, submitted to the Buriram Provincial Court on October 24, target individuals and companies accused of commercial occupation without authorization and follow earlier mid-October petitions covering 11 other plots. [Bangkok Post]

The SRT's move deepens a politically sensitive case involving over 5,000 rai (about 8 square kilometers) of disputed land, some of which overlaps with properties linked to Buriram's sports and tourism zone. The

conflict traces back to overlapping title deeds issued by the Department of Lands (DoL) despite the area's classification as railway property under a royal decree from the reign of King Rama V. In 2021, the Supreme Administrative Court confirmed the land's state ownership and ordered revocation of private deeds, but implementation stalled after the DoL declined to act on the order.

The dispute has broader political implications. Investigations by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) previously identified irregularities tied to local patronage networks and corporate developments associated with the Chidchob family, the power base of the Bhumjaithai Party of Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. The SRT's renewed filings come after control of the Interior Ministry—responsible for the DoL—shifted back to Anutin earlier this year, reigniting scrutiny over how land governance and political influence intersect in Buriram. [AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]

In parallel, SRT Asset Co., a subsidiary of the railway agency, has begun drafting lease agreements to regularize the status of 35 villagers whose land-use certificates were revoked in earlier court rulings. The SRT said it aims to balance community stability with protection of state assets, though residents have appealed for lower rents amid uncertainty over future eviction risks. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Conservationists warn proposed laws could grant de facto amnesty for forest encroachment

(lm) Environmental organizations have launched a public campaign opposing two draft laws that they say would effectively legalize past and future forest encroachment by granting sweeping amnesty provisions. The Kasetsart University Forestry Alumni Society, the National Parks Association of Thailand, and the Love Thailand Network began an online petition on October 27, drawing around 10,000 signatures on the first day.

The groups argue that the bills—framed as reforms to help poor settlers facing encroachment charges—are written so broadly that they would also shield politically connected investors and business figures who have illegally occupied or exploited state forest land. The absence of a time limit for amnesty and the expanded scope to all types of encroached state land have heightened fears that the laws would dismantle

Thailand's forest protection framework and encourage new encroachment.

Critics further warn that the legislation may breach the Constitution and the Organic Act on Anti-Corruption (B.E. 2561) by allowing Parliament to override judicial decisions and weaken accountability. The bills are now being reviewed by a special parliamentary committee chaired by Pol. Col. Tawee Sodsong, leader of the Prachachat Party, with deliberations expected to conclude by the end of October. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Public urges urgent curriculum reform as education gaps widen

(lm) A nationwide NIDA Poll–Thailand Education Partnership (TEP) survey shows that a majority of Thais view Thailand's education system as outdated and disconnected from real-world needs, urging the government to modernize the curriculum as its top priority.

Conducted between October 17 and 21 among 1,310 respondents across all regions and demographics, the survey found 49 percent identified an outdated curriculum as the leading problem, followed closely by the lack of practical skills training (48 percent) and concerns over school safety (39 percent). Other concerns included unequal school quality, hidden costs in "free education," and teachers' excessive administrative workloads.

When asked what the government should prioritize, 44 percent of respondents called for curriculum modernization and a stronger focus on practical learning, while a similar share urged reductions in education costs to ensure genuinely free schooling through upper secondary level. Roughly 38 percent emphasized the need to improve work-related skills and experience, and 36 percent called for equal access to quality education nationwide.

Public confidence in the new government's ability to fix the education crisis remains mixed: nearly 31 percent said they were "worried but hopeful," while a quarter expressed no confidence that reforms would materialize. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Finance Ministry unveils plan to tackle small-scale bad debt through state asset managers

(lm) Thailand's Finance Ministry is preparing to present a new debt-restructuring plan to the cabinet aimed at addressing non-performing loans (NPLs) held by roughly 3.8 million small-scale borrowers, with a combined debt value of THB 120 billion (USD 3.2 billion). The initiative targets individuals owing less than THB 100,000 (USD 2,700) each and forms part of the government's broader effort to reduce household debt, one of five key policy priorities to be implemented within four months.

Under the proposal, the government would purchase bad debts from commercial banks and non-bank lenders and transfer them to state-owned asset management companies (AMCs)—notably Ari AMC and Sukhumvit Asset Management—for rehabilitation. The first batch, valued at THB 60–70 billion (USD 1.6–1.9 billion), is expected to be acquired for about THB 10 billion (USD 270 million), funded from the remaining THB 26 billion (USD 700 million) under the government's "Khun Soo Rao Chuay" (You Fight, We Help) debt relief program. Financial institutions have already provisioned for these losses.

Of the total bad debt, about 1.4 million borrowers owe THB 35 billion (USD 940 million) to commercial banks, while 2.4 million borrowers owe THB 85 billion (USD 2.3 billion) to non-bank institutions. The plan will allow debtors to repay according to capacity, with extended repayment periods to lower monthly instalments.

Separately, the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) announced a parallel restructuring scheme for elderly borrowers aged 70 and above, involving roughly 28,000 debtors with total liabilities of THB 5.5 billion (USD 150 million). The BAAC is exploring debt-transfer options, partial haircuts, and inheritance-based repayment mechanisms.

According to the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), Thailand's household debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 87.4 percent in the first quarter of 2025, marginally down from the previous year due to tighter lending standards. The NESDC has warned that stricter credit access risks driving borrowers toward informal lending channels, especially among younger consumers increasingly reliant on "buy now, pay later" schemes. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Flooding continues across 15 provinces as Central Plain remains most affected

(lm) Widespread flooding persists across 15 provinces in Thailand, with water levels slowly receding in most areas but still disrupting daily life across the Central Plain and parts of the North and Northeast.

The Central region remains hardest hit, particularly Ayutthaya, where more than 54,000 households remain affected. Other provinces still under partial inundation include Uthai Thani, Chai Nat, Sing Buri, Ang Thong, Suphan Buri, Pathum Thani, Nonthaburi, and Nakhon Pathom, though floodwaters have generally stabilized or begun to recede.

In the North, flooding has eased in Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Phichit, and Nakhon Sawan, while in the Northeast, Ubon Ratchathani and Udon Thani continue to experience high water levels in several districts. Authorities reported localized road damage, particularly along the Wang Thong River in Phitsanulok, where riverbank erosion has caused collapses.

The Meteorological Department has warned that rainfall is likely to increase in northern and upper provinces from October 28 to November 2, prolonging recovery efforts, while conditions in the southern region are expected to gradually improve. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Southern security forces investigate arms smuggling and rail bombing near Malaysia border

(lm) Thai security authorities are investigating two separate incidents highlighting ongoing instability in the country's southern border provinces near Malaysia, an area long affected by insurgent activity and illicit arms flows.

On October 23, a man was arrested in Pattani province for allegedly mailing 36 grenade launcher rounds from Narathiwat—a southern border province and a core conflict zone in Thailand's Deep South—to Tak province. The Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) said the parcel, intercepted by a logistics company, contained 40mm ammunition typically used in M79 grenade launchers. The suspect reportedly confessed to arranging the shipment through social media contacts using fake identities and prepaid phone numbers. Authorities said the ammunition did not originate from army stock and are investigating the supply chain between Yala and Narathiwat. [Bangkok Post 1]

On October 27, a bomb exploded on a railway track near Maruebo station in Rangae district, Narathiwat, injuring two paramilitary rangers and halting two local train services. The blast, which damaged sleepers and signaling points, marked the second attack on the same line within a week. [Bangkok Post 2]

Timor-Leste: Minister of Interior to discuss national security priorities on 'Government Page' program

(ms) The 15th edition of the *Government Page* program will feature Minister of Interior Francisco da Costa Guterres on October 24 at 8 p.m. on RTTL and digital platforms. The minister will outline government priorities in internal security, border management, civil protection, and modernization of the security forces.

He will present the security sector's 2030 vision focused on stability, community safety, and modernization, highlighting initiatives such as professionalizing the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL), improving infrastructure, and expanding community policing. The discussion will also cover the introduction of the MIDAS border control system and reforms to strengthen disaster prevention, legislative updates, and international cooperation with partners including Australia, Portugal, and Japan.

The *Government Page* series, produced by the Government Spokesperson's Office, aims to enhance transparency and citizen engagement by broadcasting key government policies and initiatives. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Timor-Leste: Minister Agio Pereira meets with Australian energy firm to review depleted gas-field transition plans

(ms) Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers Agio Pereira met on October 23 with José Lobato, National Director of Santos in Timor-Leste, to review the company's operations and discuss the future of the Bayu-Undan gas field following the end of production in June 2025.

Santos Ltd., one of Australia's largest oil and gas producers, has long been a central player in Timor-Leste's petroleum sector. The Bayu-Undan field, located in the Timor Sea, has been one of the country's most significant sources of revenue since it began

production in 2004, supplying gas to Australia's Darwin LNG plant. The field was closed after reaching the end of its productive life, with natural gas reserves largely depleted following two decades of extraction.

During the meeting, Santos presented updates on the decommissioning process and studies into converting Bayu-Undan into a carbon capture and storage (CCS) site—an initiative that could transform the former gas field into a regional hub for low-carbon energy solutions. The project aligns with Timor-Leste's broader energy transition strategy, aiming to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability.

Minister Pereira emphasized the importance of maintaining cooperation with key energy partners to ensure an orderly transition and attract new investment that supports long-term national development goals. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Timor-Leste: Public consultation on 10-year Blue Economy Policy and Action Plan

(ms) The Government of Timor-Leste, led by Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, held a major public consultation on October 21 to discuss the *Blue Economy: Policy and Action Plan 2025–2035*, a long-term framework aimed at developing a sustainable ocean-based economy while protecting marine ecosystems.

The consultation, organized at the Ministry of Finance in Dili, brought together around 700 participants, including municipal authorities, community leaders, and sectoral stakeholders. It forms part of a national dialogue series designed to ensure broad participation and community input in finalizing the policy.

The *Blue Economy Policy and Action Plan* seeks to position Timor-Leste as a regional model for sustainable ocean management by integrating marine conservation with economic growth. It outlines key objectives such as improving fisheries management, developing eco-tourism, expanding marine renewable energy, and enhancing coastal resilience against climate change.

In his opening remarks, Prime Minister Gusmão emphasized that the plan is both an environmental and economic strategy—one that links marine protection with food security, livelihoods, and national sovereignty. Technical experts presented details on sustainable investment opportunities, biodiversity protection, and marine governance reforms.

Participants were invited to share feedback and propose local priorities, ensuring community ownership of the plan. Nationwide consultations will continue through 2026, culminating in the adoption of the final *Blue Economy Policy and Action Plan 2025–2035*. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Vietnam: National Assembly approves new deputy prime ministers and ministers, marks first female Deputy Prime Minister

(hn) On October 24, the National Assembly approved resolutions endorsing the Prime Minister's proposals to dismiss several ministers from their positions for the 2021–2026 term. The dismissed officials include Bùi Thanh Sơn, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Phạm Thị Thanh Trà, Minister of Home Affairs; and Đỗ Đức Duy, Minister of Agriculture and Environment.

Following the dismissals, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính presented proposals for the appointment of new Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers for the 2021–2026 term, which were then discussed by National Assembly delegations. The Assembly also passed a resolution to increase the number of Deputy Prime Ministers for the current tenure of the 15th National Assembly.

Previously, at the 13th Central Committee meeting, the Party Central Committee had reviewed and recommended personnel for several key state positions, including the Secretary-General of the National Assembly, Chairman of the National Assembly Office, Chairman of the Committee for Science, Technology and Environment, and Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. [Nguoilaodong, in Vietnamese]

On October 25, during its 10th session, the 15th National Assembly also approved major personnel appointments for the 2021–2026 term, including two new Deputy Prime Ministers and three new ministers. Phạm Thị Thanh Trà and Hồ Quốc Dũng were appointed as Deputy Prime Ministers, with Phạm Thị Thanh Trà making history as Vietnam's first female Deputy Prime Minister. The Assembly also approved Lê Hoài Trung as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trần Đức Thắng as Minister of Agriculture and Environment, and Đỗ Thanh Bình as Minister of Home Affairs. With these appointments, Vietnam's government now has nine Deputy Prime Ministers.

The session, chaired by National Assembly Chairman Trần Thanh Mẫn, also approved Nguyễn Hữu Đông as a member of the Standing Committee, Nguyễn Thanh Hải as Chairwoman of the Committee for Science, Technology and Environment, and Lê Quang Mạnh as Secretary-General and Chairman of the National Assembly Office. All candidates received overwhelming support, with over 90 percent approval. T

The Assembly further added Đỗ Thanh Bình, Nguyễn Hữu Đông, and Lê Quang Mạnh as members of the National Election Council. In the afternoon, committees continued their respective agendas, and on October 27, deputies are scheduled to review and discuss several draft and amended laws related to detention, criminal judgment execution, judicial records, extradition, and mutual legal assistance. [Vietnamnews] [Baomoi, in Vietnamese]

Vietnam: Draft Party Congress documents outline shift toward green, innovation-led growth

(hn/ms) Vietnam's draft documents for the upcoming 14th National Party Congress signal a evolution in economic and political strategy, emphasizing sustainable development, private-sector dynamism, and modernization through science and technology. The proposed framework integrates political, socio-economic, and Party-building goals into a single plan for the first time — a move observers say reflects Hanoi's push for streamlined governance and policy coherence, in line with Vietnam moves from a three-level to a two-level government system.

The new growth model envisions annual GDP growth of about 10 percent from 2026 to 2030, driven by high-tech manufacturing, green industries, and the digital economy. It prioritizes investment in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, biotechnology, and clean energy, while committing to carbon neutrality by 2050. The private sector is explicitly recognized as a key engine of growth alongside the state economy — marking a clearer endorsement of market principles within the socialist-oriented framework.

Institutional reform is identified as a "strategic breakthrough," with a focus on modern infrastructure, education autonomy, and innovation ecosystems linking universities and businesses. Foreign policy is given equal importance to defense and security, underlining Vietnam's commitment to deeper international integration and technological partnerships amid intensifying global competition.

At the same time, the draft redefines development as "people-centered," making public satisfaction and well-being indicators of success rather than purely economic metrics. Environmental protection is upgraded from a complementary goal to a leading one, signaling an intent to balance growth with ecological sustainability.

In the Party-building sphere, the document introduces the concept of a "civilized Party," emphasizing transparency, institutional accountability, and modernization of leadership. While maintaining one-party rule, the proposed reforms suggest a greater focus on administrative efficiency and public trust — key priorities as Vietnam seeks to sustain rapid growth in an increasingly complex regional environment. [Vnexpress1, in Vietnamese] [Vnexpress2, in Vietnamese]

Vietnam: Date for 14th National Congress set in January

(ms) Vietnam's ruling Communist Party has scheduled its 14th National Congress for January 19–25, 2026, when delegates will set the country's long-term policy direction and elect new leadership for the next five years, state media reported.

The congress, to be held in Hanoi, will elect members of the Party Central Committee, the top decision-making body, which will then choose the Politburo, including the general secretary, state president, prime minister, and parliament chair.

According to party documents, delegates will review four major reports, including a 40-year assessment of the Doi Moi (Renewal) reform program, which transformed Vietnam into a socialist-oriented market economy. The congress will also consider a personnel report and new working and election regulations aimed at preventing internal violations during the leadership selection process.

The party has outlined an ambitious goal of achieving annual economic growth of at least 10 percent between 2026 and 2030, focusing on sustaining macroeconomic stability and fostering innovation-driven development.

Officials said the event will mark a pivotal moment in defining Vietnam's strategic vision for 2030, emphasizing institutional reform, improved governance, and sustainable national progress. [Reuters] [Voice of Vietnam]

Vietnam: Accelerating nuclear power projects to strengthen energy security

(hn) Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính on October 22 urged faster development of Vietnam's nuclear power projects to ensure national energy security and balanced cooperation with international partners.

At the third meeting of the Steering Committee for Nuclear Power Plant Construction, the Prime Minister directed ministries and localities to accelerate implementation of the Ninh Thuận nuclear power projects, which were approved in 2009, suspended in 2016, and later restarted in 2024.

He praised initial progress but noted delays in foreign partner negotiations, site clearance, and legal frameworks. The Government plans to allocate an additional VND 9 trillion (about USD 342 million) for land clearance and complete all legal and technical groundwork by November 2025.

Việt Nam Electricity (EVN) and Petrovietnam were assigned to prepare feasibility studies for Ninh Thuận 1 and 2, while ministries were instructed to finalize training and safety standards in line with IAEA and Vienna Convention regulations.

The Prime Minister emphasized fair interests and shared risks with international partners to ensure safe, efficient, and sustainable nuclear energy development. [Vietnamnet] [Tuoitre, in Vietnamese]

Vietnam: Japanese company launches first large-scale biomass pellet plant to support decarbonization

(hn) Japan's Idemitsu Kosan Co., Ltd. has started commercial operations at its black pellet production plant in Gia Lai Province, the first of its kind in Vietnam and among the largest globally.

The plant, run by Idemitsu Green Energy Vietnam, produces 120,000 tons of biomass-based black pellets (IGEP) annually — a carbon-neutral alternative to coal — mainly for Japanese customers pursuing decarbonization goals.

Developed since 2020, IGEP uses wood biomass that absorbs CO_2 during growth, offsetting emissions during combustion. Tests by about 20 Japanese

companies confirmed its efficiency and compatibility with existing coal systems.

As part of its Vision for 2030, Idemitsu aims to produce 3 million tons of IGEP per year worldwide, supporting stable energy supply and global carbon reduction efforts. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Prime Minister urges acceleration of Lao Cai–Hanoi–Hai Phong railway project

(hn) On October 23, at the fourth meeting of the Steering Committee for Key National Railway Projects in Hanoi, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính has directed ministries and local authorities to speed up preparations for the Lào Cai–Hà Nội–Hải Phòng railway, scheduled to break ground on December 19. Chairing the fourth meeting of the Steering Committee for Key National Railway Projects, he emphasized the need to assess progress, resolve institutional challenges, and propose necessary amendments to ensure timely implementation.

The PRIME MINISTERalso highlighted the importance of the project as part of Vietnam's railway development strategy through 2030 and vision to 2045, alongside the North–South high-speed railway and urban metro systems in Hà Nội and Ho Chi Minh City. He instructed both cities to accelerate work on their metro lines, especially the connection between Long Thành and Tân Sơn Nhất airports.

According to the Ministry of Construction, the Lào Cai–Hà Nội–Hải Phòng project consists of two sub-projects: infrastructure development and railway construction. Feasibility studies and land clearance are underway, with domestic consultants selected for most packages. Meanwhile, 15 provinces along the North–South route are preparing resettlement plans and legal frameworks to facilitate implementation. [Vietnamnews]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Timor-Leste becomes ASEAN's 11th member

(ms) Timor-Leste has officially joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as its 11th member, marking the bloc's first expansion in nearly three decades. The decision, confirmed at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur on October 26, follows a decade-long accessions process during which the region's youngest nation worked to align its institutions, trade systems, and governance standards with ASEAN's framework.

Timor-Leste first applied for ASEAN membership in 2011, only a decade after regaining independence from Indonesia in 2002. Progress was slow as ASEAN assessed the country's readiness to meet economic and administrative requirements. After being granted observer status in 2022, Dili adopted an accession roadmap in 2023, outlining reforms across governance, infrastructure, and trade facilitation. By mid-2025, the country had reportedly completed 66 of 84 required legal instruments under the ASEAN Economic Community pillar, paving the way for full membership. ASEAN leaders described the move as both symbolic and strategic, reflecting the bloc's vision of inclusivity and regional unity.

The final hurdle in the accession process was overcome when Timor-Leste reversed its position on the Myanmar civil war. Since the conflict began, Dili had openly supported the National Unity Government (NUG), hosted its representatives, and called for stronger international intervention against the junta's actions—stances that placed it at odds with ASEAN's long-held principle of non-interference. In the lead-up to its full membership, however, the Timorese government recalibrated its approach, aligning with ASEAN's consensus-driven diplomacy. It quietly reduced its engagement with the NUG and publicly endorsed the bloc's "Five-Point Consensus" as the primary framework for addressing the crisis. This policy shift came after months of delicate negotiations,

as Myanmar's military government had been the only ASEAN member effectively vetoing Timor-Leste's accession in response to its earlier stance. The reversal ultimately removed that obstacle, signaling Dili's readiness to operate within ASEAN's diplomatic norms and underscoring its pragmatic commitment to regional unity.

For Timor-Leste, a nation of about 1.4 million people with a GDP of around two billion dollars, membership offers the chance to diversify an economy still heavily dependent on oil and gas revenues. Joining ASEAN provides access to the bloc's major economic frameworks, including the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the Comprehensive Investment Agreement, while also creating pathways to participate in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest trade bloc. These frameworks promise greater investment opportunities, access to new export markets, and integration into regional supply chains.

Still, Timor-Leste faces significant hurdles. infrastructure gaps, limited institutional capacity, and a small private sector present challenges to realizing the full benefits of membership. Economists note that integration will require careful sequencing of reforms to prevent administrative overload. "ASEAN membership offers structure and partnership, but capacity building will be key," said Dr. Maria Soares, a political economist at the National University of Timor-Leste. "Integration without institutional readiness could overwhelm the system instead of strengthening it."

The accession has already spurred new bilateral and regional cooperation. Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam have expressed support for Dili's economic integration, with initiatives focused on logistics, digitalization, and agricultural development. ASEAN's connectivity programs will now extend to Timor-Leste through transport, trade, and digital corridors, ensuring smoother integration into the bloc's economic architecture.

Beyond trade, the move has broad geopolitical significance. Positioned between Indonesia and Australia, Timor-Leste adds strategic depth to ASEAN's regional diplomacy and strengthens its role in maintaining balance amid intensifying global competition in the Indo-Pacific. The accession also reinforces ASEAN's commitment to inclusivity, bringing in Asia's youngest democracy at a time when the bloc seeks to reaffirm its centrality in global and regional affairs.

Under its five-year ASEAN integration plan for 2026–2030, Timor-Leste aims to align national regulations with ASEAN standards, strengthen public institutions, expand workforce training, and establish permanent missions to ASEAN bodies. Member states have pledged technical assistance and capacity-building support to help Dili meet these goals.

While the economic gains may take time to materialize, Timor-Leste's membership is widely seen as a political and developmental milestone. "Bringing in Timor-Leste completes the ASEAN family," ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn said. "It shows that cooperation, even in diversity, remains our greatest strength." As Timor-Leste's flag is raised alongside its ten regional partners, the small island nation enters a new chapter — one that will test both its own institutional resilience and ASEAN's ability to foster unity through inclusion. [ASEAN] [The Diplomat] [The Nation]

ASEAN pushes for conclusion of Digital Economy Framework (DEFA) by 2026

(tl) ASEAN is aiming to finalize the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (Defa) by 2026, reinforcing the region's role in the global digital economy, according to Malaysia's Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz. He reported that over 70 percent of negotiations have been completed, with the ongoing work focusing on critical issues such as customs duties on electronic transmissions and financial services commitments related to computing facilities.

The Asean Economic Community Council (AECC)'s Special Session on Defa served to review progress and provide policy guidance as well as the final Defa framework will play as the strategic roadmap for the regional collective efforts in 2026. Tengku Zafrul highlighted the importance of ensuring inclusivity, particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), start-ups, and local communities, while maintaining a secure and interoperable digital ecosystem.

He emphasized that political and strategic guidance is still needed to navigate remaining complex issues, and stressed that the agreement should be high-quality, forward-looking, and aligned with Asean's principles of consensus, inclusivity, and mutual benefit. The final agreement is targeted for signing in 2026 as part of Malaysia's Priority Economic Deliverables (PEDs) for this year. [Malay Mail]

ASEAN nears completion of extradition treaty to combat transnational crimes

(tl) Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan said that ASEAN is expected to finalize its long-awaited Extradition Treaty next month, enhancing member states' ability to address cross-border crimes. Speaking at the 30th ASEAN Political-Security Community Council Meeting (APSC), Mohamad highlighted regional efforts and cooperation including defense, law enforcement and legal institutions to tackle transnational crime, money laundering, and cyber-enabled offenses, including online scams.

He noted that these regional efforts also include Malaysia leading the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) Working Group on money laundering, as well as the recent establishment of ASEAN Prosecutors/Attorneys-General Meeting (APAGM) in strengthening regional prosecution cooperation.

ASEAN is also focusing on cyber, maritime, and health security, responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) use in defense, as well as human rights protections, including guidelines for human-trafficking victims through the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). The 19th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) adopted key declarations to fight against money laundering, cybercrime, and online scams. [Malay Mail]

ASEAN, China sign upgraded Free Trade Agreement

(tl) The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China signed the upgraded free trade agreement, known as the upgraded ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA 3.0) agreement on the final day of the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. The deal was signed by ASEAN Economic Ministers' Chair Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz and China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, with both nations' prime ministers in attendance.

Building upon the original 2010 ACFTA, the updated version seeks to deepen tariff cuts, improve trade facilitation, and expand cooperation in digital economy and sustainable development. It also aims to strengthen the region's economic resilience and tackle

non-tariff barriers, reaffirming the bloc's commitment to inclusive and sustainable growth. [Malay Mail]

The 11-member bloc, China's largest trading partner, recorded USD 771 billion in bilateral trade last year, while ASEAN collectively has a GDP of USD 3.8 trillion. Both China and ASEAN are part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest trading bloc, which covers nearly a third of the global population and around 30 percent of global GDP. Analysts view the upgraded FTA as a potential buffer against U.S. tariffs, though competing interests among ASEAN members and concerns over China's military ambitions limit Beijing's influence.

Geopolitical tensions remain in the South China Sea, where China's claims overlap with ASEAN member states' exclusive economic zones. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. criticized Chinese actions, prompting Beijing to attribute clashes to Manila's provocation. Li stressed the need to strengthen strategic trust and finalize a Code of Conduct, while Wong reaffirmed the importance of peace, stability, and freedom of navigation. [Reuters]

ASEAN declines to send observers to Myanmar's general elections

(anl) On October 27, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) announced it will not send election observers to Myanmar's upcoming December polls, marking a significant setback to the junta's efforts to secure regional legitimacy.

Instead, ASEAN chair and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim reiterated calls for an "immediate ceasefire" and emphasized the need to halt violence before any credible political process can take place.

In a statement released after the bloc's leaders' meeting in Malaysia, the 11-nation group expressed "deep concern" over Myanmar's escalating conflict and lamented the "lack of substantive progress" toward peace. The statement underscored that violence must end, and inclusive dialogue must begin before elections can occur, noting that the junta had invited ASEAN states to send observers.

Diplomatic sources confirmed that ASEAN could not reach consensus on deploying an official observer's mission. One diplomat explained that while no ASEAN observers will be sent collectively, individual member states are free to send observers on a bilateral basis.

Although Myanmar remains a member of ASEAN, its junta leaders have been barred from high-level meetings since the 2021 coup due to their failure to implement the bloc's Five-Point Consensus for peace. The absence of ASEAN and Western observers further isolates the junta as it presses ahead with an election widely viewed as an attempt to entrench military rule under the guise of democratic process. [The Irrawaddy]

China takes aim at U.S. as Chinese Premier Li Qiang urges ASEAN to resist protectionism and defend multilateral

(dql) At the recent ASEAN Plus Three Summit, Chinese Premier Li Qiang warned of growing instability in East Asia due to "high tariffs" and "rampant protectionism," a thinly veiled reference to US trade measures, coming shortly ahead of the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump on October 30 on the sidelines of the APEC summit in South Korea.

Li urged members to uphold peace, stability, and economic integration while opposing trade barriers. He reiterated China's support for ASEAN's centrality and "true multilateralism," positioning Beijing as a defender of open trade amid its ongoing tariff dispute with Washington. [State Council, China]

Li also addressed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit, the first in five years, where leaders from the 15-member bloc—covering about 30 percent of global GDP—pledged to fully implement the agreement to bolster economic resilience. The joint statement emphasized the RCEP's role in deepening regional cooperation and integration. [ASEAN]

Li proposed strengthening market connectivity, expanding RCEP membership—expressing support for Hong Kong's application—and enhancing collaboration in areas such as digital economy, green development, and supply chains. [Channel News Asia]

His remarks underscored China's intent to use the RCEP as a platform to counter global trade fragmentation and Western protectionism.

In parallel, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared that "a multipolar world is emerging," framing Beijing's Global Governance Initiative (GGI) as a stabilizing alternative to what he described as Washington-driven unilateralism. Speaking in Beijing ahead of the Xi–

Trump summit, Wang called for an end to the politicization of trade, the fragmentation of global markets, and recurring tariff disputes—remarks widely seen as a rebuke to Trump.

Wang portrayed the GGI—launched by President Xi Jinping last month—as an overarching framework uniting China's previous global initiatives on development, security, and civilization. He said it aimed to reform rather than replace the current international system and had already gained the backing of over 140 countries and organizations.

Positioning the initiative as a response to growing global instability, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and declining confidence in U.S. leadership, Wang stressed that power politics and bullying would only deepen global chaos. He reaffirmed China's support for the United Nations, advocating for reforms that enhance its authority, particularly by prioritizing Africa's representation in the Security Council.

Wang also urged depoliticization of trade and stronger roles for the WTO, IMF, and World Bank, criticizing the lag in financial system reform and selective adherence to international rules. On climate issues, he pressed for collective responsibility under the Paris Agreement and condemned renewed U.S. withdrawal. [SCMP]

EU-China relations strain amid rare earth disputes, Russia sanctions, and growing geoeconomic tension

(dql) Tensions between the European Union (EU) and China are rising as economic and strategic frictions increasingly shape their bilateral relationship, with European Council President Antonio Costa raising strong concerns with Chinese Premier Li Qiang over Beijing's expanded export controls on critical raw materials and urging China to contribute to ending Russia's war in Ukraine. Meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur on October 27, Costa emphasized the EU's expectations for Chinese cooperation in addressing these strategic challenges. [European Council 1]

In response, Li signaled China's readiness to deepen "optimized and balanced" trade cooperation with the EU, highlighting the need for a fair, non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese firms. He urged both sides to resolve existing economic and trade disputes through dialogue, consultation, and mutual understanding. [People's Daily]

The meeting came shortly after on October 23, the EU approved its 19th sanctions package against Russia over the war in Ukraine, introducing a ban on Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports. Among others, the fresh sanctions target entities linked to China's oil industry including two refineries and a trading company. [European Council 2]

Meanwhile, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned that the EU is prepared to retaliate against China's newly imposed export restrictions on rare earths (see AiR No. 41, October/2025, 2). Speaking at the Berlin Global Dialogue conference, she said the bloc would seek immediate solutions through talks with China but stood ready to deploy "all instruments in our toolbox," including coordination with G7 partners for a collective response. [European Commission]

Von der Leyen unveiled a new EU strategy to counter China's chokehold on critical minerals, focusing on recycling, joint purchasing, stockpiling, and investment. Her remarks came amid mounting pressure within the bloc to trigger the EU's anti-coercion instrument—dubbed the "trade bazooka"—which could authorize punitive tariffs, quotas, or market bans on Chinese firms. French President Emmanuel Macron has led calls for its activation after Beijing's October 9 decision to tighten control over exports of rare-earth processing equipment, which has disrupted some European production lines.

In a sharply worded reflection on global trade, von der Leyen argued that China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 failed to deliver the balanced prosperity once expected. She warned that the cooperative world order envisioned two decades ago is giving way to a confrontational, power-driven global economy marked by technology theft, state subsidies, and coercive trade measures. [SCMP 1] [SCMP 2]

Relations between Beijing and Brussels have been strained by trade disputes, including Chinese electric vehicles and EU pork and dairy exports, and recently by China's rare-earth export restrictions and perceived inaction on Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

Tensions were further inflamed by the seizure of China-owned Dutch chipmaker Nexperia by Dutch authorities earlier this month over national security concerns (see AiR No. 41, October/2025, 2), prompting China to temporarily block exports of Nexperia's finished products—a move alarming European automakers and car parts supplier dependent on these chips. [Parameter] [POLITICO] [Al Jazeera]

Adding to the tensions, China's Ministry of Commerce has announced that it will hold a public hearing on October 31 concerning its ongoing anti-dumping investigation into pork and pig by-products imported from the EU. The session will address alleged dumping practices, damage to China's domestic industry, and the causal link between the two.

Envoys from the EU and several member states, along with industry representatives from both sides, are expected to attend.

The investigation, launched in June 2024 in response to domestic complaints, was extended to December 2025 due to its complexity. In September, Beijing decided to impose preliminary duties of up to 62.4 percent on EU pork worth over USD 2 billion, citing unfair pricing practices. [Global Times] [Reuters]

China explores trilateral currency swap with Japan and South Korea

(dql) China is reportedly in discussions with Japan and South Korea on a possible trilateral currency swap. Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China (PBOC), reportedly raised the issue with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts, Rhee Chang-yong and Kazuo Ueda, at the IMF-World Bank annual meetings earlier this month. Pan emphasized the "pressing need" to strengthen the global financial safety net, noting that trade tensions threaten financial stability.

Currency swaps, which provide local currency liquidity and support during debt crises, could complement China's longstanding push to internationalize the yuan and reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar. The three nations together account for roughly a quarter of global economic output, and both Japan and South Korea have been affected by U.S. tariffs.

While details remain unclear, bilateral agreements between the three central banks appear the most likely outcome rather than a formal trilateral swap under the Chiang Mai Initiative, the multilateral East Asian currency mechanism. Existing arrangements include China-Japan (CNY 200 billion (USD 28.1 billion)), and South Korea-Japan (USD 10 billion).

China has established currency swaps with 32 central banks worldwide, totaling CNY 4.5 trillion (USD 632.25 billion), positioning its swap network as a growing component of global financial resilience. [SCMP]

The initiative is indicative of Beijing's efforts to use financial tools to counter U.S. influence, and promote yuan internationalization, while offering East Asian allies a buffer against global financial shocks amid heightened trade tensions.

The Bank of Korea (BOK) has rejected reports suggesting discussions of the trilateral currency swap, denying such talks took place.

However, the BOK confirmed that negotiations are ongoing to extend its bilateral currency swap with China, which expired on October 10. The original five-year agreement was valued at CNY 400 billion yuan (USD 56.16 billion) from China and KRW 70 trillion (USD 48.95 billion) from South Korea. Yoon described the extension talks as "unfolding smoothly." [Korea JoongAng Daily]

China, Russia accused of targeting UN human rights funding

(dql) China, along with Russia, is facing accusations of repeatedly attempting to block funding for U.N. human rights work over the past five years, according to a report by non-profit organization International Service for Human Rights (ISHR).

The proposals targeted major cuts to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and sought to eliminate resources for investigations into countries including Iran, North Korea, Ukraine, Belarus, Eritrea, Sudan, and Venezuela.

Although these efforts failed in closed-door U.N. meetings, ISHR warned they set a dangerous precedent, placing state sovereignty above human rights at a time when the United Nations is financially strained and the U.S. has disengaged from multilateral mechanisms under the Trump administration.

The report highlighted that this vacuum allows China and Russia to expand their influence over U.N. budgetary decisions amid critical structural reforms. [ISHR]

Dismissing the report as "groundless," China maintains that it supports human rights while stressing the need to avoid interference in domestic affairs and advocates balanced U.N. resource allocation, particularly for economic, social, and cultural rights. [Reuters]

Fugitive Chinese fentanyl trafficker recaptured in Cuba

(dql) Zhi Dong Zhang, a fugitive Chinese national accused of trafficking large amounts of fentanyl and cocaine into the US, has been recaptured in Cuba after escaping house arrest in Mexico in July 2025.

Zhang, indicted in 2022 in Atlanta on drug trafficking and money laundering charges, had previously traveled to Russia, where he was detained for illegal entry before being returned to Cuba. His network reportedly funneled cocaine and fentanyl into US distribution hubs in Atlanta and Los Angeles, with millions of dollars collected in stash houses in Georgia and California and remotely managed from Mexico. [Al Jazeera] [Mexico News]

Zhang's escape had heightened tensions for Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, as the US—under the Trump administration—was pressuring Mexico over fentanyl smuggling, including threats of tariffs.

His recapture coincides with Washington's intensified military campaign against Latin American drug trafficking, exemplified by a ninth US strike on a vessel allegedly carrying illicit drugs, this time in the Pacific Ocean. [The New York Times]

Japan seeks stronger ties with ASEAN amid regional security concerns

(dql/ay) Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who assumed office last week (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3) emphasized her commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific during her first overseas visit to attend the ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur on October 26. Takaichi aligns closely with the policies of the late Shinzo Abe, who originally outlined the Indo-Pacific vision in 2016.

Addressing the summit, Takaichi highlighted Japan's intention to strengthen ties with Southeast Asian nations amid China's growing maritime assertiveness. She reaffirmed Japan's support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and announced plans to expand security assistance to ASEAN countries while promoting cooperation on artificial intelligence frameworks.

She also participated in the Asia Zero Emission Community summit, a Japan-led decarbonization

initiative with Australia and ASEAN members, excluding Myanmar and East Timor.

Takaichi, known for her pro-Taiwan and conservative stance, has faced scrutiny from Chinese state media. Beijing has yet to congratulate her on assuming office, reflecting wariness toward her security policies. Although she did not meet Chinese leaders in Malaysia, she indicated plans to engage with them at upcoming regional forums such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in South Korea.

During her visit, Takaichi also held bilateral discussions with leaders from Australia, the Philippines and Malaysia and signaled her intention to leverage ASEAN engagement to boost Japan's domestic investment and technological innovation. [Kyodo News] [The Japan News]

Australia

In a meeting between Takaichi and her Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese, the two leaders emphasized their countries' shared commitment to a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP).

They discussed regional security challenges in East Asia and agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation on security and economic matters, particularly in critical mineral supply chains affected by recent export controls.

Both leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to multilateral collaboration with likeminded partners, including the U.S., India, New Zealand, and South Korea, while promoting people-to-people exchanges. The summit highlighted efforts to elevate the Japan-Australia 'Special Strategic Partnership' ahead of the 50th anniversary of their Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation next year. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan 1] [Nippo.com]

Malaysia

Meanwhile, Takaichi and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim reaffirmed their commitment to advancing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and agreed to deepen cooperation under the Japan–Malaysia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In the security field, they welcomed Japan's hand-over of unmanned aerial vehicles and rescue boats through its Official Security Assistance (OSA) program, as well as a new agreement for the provision of a diving support vessel and other defense equipment.

In the economic sphere, both sides highlighted progress in decarbonization initiatives, including carbon capture and storage, ammonia-fired power, and nuclear energy cooperation. They agreed to accelerate negotiations toward the signing of the Joint Crediting Mechanism and to strengthen collaboration within the Asia Zero-Emission Community framework. The leaders also pledged closer coordination on LNG supply, rare-earth resources, and artificial intelligence technologies.

Anwar affirmed his country's readiness to expand cooperation with Japan in the development of rare earths, critical minerals, and related industries. He invited Japanese participation across the full value chain—from sustainable mining using Japanese technology to refining, processing, and high-value manufacturing—and proposed joint research and development to spur innovation in the sector.

The two prime ministers exchanged views on regional security developments, including the South China Sea and Myanmar, and agreed to enhance cooperation on peacebuilding efforts. Japan will provide Malaysia with monitoring equipment to support ceasefire implementation between Cambodia and Thailand. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan_2] [The Edge Malaysia]

Philippines

Meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the two leaders agreed to deepen bilateral cooperation in security, economic, and energy sectors during their first meeting in Kuala Lumpur on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit.

Takaichi and Marcos welcomed the agreement in principle on the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which will enable Japan's Self-Defense Forces and the Philippine military to exchange supplies such as fuel and food. The accord marks a significant step in strengthening defense ties amid growing concerns over China's maritime assertiveness.

Takaichi reaffirmed Japan's commitment to enhancing its strategic partnership with the Philippines to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific, while both leaders pledged to further expand cooperation across key sectors. They also agreed to coordinate closely in preparation for the Philippines' ASEAN chairmanship next year. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [NHK]

World Bank approves project to strengthen Mongolia's electricity grid and

support renewable energy

(fs) The World Bank has approved the Fourth Energy Sector Project to enhance Mongolia's electricity infrastructure, improve service reliability, and advance the country's transition to low-carbon energy. The project, aligned with Mongolia's 2024-2028 Government Action Plan and New Recovery Policy, will focus on strengthening the Central Energy System's transmission grid and integrating renewable energy sources.

Planned investments include constructing a 220 kV transmission line from Mandal to Uvurkhangai Substation, expanding and developing substations in Mandalgovi, Arvaikheer, and Bayankhongor, and building associated 110 kV connection lines.

The project is expected to increase transmission capacity by over 590 MW, reducing electricity outages in the central and western regions by around 50 percent, and enable the integration of 150 MW of wind and solar energy. Climate-resilient measures will be incorporated in transmission lines and substations.

The USD 78 million project is part of the World Bank's Accelerating Sustainable Energy Transition Multi-Phase Programmatic Approach, which supports inclusive economic growth, job creation, and the scale-up of renewable energy across East Asia and the Pacific. [Mirage News]

Mongolia, United Nations reaffirm commitment to regional cooperation and sustainable development

(fs) State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia Munkhtushig Lhanaajav met with Deputy Executive Secretary for Partnership and Coordination of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) Hirohito Toda on October 22 to discuss strengthening cooperation between Mongolia and the regional body.

Lhanaajav highlighted Mongolia's active role in UN ESCAP-led initiatives and its willingness to share experiences in transit transport and digital infrastructure development.

Toda commended Mongolia's engagement in promoting regional development and expressed UN ESCAP's support for the country's preparation to host the 17th Session of the Conference of the Parties to

the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in 2026. [Montsame]

Mongolia joins regional initiative with China, South Korea, United Nations to tackle yellow dust storms

(fs) Mongolia has agreed to collaborate with China, South Korea, and the United Nations (UN) to address the growing frequency of yellow dust storms originating from desertified areas in Mongolia, which have increasingly affected air quality and heat levels in neighboring countries.

State Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change of Mongolia Batbayar Shurenchuluun met with UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Deputy Executive Secretary Hirohito Toda and East and North-East Asia Office Director Dr. Ganbold Baasanjav on October 24 to discuss coordinated action.

The parties agreed to strengthen regional and national initiatives on dust-storm prevention and climate adaptation, with plans to present these efforts at the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Ulaanbaatar next August. [Qazinform]

Former South Korean International Criminal Court president calls for action against North Korean leader

(sm) Song Sang-hyun, former 2nd president of the Hague-based International Criminal Court, has urged that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un be referred to international justice for his regime's role in supporting Russia's war in Ukraine. [Yonhap News Agency]

On October 22 at the 2025 Seoul World Convention on North Korean Human Rights, Song argued that North Korea's reported transfer of artillery shells, munitions, and other weapons to Russian forces places Pyongyang in violation of international norms and potentially implicates Kim Jong Un in aiding a war of aggression. He said such assistance makes the North Korean leader "no less than an accessory or contributor" to Russia's military campaign thereby suggesting the international community has sufficient grounds to seek accountability under international law.

The remarks come as Pyongyang and Moscow continue to deepen their military and economic cooperation, framing their partnership as a counterbalance to Western pressure. North Korea has repeatedly denied allegations of arms transfers and claiming its relationship with Russia is based on "sovereign rights" and mutual respect. [Daily NK]

Song's statement adds to growing international debate over how to address North Korea's expanding military role in the Russia–Ukraine war. While a formal ICC referral would require significant diplomatic coordination, his comments do reflect a broader call to hold Pyongyang's leadership accountable not only for domestic abuses but also for actions that may contribute to global instability.

South Korean, Malaysian leaders sign FTA and defense MoU amid regional coordination push

(mo/sm) South Korean President Lee Jae-myung concluded a two-day visit to Malaysia to attend the ASEAN summit, where he called for enhanced regional coordination on supply chains and efforts against protectionism. He outlined a vision to deepen the Korea-ASEAN strategic partnership through a new "CSP" framework and aimed to upgrade the FTA to expand bilateral trade to USD 300 billion. He emphasized the importance of trilateral coordination with China and Japan on supply chain risks and trade barriers.

Deepening ties with summit host country, Lee and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim finalized a bilateral free trade agreement and signed a memorandum of understanding on defense industry cooperation. The leaders also pledged to strengthen collaboration in AI, digital technology, smart infrastructure, and energy transition, while Anwar expressed support for Seoul's North Korea policy.

He also reached an agreement with Cambodia to establish a joint task force to combat online scams targeting Koreans, following the death of a Korean student in the country.

The Malaysia visit sets the stage for a busy diplomatic week ahead of the APEC summit in Gyeongju, where Lee is scheduled to meet separately with former U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2] [Yonhap 3]

Calls mount for Trump-Kim summit on APEC sidelines

(sm) South Korea has expressed support for the possibility of a meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un during the upcoming APEC Summit on October 31 – November 1, viewing it as an opportunity to reopen channels for dialogue on the Korean Peninsula. President Lee Jae-Myung recently stated that renewed contact between Washington and Pyongyang could contribute to easing tensions and restoring momentum for diplomacy after years of stalemate. [NK News]

South Korea's Unification Ministry has also called on both sides to take advantage of the summit as a venue for engagement, describing the gathering as a timely opportunity to reestablish communication and promote stability. South Korea officials have emphasized that even a brief exchange between the two leaders could help revive long-stalled negotiations on peace and denuclearization. [Yonhap News Agency]

Although no formal plans for a meeting have been announced, the discussions underscore Seoul's ongoing efforts to position itself as a supporter of diplomacy amid renewed international attention to the region. The government's coordinated messaging from both the president and the Unification Ministry suggests a strategic push to create conditions for a renewed U.S.-North Korean contact and future inter-Korean dialogue.

Taiwanese government launches global undersea cable security initiative

(dql) Taiwan's foreign ministry has launched a global initiative to enhance the security and resilience of undersea communication cables amid growing concerns over cable disruptions worldwide. Announced by Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung at the Taiwan-Europe Subsea Cable Security Cooperation Forum in Taipei, the Management Initiative on International Undersea Cables, or RISK (Risk mitigation, Information sharing, Systemic reform, and Knowledge building), aims to foster international cooperation, align standards, and promote best practices.

Lin emphasized that Taiwan's strategic position at the crossroads of major global data routes makes cable security a critical issue, noting repeated incidents of damage to cables linking Taiwan's outlying islands. He

described RISK as a collaborative and inclusive platform treating connectivity as a "public good, not a geopolitical weapon."

European Parliament member Rihards Kols voiced strong support, calling undersea cables the "nervous system of democratic connectivity" and citing a series of suspected sabotage incidents in the Baltic region. [Focus Taiwan]

In parallel, the Legislative Yuan, Taiwan's parliament, is preparing to review amendments to seven laws aimed at enhancing the protection of undersea communication cables. The proposed revisions mandate the use of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) for all vessels in Taiwan's territorial waters to improve transparency and traceability. Ships found loitering abnormally may be ordered to leave, and those refusing could be denied entry to Taiwanese ports — a measure intended to deter potential threats to critical infrastructure.

Approved by the Cabinet in September, the changes align penalties for damaging undersea cables with those for tampering with vital utilities, imposing up to seven years' imprisonment for deliberate offenses and allowing for vessel confiscation. The Coast Guard Administration will take a central role in enforcement.

The move comes amid increasing security concerns after several Chinese vessels allegedly severed or damaged Taiwan's undersea cables — including incidents near the Matsu and Penghu Islands — highlighting the strategic and security implications of protecting the island's 24 international cable links. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan's foreign ministry to launch 'drone diplomacy' initiative for allies and European partners

(yl) Taiwan plans to launch a "drone diplomacy" initiative to provide drones to diplomatic allies and European partners facing Russian threats. At the EU-Taiwan Drones Technology & Export Forum, the foreign ministry announced a new task force that will oversee the effort in two phases: first, supplying allies with drones for civilian uses such as agriculture, logistics, disaster prevention, and health care; and second, supporting like-minded partners in the Asia-Pacific and Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states, where demand focuses on defense and battlefield surveillance.

The ministry added that it will coordinate with the Ministry of Economic Affairs to connect local drone suppliers with international buyers. [Focus Taiwan]

The plan signals Taiwan efforts to play a role in Europe's drone supply chain, as also expressed by Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung at the recent Warsaw Security Forum. [Commonwealth Magazine]

International judges' group condemns Azerbaijan for blocking Taiwanese delegates

(dql) The International Association of Judges (IAJ) has reaffirmed its backing of Taiwan following the exclusion of Taiwanese delegates from the 67th IAJ Annual Meeting in Baku. Taiwan's Judges Association (JAROC) had intended to send six representatives, including High Court judge Lin Yi-lun, but the delegation was denied visas without explanation, forcing them to cancel their participation.

JAROC criticized the move as undermining judicial engagement and contrary to the IAJ's principles of independence, equality, and cooperative exchange. Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs attributed the exclusion to Beijing's influence and the enforcement of the "one China" policy.

The IAJ expressed regret over Taiwan's absence, denounced Azerbaijan's actions, and committed to ensuring that future meetings protect all members' rights to participate regardless of government pressures. [Taiwan News]

Global health officials reaffirm commitment to polio eradication despite funding cuts

(lm) The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) — a partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and other international actors — announced that it will refocus its operations following a 30 percent budget reduction in 2026 and a projected USD 1.7 billion funding gap through 2029. The shortfall, primarily due to decreased contributions from major donors such as the United States and European governments, is prompting a shift toward core surveillance and vaccination efforts in high-risk regions.

Under the revised plan, GPEI will scale down operations in lower-risk areas while expanding collaboration with other immunization and health programs. Measures such as fractional dosing — using one-fifth of a standard vaccine dose — will be adopted to stretch supplies without compromising efficacy.

Officials confirmed that wild poliovirus transmission now persists only in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have jointly reported 36 cases in 2025. An additional 149 cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus have been detected in countries including Nigeria, though both figures mark a decline from 2024 levels. [Arab News]

Cost of living in Maldives highest in South Asia

(lm) Statistics show that the Maldives currently has the highest cost of living in South Asia, according to data compiled by Bangladeshi outlet *Fintech News BD* based on online database Numbeo and official sources. The estimated monthly cost of living for a single person, excluding rent, stands at USD 840.4 (MVR 12,958.9) — significantly higher than in Sri Lanka (USD 507.6), Bhutan (USD 387.2), Bangladesh (USD 348.9), Pakistan (USD 335.6), and India (USD 313.4).

The rising cost of essentials has been linked by business owners to the stronger U.S. dollar and a steady black-market exchange rate of around MVR 20 per USD. A 2019 survey by the National Bureau of Statistics found that the monthly cost of living in the Male' area averaged over MVR 37,000 (USD 2,405) per household, with rent accounting for a substantial share of expenses—35 percent for middle-income households, 68 percent for low-income households, and 28 percent for wealthier households. Average household income was reported at MVR 35,596 (USD 2,313), indicating that many families face growing financial strain amid elevated living costs. [The Sun]

Maldives and European Union agree to expand fisheries cooperation and market access

(ya) The Maldivian government and the European Union (EU) agreed on October 21 to strengthen cooperation on sustainable fisheries and expand market access for Maldivian exports. The discussions took place in Cairo between Special Envoy Mohamed

Waheed Hassan Manik and EU Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans Costas Kadis.

Both sides committed to enhancing collaboration against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and to promoting responsible marine resource management. They also expressed interest in expanding cooperation beyond fisheries to include trade, education, and cultural exchange. [The Sun]

Pakistan and EU reaffirm GSP+ partnership amid trade frictions over ethanol and Basmati exports

(lm) Pakistan and the European Union reaffirmed their partnership under the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) during meetings in Islamabad on October 27, as both sides discussed trade, investment, and human rights issues. The visiting European Parliament delegation and Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan agreed to strengthen cooperation within the GSP+ framework, which grants Pakistan duty-free access to most EU markets in return for implementing 27 international conventions on human rights, labor standards, governance, and environmental protection.

While welcoming the continuation of GSP+ status—extended until 2027—Pakistan raised two key concerns: the European Commission's suspension of duty-free access for Pakistani ethanol exports and the Geographical Indication (GI) dispute over Basmati rice. Khan told EU lawmakers that the ethanol decision, justified by Brussels as a response to increased export volumes, had hurt sugarcane farmers and rural supply chains, particularly in flood-affected areas where molasses-based production supports livelihoods. Islamabad urged the EU to reconsider the suspension, calling for a "balanced and development-sensitive" approach.

On Basmati rice, Pakistan argued that the EU's pending GI decision must account for the shared cultivation of the crop across Punjab in both Pakistan and India, warning that any unilateral recognition could distort trade and undermine its agricultural heritage. Pakistani officials asked the EU to ensure a fair and impartial process.

The delegation also reviewed Pakistan's progress under GSP+ monitoring, including recent legislative measures such as the Islamabad Child Marriage Restraint Act (2025) and the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals, as

well as Pakistan's election to the UN Human Rights Council (2026–2028). EU lawmakers reportedly welcomed these steps and highlighted Pakistan's potential for industrial expansion and human capital development, noting that over 60 percent of its 250 million citizens are under 30 years old.

Looking ahead, Pakistan requested technical assistance and transition support to comply with new EU regulatory regimes—particularly the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), and the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)—that will shape future access for its textile, leather, and agri-food exports. Both sides reaffirmed that continued dialogue and transparency would guide the EU–Pakistan relationship, which has seen Pakistani exports to Europe rise by more than 100 percent since 2014, making the EU the country's largest trading partner. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan seeks Saudi investment as Islamabad promotes mining and trade cooperation abroad

(lm) Pakistan is intensifying its international investment drive, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif attending the Future Investment Initiative (FII) summit in Riyadh while senior ministers promote the country's mineral potential at global industry forums. The coordinated outreach underscores Islamabad's effort to attract foreign capital amid slow growth and ongoing fiscal constraints.

In Riyadh, Sharif is engaging with Saudi leadership and global investors at the FII, a flagship conference launched under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and hosted by the Public Investment Fund. His visit aims to expand cooperation in energy, trade, investment, and workforce mobility, with talks also expected to address regional stability and sustainable development. The Pakistani delegation, which includes Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, is promoting Pakistan as a destination for long-term strategic and technological investment.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have deepened their economic and security ties over the past year. In September 2025, the two countries signed a defense pact formalizing joint security commitments, while in 2024, they concluded 34 memorandums of understanding worth USD 2.8 billion across multiple sectors. Riyadh remains Islamabad's largest economic partner in the Middle East and home to over 2.5 million

Pakistani workers, whose remittances are vital to Pakistan's USD 407 billion economy. [Arab News 1]

In parallel, Pakistan's Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Resources, Ali Pervez Malik, highlighted investment opportunities in the country's mining and minerals sector at the International Mining and Resources Conference (IMARC) 2025 in Sydney. Malik emphasized Islamabad's new export-oriented strategy, supported by regulatory reforms and improving credit outlooks.

On the sidelines, Malik met Saudi Vice Minister for Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid Al-Mudaifer to discuss Saudi participation in Pakistan's mineral exploration ventures, describing the cooperation as a "natural extension" of existing bilateral ties. Pakistan's estimated USD 6 trillion in untapped mineral reserves, including copper, gold, lithium, and iron ore, remain largely underdeveloped, contributing only 3.2 percent to GDP and less than 0.1 percent to global mineral trade.

Malik also met officials from Sweden, France, and the World Bank, seeking technical and financial cooperation in mineral value chains and critical metals. The government views mining and downstream processing as central to its export diversification and long-term fiscal stability strategy. [Arab News 2]

India: Refiners pause Russian oil orders amid new U.S. sanctions, pending trade deal with Washington

(lm/ms) Indian refiners have halted new orders of Russian crude oil following the latest round of U.S. sanctions targeting Russia's two biggest energy producers, Rosneft and Lukoil, as companies await government guidance and clearer payment mechanisms, industry sources told Reuters. The shift comes as New Delhi and Washington move closer to finalizing a bilateral trade agreement that could significantly reduce punitive U.S. tariffs on Indian exports.

India has been the largest buyer of Russian seaborne crude since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, importing around 1.7 million barrels per day this year. However, the sanctions—announced on October 23—give companies until November 21 to wind down transactions with the targeted producers. Major refiner Reliance Industries, which operates the world's largest refining complex in Gujarat and holds a long-term contract for 500,000 barrels per day with Rosneft, has

confirmed it will comply with Western sanctions and adjust supply arrangements accordingly.

State-run refiners, including Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindustan Petroleum, are also reviewing trade documentation to ensure compliance. Analysts estimate the sanctions could raise India's annual import bill by under two percent, as refiners substitute Russian barrels with crude from the Middle East and Brazil. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3]

The recalibration of Russian oil imports coincides with an ongoing U.S.–India trade negotiation, in which the Trump administration's 50 percent tariff on Indian exports—half of it imposed in retaliation for Russian oil purchases—remains a major sticking point. Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said New Delhi would not "rush into" agreements or accept limits on its trade choices, but a senior official described the U.S. deal as "very near," with both sides "converging on most issues." [Reuters 4]

Agriculture and energy are central to the talks, with Washington seeking market access for U.S. corn, soybeans, and soymeal, while India has sought tariff reductions to around 15–16 percent to restore competitiveness for its textile, jewelry, and seafood exports. [Reuters 5]

India advances anti-dumping probe into Chinese and Thai tuberculosis drug imports

(ms) India has advanced an anti-dumping investigation into imports of *Ethambutol Hydrochloride* — a key ingredient in anti-tuberculosis drugs — from China and Thailand, after domestic pharmaceutical giant Lupin Ltd. alleged that the products were being sold at unfairly low prices, undercutting Indian manufacturers. The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) released a list of registered parties on October 27, moving the case into its next phase.

The probe comes amid India's broader push to protect its pharmaceutical sector from cheap imports, particularly from China, which remains the largest source of raw materials and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for Indian drugmakers. In recent years, New Delhi has encouraged local production through "Make in India" and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to reduce import dependence.

The DGTR will assess whether dumping occurred during April 2024–March 2025 and may impose anti-

dumping duties if injury to domestic producers is confirmed. The case is part of 13 new trade remedy probes launched in recent months, reflecting growing scrutiny of foreign competition in strategic manufacturing sectors. [Reuters]

Brunei signs United Nations cybersecurity treaty

(tl) Brunei Darussalam has officially joined the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime (Hanoi Convention) during a ceremony in Hanoi, Vietnam, marking its commitment to strengthening global cooperation against cyber threats.

By joining the convention, Brunei aims to enhance its domestic legal framework against transnational cybercrime, conduct further legislative reviews, and deepen international partnerships in cybersecurity.

At the high-level conference, attended by 110 UN member states, Minister Dato Paduka Seri Awang Haji Halbi bin Haji Mohd Yussof reaffirmed Brunei's dedication to global cybersecurity and called for stronger regional and international cooperation in information-sharing and cyber resilience. He also highlighted national initiatives such as the Anti-Scam Centre and Anti-Scam Helpline, established to counter online fraud. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia highlights regional cooperation at ASEAN summits

(dql) At the 47th ASEAN Summit in Malaysia on October 27, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to dialogue, peace, and multilateralism as the foundation of regional stability. He stressed that ASEAN will continue to favor dialogue over confrontation, peaceful solutions over coercion, and international law over unilateral actions — principles he said have long sustained the bloc's unity and resilience amid global instability.

Leaders discussed advancing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, focusing on building a resilient, innovative, and people-centered community. They agreed on the need to reinforce ASEAN's centrality and unity in response to shifting geopolitical and economic conditions.

Hun Manet called for deeper regional integration through the removal of trade and connectivity barriers,

the empowerment of MSMEs, and the completion of the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement. He also urged stronger cooperation on renewable energy and the acceleration of the ASEAN Power Grid to promote sustainable growth. [Cambodianess]

Meanwhile, tt the 26th ASEAN–Republic of Korea (ROK) Summit Hun Manet called for stronger regional cooperation to tackle transnational crimes such as trafficking, smuggling, cybercrime, terrorism, and online scams. He emphasized closer coordination through enhanced law enforcement, information sharing, and capacity-building.

Hun Manet highlighted Cambodia's collaboration with South Korean police to address these threats and underscored Seoul's support for ASEAN's digital transformation, including the ASEAN–ROK Digital Innovation Fund and the new ASEAN–ROK Digital Academy in Cambodia. He also commended Korea's contributions to regional energy and creative industry initiatives, notably the ASEAN Power Grid 2045.

ASEAN and Korean leaders reaffirmed their commitment to advancing a future-oriented Comprehensive Strategic Partnership under the ASEAN–ROK Plan of Action (2026–2030), aligned with ASEAN's Vision 2045. They agreed to deepen economic cooperation through the ASEAN–Korea Free Trade Area and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and welcomed continued South Korean support for ASEAN's digital integration, particularly the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia reaffirms commitment to ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar

(gm) Cambodia has reiterated its full support for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC) as the main framework for resolving the crisis in Myanmar through a Myanmar-led political process.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn reaffirmed the position during the Extended Informal Consultation on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus held in Kuala Lumpur on October 24, at the invitation of Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan.

The meeting reviewed regional efforts to advance the 5PC, including calls to end violence, promote dialogue

among all parties, and expand humanitarian assistance. Participants commended Malaysia's leadership and the ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy for maintaining engagement despite slow progress.

Sokhonn emphasized the importance of the ASEAN Troika and Extended Troika mechanisms to ensure policy continuity and coordination within the bloc. On the sidelines, he met Mohamad to thank Malaysia for its mediation role in facilitating the recent Cambodia–Thailand peace talks.

Prime Minister Hun Manet has also voiced optimism that Myanmar's conflict can be resolved peacefully through inclusive dialogue and full implementation of ASEAN's 5PC, reaffirming Cambodia's continued support for the bloc's collective peace efforts. [Khmer Times]

Chinese-backed aluminum boom in Indonesia reshapes global market outlook

(ms) Indonesia is fast emerging as a new global powerhouse in aluminium production, driven largely by massive Chinese investment. Three new Chinese-backed smelters — including the Xinfa–Tsingshan Juwan project in Weda Bay, Taijing's plant in the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP), and the Adaro–Lygend Kaltara project in North Kalimantan — are nearing completion, positioning the country to double its primary aluminium output within a year.

According to Trade Data Monitor, Indonesia exported over 325,000 metric tons of aluminium between January and August 2025, a 67 percent increase compared to the same period last year. In 2023, the figure was barely 10,000 tons. This rapid acceleration reflects how Indonesia's downstream industrialization push — once focused on nickel — is now extending into aluminium as part of President Prabowo Subianto's broader plan to add value to the nation's vast mineral wealth.

Analysts say the implications for the global aluminium market are profound. Goldman Sachs projects Indonesia's aluminium output will rise from 815,000 tons in 2025 to 1.6 million in 2026 and 2.5 million by 2027, potentially driving a global surplus of 1.5 million tons by 2026 and 2 million tons by 2027. Prices, currently around USD 2,870 per metric ton on the London Metal Exchange, are expected to fall to about USD 2,350 in late 2026.

With China nearing its domestic smelting cap of 45 million tons — a limit imposed by Beijing to curb overcapacity, reduce carbon emissions, and control energy-intensive industries — Indonesia's expansion effectively allows Chinese companies to continue scaling production abroad, filling the global supply gap that would otherwise have emerged later in the decade while reinforcing Beijing's influence across Southeast Asia's rapidly developing metals sector.

However, the aluminium surge also raises new challenges. Energy demand for smelting is enormous, and most of Indonesia's power still comes from coal, raising questions about environmental sustainability. Meanwhile, the country's bauxite reserves — crucial for alumina production — are smaller than its nickel deposits, meaning future supply chains could face raw material constraints.

Critics also warn that an oversupply could hurt producers elsewhere, particularly in regions with higher energy costs, while Indonesia risks becoming overly dependent on Chinese capital and technology. [Energy News] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Rights Groups urge ASEAN to reject Myanmar's upcoming general election

(anl/su) Two leading human rights organizations—Justice for Myanmar (JFM) and Human Rights Watch (HRW)—have urged ASEAN to reject the Myanmar junta's planned election and end all engagement with the military regime. Their appeal came ahead of the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

JFM stated that ASEAN "has the opportunity at this summit to end its continued complicity by rejecting the junta's sham election, barring the junta and its representatives from ASEAN and its bodies, and standing with the people of Myanmar in their struggle for federal democracy, peace, and justice."

The group highlighted that since the 2021 military coup, at least 54 companies from ASEAN member states have maintained business ties with the junta in sectors such as oil and gas, timber, surveillance technology, and aviation fuel. JFM also warned that the junta's recent rebranding, from the *State* Administration Council *to the* State Security and Peace Commission, is a calculated attempt to evade sanctions and obscure accountability for ongoing international crimes.

JFM described the planned election as a “façade designed to falsely legitimize the junta’s reign of terror.” She emphasized that any election held under coercion by an illegitimate regime “categorically rejected by the Myanmar people” is a sham. She urged ASEAN to refuse to send observers or provide any form of recognition to the junta process.

HRW similarly warned that the junta lacks both the intention and the capacity to hold a credible election. The organization said the planned December 2025 polls would only intensify repression and violence. HRW’s Asia Director, John Sifton, noted that the junta’s systematic attacks on civilians and opposition groups have created a climate of fear that makes free and fair elections impossible. He added that the regime’s ongoing atrocities—including killings, torture, and sexual violence—amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Both groups called on Malaysia, as ASEAN’s 2025 chair, along with Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and regional governments, to “unequivocally reject the Myanmar junta’s sham election, refuse to send observers or provide any form of support, and stand firmly in solidarity with the people of Myanmar and their legitimate democratic representatives.” [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines cements Timor-Leste’s ASEAN entry, pushes key trade pacts at ASEAN Summit

(ghd) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is in Malaysia to attend the 47th ASEAN Summit from October 26-28. A primary objective of his visit is to participate in the signing of the formal declaration for Timor-Leste's admission as the bloc's eleventh member. [Inquirer1] [Inquirer2] [Manila Bulletin1]

On the sidelines of the summit, Marcos held a series of bilateral meetings to strengthen ties. In his first meeting with Japan's new Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, the leaders reached an "agreement in principle" on a new military agreement. This pact, known as an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), will establish a framework for the armed forces of both nations to mutually provide supplies and services during military exercises. The leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to the trilateral partnership with the US to ensure regional peace and Takaichi expressed Japan’s support of the Philippines during the latter’s ASEAN chairmanship. [Inquirer3]

Marcos also met with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, who expressed strong support for the Philippines' upcoming 2026 ASEAN chairmanship. For his part, Marcos reaffirmed the Philippines' support for the peaceful resolution of the Thai-Cambodian conflict. During his meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Joseph Carney, Marcos thanked Canada for its support of the rules-based international order, particularly UNCLOS.

Marcos also held talks with Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul to boost tourism and trade, and with European Council President Antonio Costa to discuss trade and the international rules-based order. [Manila Bulletin4]

During the summit, the Philippines is also set to formally accept the ASEAN chairmanship for 2026 from the current chair, Malaysia. Marcos has declared that the Philippines is "ready" to take the helm, emphasizing that its leadership objective will be guided by "practical, inclusive, and measurable initiatives." In strategic discussions, Marcos also suggested that the bloc should look to India for solutions on regional maritime concerns. [Manila Bulletin5] [Manila Bulletin6]

Thailand steps up anti-scam campaign under U.S. scrutiny, linking domestic purges with regional diplomacy

(bk/lm) Thailand's intensifying crackdown on transnational scam networks has gained new urgency amid mounting international pressure—particularly from the United States and United Kingdom—to dismantle Southeast Asia's vast cyberfraud operations. The campaign, led by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, follows a U.S.–U.K.–coordinated seizure of nearly USD 15 billion in cryptocurrency linked to Cambodia's Prince Holding Group, accused of running one of Asia's largest scam and forced-labor empires. The U.S. indictment explicitly named Thailand as a logistical and financial base in the operation, placing Bangkok under heightened scrutiny and compelling the government to showcase credible enforcement and transparency. [AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3]

Anutin has since launched an expansive anti-scam drive combining domestic purges, legal action, and regional coordination. He tasked the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) with leading real-time intelligence sharing and joint operations with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, China, South Korea, and the U.S. Domestically, he revoked the Thai citizenship

of Cambodian senator Ly Yong Phat for alleged involvement in cyberfraud, human trafficking, and money laundering, and moved forward with the extradition of Chinese gambling tycoon She Zhijiang under the Extradition Act (2008). Thailand's Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) has frozen over THB 70 million (USD 2 million) in Ly's assets, while police have issued more than 160 arrest warrants and blocked 40 percent of illicit fund transfers. [Bangkok Post] [Thai Enquirer] [The Nation 1]

The campaign has also been shadowed by political turbulence. Deputy Finance Minister Vorapak Tanyawong resigned on October 22 after allegations surfaced that he and his wife had received cryptocurrency payments from Cambodian scam operators. Though he denied wrongdoing, the episode has damaged public trust and underscored how deeply embedded such networks have become within Thailand's elite. [The New York Times]

In parallel, Anutin is pursuing a regional strategy to restore confidence, proposing during the ASEAN–Republic of Korea and ASEAN Plus Three summits in Kuala Lumpur that Thailand host a regional summit on scam suppression. The proposal complements commitments under the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords with Cambodia to dismantle cross-border scam and trafficking networks. Bangkok and Phnom Penh have also co-sponsored an emergency resolution at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) calling global cyberfraud "an attack on humanity." [The Nation 2]

U.S. e-waste shipments expose regulatory gaps as Southeast Asia becomes dumping ground

(bk) A new investigation by the Basel Action Network (BAN), a U.S.-based environmental watchdog monitoring hazardous waste flows, has revealed that Southeast Asia has become a major destination for illegal U.S. electronic waste exports—highlighting growing governance and compliance challenges in the region's environmental management systems. The report found that ten U.S. brokers shipped over 10,000 containers of discarded electronics valued at more than USD 1 billion between January 2023 and February 2025. Much of this material was falsely declared as recyclable scrap and exported to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, countries that lack sufficient infrastructure for the safe treatment of hazardous waste. [Thai Enquirer]

Vietnam hosts signing of United Nations Convention against Cybercrime with broad Asian participation

(hn/ms) On October 25, 65 nations signed the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, also known as the *Hanoi Convention*, at a high-level ceremony held in Vietnam. The agreement — adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2024 after five years of negotiations — aims to create the first comprehensive international legal framework to combat cybercrime and promote digital trust.

Among Asian signatories were Vietnam, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, reflecting the region's growing engagement in cyber governance. UN Secretary-General António Guterres described the treaty as a "powerful, legally binding tool to strengthen our collective defenses against cybercrime," emphasizing that no country can tackle cross-border digital threats alone.

The Hanoi Convention requires member states to criminalize a wide range of online offenses, including unauthorized access and interference with computer systems, online fraud and forgery, identity theft, and data espionage. It also targets the distribution of child sexual abuse material, cyber-enabled money laundering, and the use of digital networks for terrorism or organized crime.

Beyond defining offenses, the convention lays out a framework for international cooperation and evidence-sharing, obliging countries to provide mutual legal assistance, enable extradition for cybercriminals, and facilitate real-time preservation and exchange of electronic data between national law enforcement agencies. It calls for 24/7 contact networks to ensure rapid responses to cyber incidents and encourages capacity-building initiatives, particularly to help developing countries strengthen their cybercrime legislation and investigative capabilities.

However, rights organizations and technology experts have warned that some provisions could be misused to justify state surveillance or restrictions on free expression, citing the absence of strong safeguards to protect journalists, whistleblowers, and activists. Civil society groups from Asia and Europe have urged governments to ensure that domestic legislation implementing the treaty remains consistent with international human rights standards.

The convention will enter into force 90 days after 40 ratifications and remain open for signature until

December 31, 2026, marking a major step toward coordinated global action against cyber threats — though its long-term impact will depend on how states balance security and civil liberties in the digital era. [Reuters] [Vietnamnews1]

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính strengthens Vietnam's role and partnerships at the 47th ASEAN Summit

(hn) Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính, leading the Vietnamese delegation, just attended the 47th ASEAN Summit and related meetings from October 25 to 28, 2025. [Baochinhphu, in Vietnamese]

At the 47th ASEAN Summit and related meetings held in Kuala Lumpur, regional leaders, including Prime Minister Chính, gathered to discuss strategies for building a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient ASEAN community.

In his address, Prime Minister Chính emphasized that inclusivity and sustainability should serve as ASEAN's long-term strategic direction amid global uncertainties. He outlined three main pillars: strengthening solidarity to effectively implement ASEAN strategies; deepening intra-bloc economic, digital, and green linkages; and promoting innovation through initiatives like the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework and an ASEAN Innovation Centre Network. He also announced that Vietnam will host the third ASEAN Future Forum in 2026 and expressed support for the Philippines as ASEAN Chair that year, voicing confidence in its leadership to advance creativity and unity across the bloc. [Vietnamnews1]

Vietnam urges stronger ASEAN–Japan cooperation in digital, green, and sustainable development

At the 28th ASEAN–Japan Summit, Prime Minister Chính and other ASEAN leaders, along with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, reaffirmed their commitment to deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Chính called for early upgrading of the ASEAN–Japan Free Trade Agreement and prioritized cooperation in digital and green economies, sustainable supply chains, and air transport connectivity. He also proposed expanding collaboration in education, science, health care, and AI, while requesting Japan's support in nuclear energy safety and training. Both sides agreed to strengthen economic cooperation, with Japan remaining ASEAN's fourth-largest trading partner and fifth-largest investor. They pledged to promote digital

transformation, clean energy, and climate resilience through the ASEAN–Japan Integration Fund (JAIF 3.0) and endorsed the Joint Statement on Further Promotion and Implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). [Vietnamnews2]

Vietnam and the US strengthen comprehensive strategic partnership and regional cooperation at ASEAN–US Summit

Chính also held a brief meeting with US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the 13th ASEAN–US Summit. The two leaders agreed to advance the Vietnam–US Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in a deeper and more substantive manner, aiming to conclude a Reciprocal Trade Agreement and boost US investment in Vietnam. Chính proposed that the US recognize Vietnam's market economy status and remove it from strategic export control lists, which President Trump acknowledged and instructed his team to review. Chinh also commended US efforts in promoting regional peace, including mediating the Cambodia–Thailand peace agreement.

At the ASEAN–US Summit, Chinh proposed four cooperation priorities: enhancing trade and investment connectivity, promoting digital transformation and energy security, strengthening cybersecurity and transnational crime prevention, and maintaining regional peace and stability, including in the East Sea (South China Sea), in accordance with international law and the 1982 UNCLOS. President Trump reaffirmed ASEAN's central role in the Indo-Pacific and pledged continued US support in economics, technology, energy, and peacebuilding. The summit concluded with the adoption of the *Joint Vision Statement on a Stronger, Safer, and More Prosperous ASEAN–US Partnership*, setting strategic directions for cooperation in trade, finance, digital economy, and regional security. [Vietnamnews3]

Vietnam strengthens partnerships with Cambodia, Canada, and Brazil to boost trade, connectivity, and global cooperation

On the sidelines of the Summit, he also held separate meetings with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, and Brazilian President Lula da Silva.

During the meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening political trust and promoting cooperation under the motto of *"good neighborliness, traditional friendship, comprehensive cooperation, and long-term sustainability."* They agreed

to work toward a USD 20 billion bilateral trade target, enhance transport and logistics connectivity, and resolve border issues amicably. Chinh also welcomed Cambodia's progress in peacefully resolving its border situation with Thailand through the newly signed Peace Agreement.

Meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Chinh welcomed Canada's engagement in the region through its Indo-Pacific Strategy and called for deeper cooperation in aviation, energy, education, and civil nuclear training. Both sides agreed to strengthen trade and investment ties leveraging the CPTPP, facilitate supply chain connectivity, and enhance people-to-people exchanges.

In his discussion with Brazilian President Lula da Silva, both leaders agreed to promote trade liberalization through a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between Vietnam and MERCOSUR, boost cooperation in agriculture—particularly coffee production and exports, and strive to raise bilateral trade to USD 15 billion by 2030. President Lula da Silva reiterated Brazil's intention to recognize Vietnam's market economy status and expressed support for Vietnam's initiatives in multilateral forums.

The two sides also agreed to enhance consultation and coordination to amplify the voice of developing nations and contribute to peace, stability, and sustainable development globally. [Vietnamnews4]

Nominee for U.S. envoy to Dhaka urges stronger defense ties to counter China, calls upcoming election pivotal

(lm) Brent Christensen, nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh, told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 23 that Bangladesh's forthcoming national election will be "the most consequential in decades," stressing Washington's intent to deepen ties with both the interim government and the next elected administration.

Christensen — a veteran diplomat with more than twenty years of experience on Bangladesh policy, including service in Dhaka from 2019 to 2021 — described the country as "one of the new Asian tigers" with substantial economic potential and a critical role in ensuring a "free and open Indo-Pacific." He emphasized that the United States would continue supporting Bangladesh's democratic transition following the 2024 student-led uprising that ended ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule.

During questioning, Senator Pete Ricketts of Nebraska raised concerns over Dhaka's expanding defense ties with China, citing the Chinese-built submarine base in Pekua and reported plans to purchase J-10 fighter jets from Beijing. Christensen said he shared those concerns and pledged, if confirmed, to "clearly articulate the risks from Chinese activity" while advancing closer US–Bangladesh military cooperation. He highlighted opportunities for interoperability through joint exercises and promotion of allied defense systems as alternatives to Chinese hardware, in line with congressional initiatives such as the "Think Twice Act", which seeks to discourage Chinese arms purchases by partner nations.

Christensen also committed to strengthening bilateral trade and investment, reducing barriers for US businesses, and expanding cooperation in humanitarian affairs — notably in addressing the Rohingya refugee crisis, for which he urged broader international burden-sharing.

Once confirmed, Christensen would fill a post left vacant since mid-2024, when former ambassador Peter Haas completed is term. [The Daily Star]

Brunei, Laos deepen strategic partnership through bilateral talk

(tl) Brunei Darussalam's King Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah had bilateral talks with Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone in Kuala Lumpur to further strengthen the two nations' strategic partnership. The discussions focused on expanding cooperation in education, defence, and people-to-people exchanges.

King Sultan highlighted Brunei's scholarship program for Laotian students and Laos' continued participation in English language training provided by Bruneian defence officials. Both sides also explored opportunities to enhance trade relations, particularly in rice imports and agricultural collaboration between their private sectors.

Brunei and Laos upgraded their ties to a strategic partnership in 2023. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia, Singapore discuss defense cooperation

(dql) General Mao Sophan, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and

Commander of the Royal Cambodian Army, paid an official visit to Singapore from October 21 to 23. During the trip, he held talks with Desmond Choo, Secretary of State at Singapore's Ministry of Defence; Rear Admiral Aaron Beng, Chief of Defence Force; and Major General Cai Dexian, Chief of the Singapore Army.

Discussions focused on strengthening bilateral defence cooperation through joint training, capacity-building, and enhanced military-to-military engagement aimed at supporting regional peace and stability. [Government, Cambodia] [Khmer Times]

Cambodian, Vietnamese navies deepen cooperation to combat maritime crime

(dql) Cambodia and Vietnam have strengthened naval cooperation to promote maritime peace, combat illegal fishing, drug trafficking, smuggling, and illegal immigration, while protecting the marine environment and conducting search and rescue operations.

The 4th meeting on maritime information exchange between Cambodia's National Maritime Security Committee (NCMSC) and Vietnam's Maritime Area Command 4 was held on October 22 in Preah Sihanouk province to deepen collaboration in contiguous waters.

Rear Admiral Ly Huot of Cambodia called for expanding information sharing beyond security and rescue, aiming to enhance friendly relations and regional maritime stability. Vietnam's Colonel Nguyen Van Can confirmed agreements covering fishing activities, disputes over fishing grounds, illegal immigration, search and rescue, and maritime crime monitoring. Both sides underscored the importance of coordinated patrols, inspections, and information exchange to address transnational maritime crimes and maintain order at sea. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia agrees to full U.S. tariff elimination in trade deal

(dql) Cambodia and the United States have reached a trade agreement under which Phnom Penh will remove tariffs on all American exports, while the U.S. will retain a 19 percent tariff on most Cambodian goods, with select products benefiting from zero tariffs. Signed by Prime Minister Hun Manet and President Donald J. Trump on October 26, the deal aims to enhance market access for U.S. exporters

while safeguarding America's economic and security interests.

The agreement also tackles longstanding non-tariff barriers. Cambodia has pledged to streamline import procedures, accept U.S. vehicle and medical standards, and recognize FDA certifications. In agriculture, it will adopt U.S. sanitary and phytosanitary rules, while in digital trade, it will maintain a moratorium on duties for electronic transmissions and refrain from discriminatory digital taxes. Additional commitments include stronger intellectual property enforcement, improved labor protections—including prohibitions on goods made with forced labor—and stricter environmental compliance. Both countries also agreed to ensure fair competition from state-owned enterprises and reinforce supply chain resilience.

Experts describe the deal as not only a trade arrangement but also a strategic governance pact, requiring Cambodia to strengthen labor, environmental, and digital regulatory systems. [Khmer Times] [The White House, USA]

Cambodia, Croatia explore strategic partnership to boost humanitarian mine action collaboration

(dql) Cambodia and Croatia are set to explore formal collaboration on mine clearance and related humanitarian initiatives following an agreement reached during an October 22 meeting in Tokyo between Ly Thuch, First Vice-President of the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA), and Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman, held on the sidelines of the Ukraine Mine Action Conference.

Discussions focused on strengthening bilateral ties and leveraging technological innovations in demining, with Radman expressing interest in sharing Croatia's expertise and advanced equipment, including drones and modern detection devices.

Both parties agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), expected to be signed during a high-level Croatian delegation visit to Cambodia in early 2026, facilitating knowledge exchange and the adoption of advanced technologies to enhance safety and efficiency in demining operations. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia strengthens parliamentary ties with Hungary

(dql) Cambodia and Hungary have deepened their parliamentary cooperation with two new agreements signed in Budapest during a visit by Cambodia's National Assembly delegation.

National Assembly President Khuon Sudary and Hungarian Speaker Laszlo Kover signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance inter-parliamentary collaboration, while a separate accord between the two secretariats was signed to facilitate administrative cooperation.

The agreements aim to expand high-level exchanges, training programs, and knowledge sharing between both legislatures. Kover praised the visit as a step toward stronger ties, reaffirming both sides' commitment to promoting peace and mutual understanding.

He also announced plans to accelerate the establishment of a Hungarian embassy in Phnom Penh and to double scholarships for Cambodian students from 15 to 30.

Sudary highlighted Hungary as a reliable partner connecting Asia and Europe and expressed gratitude for its support in education and healthcare. She also pledged to expand cooperation in agriculture, water management, technology, and tourism to further strengthen bilateral relations. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia, Morocco pledge to expand cooperation

(dql) Cambodia and Morocco have pledged to deepen bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors ahead of the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2026. During a virtual meeting on October 21, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn and Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita discussed strengthening ties in trade, investment, tourism, science, technology, and sub-national partnerships such as sister-city programs.

Bourita announced an increase in Morocco's annual scholarship quota for Cambodian students from 20 to 30, particularly in diplomacy and international relations, in support of Cambodia as host of the 2026 Francophonie Summit. He also confirmed Morocco will send a high-level delegation to the event.

In addition, he reiterated Morocco's backing for Cambodia's candidacies for the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for 2028–2030 and the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICS-ICH) for 2026–2030.

The ministers exchanged views on regional and global issues, emphasizing justice, peace, and mutual respect as foundations for stability. Sokhonn briefed Bourita on Cambodia's efforts to resolve the Cambodia–Thailand border dispute peacefully.

Both sides encouraged more frequent engagement between sectoral ministries through visits and virtual exchanges, alongside cultural and commemorative activities planned for next year. [Cambodianess] [Khmer Times]

Importantly, Cambodia has reiterated its backing of Morocco's Autonomy Plan as a realistic and credible solution to the Western Sahara dispute, following the videoconference. Morocco's Autonomy Plan refers to a political proposal presented by Morocco in 2007 aimed at resolving the long-standing dispute over Western Sahara, a territory in North Africa claimed by both Morocco and the Polisario Front which seeks independence as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

The joint statement emphasized Cambodia's support for Morocco's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while commending Morocco's efforts to achieve a negotiated political settlement through the 2007 Autonomy Plan.

The statement also reaffirmed support for the UN-led mediation process, guided by relevant Security Council resolutions, and underscored a shared commitment by both countries to peace, security, and stability. Cambodia and Morocco highlighted common positions against separatist threats, equating them to those posed by terrorists and extremist groups.

This reaffirmation follows Cambodia's previous endorsement of Morocco's sovereignty during an official visit in March 2023. The Autonomy Plan has received wide international recognition, with countries such as France, the UK, the US, and Spain among over 120 nations supporting Morocco's proposal. [Morocco World News]

New Chinese floating barrier installed at Scarborough Shoal amid heightened tensions with Philippines

(dql) China has installed a new floating barrier at Scarborough Shoal, according to satellite imagery, further escalating tensions with the Philippines over the disputed atoll in the South China Sea. The barrier blocks access to the lagoon, continuing Beijing's longstanding effort to restrict entry to the shoal, which it has controlled since a 2012 standoff with Manila. Analysts note this is not the first such installation, but recent imagery from October 8 highlights the ongoing enforcement of Chinese maritime control.

The move comes amid rising confrontations between Chinese and Philippine coastguard and military aircraft, including reported interference with Philippine reconnaissance flights. Beijing's earlier announcement to establish a nature reserve at the shoal, a traditional fishing area for local communities, has added to the dispute.

Chinese authorities frame the installation as a response to what they consider "provocative behavior" by the Philippines, asserting sovereignty over the atoll while signaling that future measures will depend on Manila's actions. [SCMP] [Newsweek]

China-supported religious trips to mainland attract over 10,000 Taiwanese in 2024

(dql) More than 10,000 Taiwanese citizens took part in China-backed religious activities in 2024, according to a study by Taiwanese non-governmental organization IORG, which described the participation as part of Beijing's influence campaign to shape public sentiment on the island. [IORG, in Chinese]

The report, based on over 7,000 articles from China's Taiwan Affairs Office—the State Council agency responsible for managing relations with Taiwan—, revealed that Chinese authorities organized or supported more than 110 religious trips for Taiwanese participants.

The study found that Beijing used religion as a vehicle for what it called "political messaging," that promotes narratives of shared cultural heritage and the idea that Taiwan and China are "destined to reunify."

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council called the findings a valuable reference, noting that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) routinely conducts "United Front" operations under the guise of religious exchange to extend political influence. [Reuters]

China, U.S. establish framework for trade deal ahead of leaders' meeting

(dql) China and the U.S. have agreed on the framework of a potential trade deal, set to be finalized during talks between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping this week in South Korea, according to US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent. The framework addresses key points including TikTok's US operations, China's rare earth export controls, and resumption of significant Chinese soybean purchases. [ABC News]

Bessent emphasized that the deal would avert the threatened 100 percent US tariffs on Chinese goods, signaling both countries' desire to prevent further escalation in the trade dispute between the world's two largest economies. On rare earths—critical for electronics and largely controlled by China—the US secured a one-year delay while both sides reassess restrictions. The agreement on soybeans aims to alleviate the impact on US farmers caused by China's previous import halt. [Reuters]

TikTok's US operations, a point of national security concern, will remain under US oversight, with American companies controlling the algorithm and holding the majority of board seats. The deal reflects a shift in Trump's approach to the platform, which he previously threatened to ban. [BBC]

Last week, the White House confirmed that the two presidents will meet on October 30 on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in South Korea, marking their first in-person encounter since Trump returned to office in January. [CNBC]

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on the United States to "meet China halfway" to facilitate "high-level interactions" ahead of the meeting between the two presidents. Speaking with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio by phone on October 27, Wang described the personal rapport between Xi and Trump as "the most valuable strategic asset" in bilateral relations.

Wang acknowledged that China–U.S. economic relations have faced "twists and turns" but said both countries had "clarified positions and enhanced understanding" during the talks. He urged the U.S. to resolve disputes through dialogue and to refrain from "exerting pressure at will." Trump, en route to Japan, said he expected a trade deal would soon be reached.

Analysts viewed the engagement as an attempt by both sides to stabilize relations before the Xi–Trump summit. [Reuters]

U.S. lawmakers Trump to raise detained Americans, Jimmy Lai in talks with Xi

A bipartisan group of 38 US senators has urged Trump to press Xi Jinping for the release of Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai during their meeting. In a letter, the lawmakers described Lai, 78, as a political prisoner in deteriorating health, warning that his continued incarceration could turn him into a symbolic martyr. They noted that if released, Lai would leave Hong Kong and withdraw from public life. [Foreign Relations Committee, USA]

Lai, founder of the now-defunct *Apple Daily*, is awaiting a verdict following a lengthy trial under Beijing's national security law, the first major prosecution of a high-profile pro-democracy activist. US and Western officials have condemned the case as an attack on press freedom, while Hong Kong authorities maintain that Lai masterminded riots and acted against Chinese interests. [SCMP 1]

The Hong Kong government strongly condemned the Senators' move, accusing them of misleading the public and attempting to undermine the city's judicial independence and the "one country, two systems" principle.

Authorities stressed that ongoing legal proceedings should not be subject to external commentary, warning that such interference could compromise the courts' independence. Addressing concerns about Lai's treatment in custody, the government highlighted that the Correctional Services Department (CSD) ensures a safe, humane, and medically supervised environment for all inmates. [The Standard]

In parallel to the Senator group, a group of Republican lawmakers has called on Trump to confront Xi over the detention and exit bans of Americans. Senators and Representatives highlighted cases including Dawn Michelle Hunt, Nelson Wells, and the U.S.-citizen son of dissident artist Gao Zhen, framing Beijing's use of detention and travel restrictions as coercive tools to gain leverage over the United States.

The lawmakers also cited Chinese citizens with U.S.-based relatives involved in human rights advocacy, including Gulshan Abbas, Ezra Jin Mingri, and Ekpar Asat, accusing the Chinese Communist Party of disproportionately targeting Chinese-American and Uygur-American communities. [SCMP 2]

China blames U.S. military presence for South China Sea crashes

(dql) China has attributed recent U.S. military aircraft accidents in the South China Sea to Washington's frequent naval deployments in the disputed waters. The foreign ministry accused the U.S. of "flexing muscles by frequently sending military vessels and aircraft to the South China Sea," describing it as "the root cause of maritime security issues, that undermines regional stability. Beijing, however, offered humanitarian assistance if requested. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

The October 27 incidents involved a Sea Hawk helicopter and an F/A-18F Super Hornet, both operating from the USS *Nimitz*. All five personnel aboard were rescued and are in stable condition. The causes of the crashes are under investigation. The *Nimitz*, returning from the Middle East after operations related to the Israel-Gaza conflict and Yemen, is scheduled for retirement next year. [The New York Times]

A March report by a Beijing-based think tank noted that U.S. carrier strike groups entered the South China Sea eight times last year, alongside numerous submarine operations. However, it also highlighted logistical constraints, including maintenance and deployment limits. The U.S. Pentagon plans to invest USD 12.6 billion in shipbuilding and maintenance through 2028, but limited shipyard capacity and labor shortages continue to challenge fleet operations. [SCMP]

Chinese nationals arrested in Georgia over attempted uranium purchase

(dql) Georgian authorities have detained three Chinese citizens in Tbilisi for allegedly attempting to purchase 2 kg of uranium with plans to transport it to China via Russia, the State Security Service (SSS) reported. The suspects, coordinated from China, were apprehended while negotiating the transaction, which reportedly involved a payment of USD 400,000.

An additional Chinese national in Georgia, in breach of visa rules, is accused of bringing experts to locate uranium across the country. The suspects face charges carrying up to ten years in prison.

The arrests highlight Georgia's ongoing struggles with illicit nuclear material trade—a legacy issue stemming from leftover Soviet-era radioactive stockpiles. Previous cases include arrests in 2016, 2019, and July 2025 involving attempts to sell uranium-238 and uranium-235—both are strictly controlled internationally because even small amounts can contribute to nuclear weapons programs. [Al Jazeera]

Germany postpones foreign minister's China visit amid rising tensions over trade and geopolitics

(dql) German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul has postponed his planned visit to China due to an insufficient number of meetings arranged with Chinese officials, aside from a scheduled meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Berlin described the trip as postponed "to a later date," but the move signals mounting strain in Germany–China relations at a time of broader EU–China trade friction (see article in this edition).

The postponement follows growing tensions between the two countries over Beijing's export restrictions on rare earths and semiconductors, as well as Germany's criticism of China's stance on Taiwan and assertive behavior in the South China Sea. [DW]

Responding to Wadephul's remark in an interview with Reuters that Germany's One-China policy remains unchanged, meaning that "there must be no violent change of the status quo," in cross-strait relations, China's foreign ministry stressed a strict, non-negotiable interpretation of the one-China principle, framing any stance that stops short of actively opposing "Taiwan independence" as indirectly supporting separatism. [Reuters] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Wadephul, who was scheduled to depart for Beijing on October 26, had intended to urge Beijing to lift export curbs and to discuss China's support for Russia amid the ongoing war in Ukraine. [POLITICO]

China reclaims top spot as Germany's largest trading partner amid U.S. tariffs

The cancellation of the German foreign minister's trip to Beijing comes as China has reclaimed its position as Germany's largest trading partner in the first eight months of 2025, surpassing the United States as renewed U.S. tariffs sharply reduced German exports. According to preliminary data by *Reuters*, total trade

between Germany and China reached USD 190.7 billion, compared to USD 189 billion with the U.S., reversing last year's ranking when the U.S. briefly overtook China after eight years.

The shift reflects the growing impact of President Donald Trump's renewed protectionist policies, which have caused German exports to the U.S.—especially cars, machinery, and chemicals—to fall 7.4 percent year-on-year, with a steep 23.5 percent drop in August alone. Economists attribute the decline primarily to higher tariffs and a stronger euro, both dampening export competitiveness.

At the same time, German exports to China also contracted by 13.5 percent, yet imports from China surged 8.3 percent to USD 126.4 billion, driven partly by goods reportedly sold at dumping prices. Analysts warn that this widening imbalance deepens Germany's economic dependence on China and intensifies pressure on domestic industries already struggling with weak growth. [Reuters]

China condemns UK sanctions on firms over Russia ties

(dql) China has strongly condemned the United Kingdom for imposing sanctions on 11 Chinese companies over alleged ties to Russia, despite Beijing's formal objections.

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce described London's measures as "unilateral" and lacking international legal basis, warning they could undermine the positive momentum in China–UK economic and trade relations. Beijing insisted that exports of dual-use goods are subject to strict control. It demanded that normal cooperation between Chinese and Russian firms "should not be interfered with," and called on London to revoke the sanctions, pledging to protect the rights of affected Chinese companies. [Ministry of Commerce, China, in Chinese]

The sanctions, announced on October 15, targeted 90 entities and ships, including Chinese firms, for allegedly supporting Russia's energy, finance, and defense sectors. London framed the move as part of efforts to block Russian oil from global markets, amid rising tensions over China's continued purchases of Russian crude. Chinese imports from Russia reached 8.29 million tons in September, accounting for 17.5 percent of total crude imports, highlighting Beijing's reliance on Russian energy.

Analysts note the dispute is unlikely to ease, as China insists on meeting its domestic energy needs, while the UK and EU maintain sanctions. Beijing characterized the measures as attempts to shift blame or smear China and indicated that any actions harming Chinese interests would provoke a firm response. Similar backlash followed the EU's sanctions on Chinese companies buying Russian oil announced on October 23. [SCMP] [Reuters]

Hong Kong slams UK's criticism of National Security Law

Adding to the tensions, Hong Kong authorities condemned the UK's latest monitoring report on the city, accusing London of making "untruthful remarks" and "slanders" over claims that national security laws have eroded the city's autonomy and freedoms. The government said Britain had "no right to interfere" in China's internal affairs and denounced its comments on ongoing national security cases, including those of Jimmy Lai and Joshua Wong, as an attempt to pressure Hong Kong's judiciary.

The report, issued by UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, expressed concern that Beijing-imposed security laws and the disbandment of opposition groups had curtailed Hong Kong's political pluralism. Cooper also criticised the issuance of arrest warrants for overseas activists and reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the British National (Overseas) visa scheme, calling it a lifeline for Hongkongers seeking greater freedoms. [Government, UK]

Hong Kong's government dismissed the report as politically motivated and accused London of "distorting the truth" and "glorifying criminal behaviour." Cooper, meanwhile, pledged continued support for Hongkongers settling in the UK under the BN(O) scheme, praising their contributions to British society. The report also noted declining transparency in Hong Kong's governance, citing restricted public access to records and official information. [Hong Kong Free Press] [SCMP]

Ethiopia explores partial debt conversion to Chinese yuan amid restructuring talks

(dql) Ethiopia is in discussions with China to convert part of its USD 5.38 billion debt into Chinese yuan, following talks initiated last month during National Bank Governor Eyob Tekalegn's visit to Beijing. The proposed currency swap aims to lower financing costs and bolster bilateral trade, aligning with China's

broader strategy to internationalize the yuan—a path recently embraced by neighboring Kenya.

Ethiopia and China—both BRICS memebers—previously signed a currency swap agreement in September 2024, establishing transactions in Ethiopian birr and yuan to deepen economic and trade ties. Discussions involved the Export-Import Bank of China and the People's Bank of China, highlighting Beijing's role as a key partner amid rising investment and trade flows with Ethiopia.

The move comes as Ethiopia continues restructuring roughly USD 15 billion in external debt after a 2023 default. A memorandum of understanding was reached in July with the official creditor committee, co-led by China and France, while negotiations with Eurobond holders remain complex and delayed. The Ethiopian government plans to finalize agreements with official creditors by the end of 2025 and with commercial creditors by March 2026.

This potential partial yuan conversion reflects a growing trend among African nations to diversify debt currency exposure, reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar, and strengthen strategic financial partnerships with China. [APA News] [SCMP]

China signals strategic partnership offer to Australia

(dql) During a meeting on October 27, held on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Malaysia, Chinese Premier Li Qiang told Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese that Beijing is prepared to develop "a more mature and stable China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership." Li emphasized maintaining strategic communication and expanding mutually beneficial cooperation.

He highlighted potential collaboration in the green economy, high-tech industries, and the digital sector, while urging Australia to ensure an "open, transparent, and non-discriminatory environment" for Chinese businesses. [State Council, China]

Albanese, who described the meeting "positive," highlighted the progress in Australia-China relations since his government took office in 2022, noting that China has lifted a series of trade restrictions that had previously cost Australian exporters up to USD 13 billion annually.

The leaders also addressed Australia's recent USD 8.5 billion critical minerals deal with the United States, a move aimed at reducing global reliance on China in the renewable energy supply chain.

Security concerns were a key topic, particularly a recent incident over the South China Sea in which a Chinese Su-35 jet released flares near an Australian P-8 surveillance aircraft. Australia formally protested the maneuver as unsafe and unprofessional, while China accused Australia of violating its sovereignty (see article below).

Albanese told Li the incident was a matter of concern, emphasizing the importance of frank discussion between allies and partners. He also referenced previous military tensions, including Chinese naval exercises near Australia and earlier aerial encounters in the South and Yellow Seas. [ABC News]

The meeting between Li and Albanese comes at a time when Australia is emerging as the primary counterweight to China in the Pacific as U.S. and other Western aid contributions decline. The 2025 Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map shows official development finance (ODF) to the region fell 16 percent in 2023, marking the second consecutive year of decline to USD 3.6 billion. Australia now accounts for 43 percent of ODF, four times more than New Zealand, and is expanding infrastructure lending to offset the gap left by the U.S., whose aid cuts under the Trump administration weakened Washington's credibility in the region. [Lowy Institute]

The report notes that while China's overall spending has decreased over the past decade, it has shifted toward smaller, community-focused grants that strengthen local political and grassroots influence, gaining "narrative dominance" as a reliable partner. In contrast, the U.S. retreat has left Australia increasingly isolated in efforts to counter Beijing's influence. By 2028, Australia is projected to provide more than twice the combined aid of Japan, New Zealand, the U.S., France, Germany, and the U.K.

Beyond development finance, Australia is actively collaborating with Pacific nations, including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and others, to improve disaster response. At the 2025 South Pacific defence ministers' meeting in Chile, Australia and New Zealand advanced plans for a regional response group, with New Zealand set to lead the shared headquarters from mid-2026, reinforcing both humanitarian and strategic engagement in the region. [The Guardian]

Australia, China trade accusations after South China Sea military incident

(dql) China and Australia have exchanged accusations following an incident involving military aircraft over the South China Sea, escalating tensions between the two nations. [Al Jazeera]

The Chinese defense ministry accused Australia of covering up an incursion into Chinese airspace and lodged a complaint, criticizing Australia for allegedly shifting blame onto China and urging Canberra to restrain its naval and air forces to avoid harming bilateral relations. China claimed the incident occurred over the Xisha Islands (Paracel Islands), a territory also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan. [Ministry of Defense, China]

Australia, in turn, described the event on October 19 as "unsafe and unprofessional," saying a Chinese fighter aircraft released flares near an Australian Air Force plane conducting a maritime surveillance patrol. The Australian statement emphasized that its operations have been carried out for decades in accordance with international law but did not specify the location. [Australian Government, Defence] [BBC]

The incident coincided with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to the White House, where he met US President Donald Trump. They signed an agreement for Australia to supply rare earth and critical minerals to the US following Chinese export restrictions and discussed Australia's procurement of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pact (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3).

Beijing reiterated its opposition to AUKUS, with the foreign ministry condemning it for promoting bloc confrontation, nuclear proliferation risks, and intensifying an arms race. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Direct flights between China and India resume after five-year suspension amid gradual thaw in relations

(lm) India and China have resumed direct passenger flights for the first time in five years, marking a significant step in the gradual normalization of relations between the two neighbors following years of diplomatic and military tension. Air services had been suspended in early 2020 due to the COVID-19

pandemic and remained halted after a deadly Himalayan border clash that severely strained ties.

The resumption of flights reflects broader efforts by both sides to rebuild confidence. In July 2025, India restarted issuing tourist visas for Chinese nationals, followed in August 2025 by a series of high-level exchanges: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit to China in seven years—where he met President Xi Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit—and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's trip to New Delhi for talks on border de-escalation and delimitation.

Officials described the flight restoration as a step toward "people-to-people contact" and "gradual normalization of exchanges." Before the pandemic, India and China operated more than 2,500 scheduled flights annually, underscoring the scale of suspended connectivity. Thus, business communities have welcomed the move, citing faster travel and revived commercial links between eastern India's industrial hubs and southern China's manufacturing centers. [BBC] [CNN]

India reaffirms strategic partnership with Seychelles during vice president's visit

(lm) India's Vice President, C. P. Radhakrishnan, visited Seychelles from October 26 to 27 to attend the swearing-in ceremony of newly elected President Patrick Herminie. During his visit, he met both President Herminie and Vice President Sebastien Pillay, extending congratulations on behalf of the Government of India and reaffirming New Delhi's commitment to deepening bilateral ties.

Talks between the two sides centered on advancing cooperation under India's Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) framework, which seeks to enhance regional maritime security and sustainable development across the Indian Ocean. The discussions also highlighted India's broader engagement with the Global South and its support for Seychelles' development priorities.

Vice President Radhakrishnan also met Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam and addressed a gathering of the Indian diaspora in Seychelles. [Ministry of External Affairs, India]

India donates 81 school buses to Nepal as part of long-standing education partnership

(lm) India has donated 81 school buses to educational institutions across 48 districts in Nepal, including disaster-affected areas in Koshi Province, as well as remote regions. The latest contribution brings the total number of buses donated by India to 381 over the past three decades. [The Kathmandu Post]

Incoming Indian chief justice urges coordinated Indo-Lankan response to marine and climate degradation

(lm) India's next Chief Justice Surya Kant has urged India and Sri Lanka to launch a joint framework to address worsening environmental degradation in the Indian Ocean, warning that unchecked overfishing, oil spills, and coral reef loss threaten the region's survival. Speaking at the University of Colombo during a three-day visit, he said both nations must replace fragmented national policies with shared legal and scientific mechanisms to protect their interconnected coastal ecosystems.

Justice Kant cited the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar as areas of particular concern, describing them as once-rich biodiversity zones now depleted by trawling and unregulated coastal activity. He said the repeated confrontations between Indian and Sri Lankan fishers reflect an exhausted resource base rather than isolated law enforcement disputes.

He called for joint data-sharing, monitoring, and disaster-response systems to manage marine pollution, saltwater intrusion, and plastic accumulation —issues he described as transboundary and escalating. To strengthen institutional cooperation, Kant announced that Sri Lankan Supreme Court judges will visit India later this year or in early 2026 to deepen legal collaboration on environmental governance.

He concluded that both countries' judiciaries, with their established records in environmental jurisprudence, must act as central institutions in shaping a regional model for ecological protection in the Indian Ocean. [Daily Mirror]

German foreign minister meets Indian trade minister in Brussels to discuss EU–

India trade deal

(lm) German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul met with India's Trade Minister Piyush Goyal in Brussels on October 27 for consultations aimed at advancing the ongoing EU–India free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. The talks come amid renewed efforts by New Delhi and Brussels to finalize the deal by the end of 2025, with both sides seeking to expand market access, reinforce supply-chain resilience, and deepen cooperation in critical raw materials.

The meeting reflects Germany's increasing focus on India within the European Union's Indo-Pacific strategy. Wadephul postponed a planned visit to China earlier in the week—a move widely interpreted as signaling Berlin's shift toward diversification of economic partnerships in Asia amid continuing trade and security tensions with Beijing.

While in Brussels, the German foreign minister also held meetings with EU leaders and NATO officials on defense industrial cooperation and transatlantic supply-chain security. No official readout of the discussions with Goyal was available at the time of publication on October 29. [Reuters]

India's Navy frigate Sahyadri visits Japan's Sasebo base

(dql) The Indian Navy frigate Sahyadri made a port call October 28 at Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) base in Sasebo, southwestern Japan, as part of growing defense cooperation between the two countries amid China's rising military presence in the Indo-Pacific. The vessel is scheduled to depart Nagasaki Prefecture on October 31 after a rest period for the crew and resupply.

Earlier this month, the Indian frigate visited the MSDF's Yokosuka base near Tokyo following joint exercises with Japanese ships and submarines off Kyushu, underscoring ongoing efforts to strengthen maritime security collaboration in the region. [Kyodo News] [The Hans India]

Indonesia Raises USD 840 million in first dim sum bond as China pushes global use of Renminbi

(ms) Indonesia has successfully raised CNY 6 billion (USD 842 million) from its first-ever renminbi-denominated sovereign bond, marking both a milestone in Jakarta's funding diversification strategy and a boost to Beijing's efforts to expand the international use of its currency.

The issuance, conducted on October 23 and to be settled on October 31, comprised two tranches: a five-year bond worth CNY 3.5 billion (USD 491 million) with a 2.5 percent coupon, and a ten-year bond worth CNY 2.5 billion (USD 351 million) offering 2.9 percent. Total orders reached around CNY 18 billion (USD 2.53 billion).

The strong demand came primarily from Asia, with significant participation from Chinese investors. The FInance Ministry said proceeds from the sale will support the state budget and align with Indonesia's prudent debt management strategy.

The debut makes Indonesia one of a growing number of countries turning to China's bond markets for financing as part of efforts to diversify funding away from traditional dollar-denominated debt. The bonds received investment-grade ratings from Moody's (Baa2) and Fitch and S&P (BBB), and will be listed on the Singapore Exchange.

Analysts say the move also reflects Beijing's ongoing push to internationalize the renminbi. Through initiatives like cross-border settlement programs, the Belt and Road Initiative, and offshore "dim sum" bond markets in Hong Kong and Singapore, China has sought to position its currency as a credible alternative to the dollar for trade and investment.

By encouraging trading partners such as Indonesia to issue yuan-denominated debt, China aims to strengthen the renminbi's role in regional finance while deepening its capital markets' global reach.

The issuance was jointly managed by Bank of China, HSBC, and Standard Chartered Bank. [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia seeks China's support for global copyright royalty reform

(ms) Indonesia has asked for China's backing on a proposal to create a legally binding international framework for copyright royalty governance, an initiative Jakarta plans to present at the World

Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) meeting in Geneva this December.

Justice Minister Supratman Andi Agtas met Chinese officials during the China–ASEAN Heads of Intellectual Property Offices Meeting in Xi'an, where he urged Beijing to support Indonesia's proposal for a Legally Binding Instrument on the Governance of Copyright Royalty in the Digital Environment. The plan seeks to promote fairer and more transparent compensation for creators and rights holders in the digital age.

"We highly value the support of the People's Republic of China as a WIPO member in advancing this collective effort," Agtas said, emphasizing that the initiative would strengthen copyright management amid rapid technological change. He added that Indonesia views intellectual property as a strategic tool for innovation and economic growth, especially under President Prabowo Subianto's administration.

According to Agtas, China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA) Commissioner Shen Changyu welcomed the proposal and expressed interest in studying it further.

During the visit, Indonesia and China also signed two new memoranda of understanding to strengthen intellectual property cooperation, replacing an agreement that expired in June 2024. One focuses on bilateral IP system development across patents, industrial designs, and trademarks, while the other establishes a Patent Prosecution Highway, allowing for faster and more coordinated patent reviews between the two countries.

Agtas said the renewed cooperation would help improve IP governance and benefit both economies by supporting innovation, technology transfer, and small-business competitiveness. [Antara] [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia to repatriate British death row inmate on humanitarian grounds

(ms) Indonesia and the United Kingdom have agreed to repatriate Lindsay Sandiford, a 69-year-old British woman sentenced to death for drug trafficking in Bali, on humanitarian grounds, Indonesian Legal Affairs Minister Yusril Ihza Mahendra announced on October 21.

Sandiford was convicted in 2013 for smuggling 4.8 kilograms of cocaine worth more than USD 2 million from Bangkok to Bali. Her age, illness, and good

behaviour in prison were cited as reasons for the decision.

“Lindsay is old and sick. She behaved well during her imprisonment, so that was enough reason to satisfy the request from the United Kingdom government that she be returned home and complete her sentence there,” Yusril said.

He added that another British national serving a life sentence would also be released under the agreement. Sandiford is expected to return to Britain within two weeks.

The transfer marks a rare humanitarian arrangement between Indonesia and the United Kingdom. Indonesia enforces some of the world’s strictest drug laws, with trafficking offences often punishable by death, though recent cases have seen growing international appeals for clemency. [Reuters]

Indonesia, Brazil sign energy and mining MoU

(gp) On October 23, Indonesian Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia and Brazilian Mines and Energy Minister Alexandre Silveira signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in energy and mining sectors. The MoU establishes a framework for collaboration in oil and gas developments, renewable energy promotion, energy efficiency initiatives, and infrastructure modernization. It also creates opportunities for joint projects in mineral resources and human resource development.

A key focus of the cooperation initiative is bioenergy development. Brazil ranks as the world's second-largest ethanol producer, and Indonesia aims to leverage this expertise through technology transfer and best practices to advance its national bioenergy program. According to Lahadalia, “Brazil is among the global leaders in bioenergy, particularly in terms of ethanol production. We aim to use this MoU to promote technology transfer and best practices in a bid to advance our national bioenergy program." Beyond energy cooperation, Indonesia and Brazil also agreed to work together to enhance mineral resource management, with both being the world’s largest producers of nickel and niobium, respectively. [Antara]

This MoU was one of eight cooperation agreements signed during President Lula's official visit to Jakarta, which largely focused on bolstering the countries’

trade relationship. Lula has argued, “How is it that two important countries in the world, such as Indonesia and Brazil, which together have a population of almost 500 million, only have a trade volume of USD 6 billion? This is not enough for Indonesia, and it is not enough for Brazil.” [South China Morning Post]

Japan, U.S. sign critical minerals deal as Prime Minister Takaichi seeks stronger alliance in meeting with U.S. President Trump

(dql/ay) Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and U.S. President Donald Trump signed a framework agreement on critical minerals on October 28, aiming to reduce reliance on China for materials essential to technology and defense. The deal, inked shortly before Trump’s meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in South Korea on October 30, was hailed by Takaichi as the start of a “new golden age” in U.S.-Japan relations and is part of a broader U.S. strategy to secure mineral partnerships across the Indo-Pacific, including with Australia and Malaysia.

The bilateral meeting—part of Trump’s three-visit to Japan—highlighted the leaders’ close rapport, with Trump praising Takaichi’s predecessor Shinzo Abe and offering broad U.S. support for Japan. Takaichi, in a diplomatic gesture, nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize and pledged gifts including 250 cherry blossom trees and fireworks for U.S. Independence Day celebrations.

Security and defense cooperation were also emphasized, with Takaichi signaling plans to accelerate Japan’s defense spending to 2 percent of GDP and strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance amid China’s rising influence. The discussions included economic commitments, with Japan reaffirming a USD 550 billion investment in the United States, while familiar U.S.-Japan negotiators and cabinet members attended, underscoring continuity from the Abe administration. [The Guardian] [France 24]

Furthermore, Trump announced that he approved the first batch of missiles to be delivered to Japan’s Self-Defense Forces for their F-35 fighter jets, with the shipments scheduled to arrive this week ahead of schedule. Speaking to American troops aboard the USS George Washington at Yokosuka naval base, Trump emphasized US military dominance, praising the country’s weapons, ammunition, and personnel while

asserting that any future conflict would be decisively won by the United States. [Anadolu Ajansı]

Prior to the meeting, Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi stated on October 22 that the government plans to demonstrate its determination to further strengthen national defense, reaffirming Japan's ongoing five-year military expansion through 2027, which includes—besides doubling defense spending to two percent of GDP—also developing long-range "counterstrike" capabilities—a major shift from the country's postwar defense-only policy. He added that Japan is adapting to "new warfare realities," citing drone swarms and cyber threats seen in Ukraine. [NBC News]

Regarding the USD 550 billion investment pledge, analysts have noted that Takaichi faces a major fiscal challenge to deliver on the commitment. The funding, pledged as part of a September memorandum of understanding with the White House, must be deployed before President Trump's term ends in January 2029 or tariffs on Japanese goods could be reinstated at higher rates.

According to the plan, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) is expected to provide about one-third of the total, financed partly through Japan's USD 1.3 trillion in foreign reserves and new debt issuance. The remainder would rely on commercial lenders backed by Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI), though the extent of government guarantees remains unclear. Takaichi, who supports expansionary fiscal policy, is expected to favor private-sector participation to limit immediate budget strain.

However, investments cannot proceed until Washington finalizes the list of approved projects under a U.S.–Japan oversight committee. The delay may temporarily ease pressure on Tokyo ahead of Takaichi's first summit with Trump next week, but failure to mobilize funding early next year could risk renewed tariff threats. [Reuters]

Defense ministers meeting

Following Trump's visit to Japan, Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi will meet U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in Tokyo on October 29, marking the first defense talks between the two allies since Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi took office last week.

Koizumi is expected to brief Hegseth on Japan's plans to revise its three key defense and security strategy documents and accelerate defense spending to 2

percent of GDP by March—two years ahead of schedule. The move is widely seen as reflecting Takaichi's firm security stance and her intent to reinforce Japan's defense posture amid regional tensions.

The two defense chiefs are also likely to discuss enhancing deterrence and response capabilities under the Japan-U.S. alliance, particularly in light of China's expanding military activities in the East and South China seas. [Kyodo News]

Laos, Brunei pledge closer cooperation in key sectors

(ms) Laos and Brunei have agreed to strengthen cooperation across key areas including agriculture, energy, trade, investment, and human resource development, following a visit by Lao Foreign Minister Thongsavanh Phomvihane to Brunei from October 19 to 22.

During meetings with Brunei's Foreign Minister Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof, both sides reviewed progress in existing bilateral programs and discussed expanding collaboration under their strategic partnership framework. The two ministers reaffirmed commitments to implement earlier agreements and encourage private-sector engagement to drive mutual growth.

Thongsavanh also paid a courtesy call on His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, conveying appreciation for Brunei's long-standing support, including contributions to human resource development, disaster relief, and infrastructure in Laos. He also thanked Brunei for its assistance during Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024, which he said had contributed to its success.

The Sultan welcomed the visit, expressing Brunei's continued support for closer cooperation both bilaterally and within ASEAN, and urged greater engagement between the two countries' business communities to deepen economic ties. [Asia News Network] [Lao News Agency]

Laos, Vietnam agree to accelerate joint projects and boost trade

(ms) Laos and Vietnam agreed to accelerate joint development projects and expand economic

cooperation after bilateral trade rose 57.1 percent in the first nine months of 2025, reaching 2.4 billion dollars, according to a meeting between Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Lao Party General Secretary and President Thongloun Sisoulith in Hanoi on October 24.

Vietnam's exports to Laos increased 79.9 percent to 884.5 million dollars, while imports grew 46 percent to 1.5 billion dollars, reflecting stronger connectivity and investment flows between the two neighbors. The leaders also agreed to push for the timely completion of key joint infrastructure and development projects and organize activities celebrating major bilateral anniversaries in the coming year.

Thongloun was in Vietnam to attend the signing ceremony of the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, also known as the Hanoi Convention, which both sides described as an important step toward building a global framework for cybersecurity cooperation.

Prime Minister Chinh commended Laos for progress in implementing its ninth five-year socio-economic development plan and preparations for its 12th National Party Congress in early 2026. He reaffirmed that Vietnam gives top priority to its "special and enduring" relationship with Laos and will continue supporting its reform and development efforts.

Thongloun expressed appreciation for Vietnam's sustained assistance and solidarity, including disaster relief support following recent floods in northern provinces. He called the Hanoi Convention a "historic milestone" and pledged to strengthen cooperation with Vietnam to promote stability, growth, and digital security across the region. [Lao News Agency] [Vietnam News] [Vietnam+]

Laos expands agricultural exports to China amid stronger bilateral cooperation

(ms) Laos is deepening agricultural cooperation with China as part of efforts to diversify exports and strengthen rural development, building on the growing trade and infrastructure links forged under the Laos–China Railway corridor. The initiative underscores agriculture's role as a key driver of Laos' economic strategy to boost exports, reduce poverty, and attract investment into rural areas.

During the 15th meeting of the Coordination Committee for Northern Laos and Yunnan Province on

October 24, both countries agreed to enhance product quality, improve quarantine standards, and expand market access for Lao agricultural goods — particularly durian, coffee, and livestock. The meeting also emphasized technology transfer and stronger disease-prevention systems to ensure the safe and sustainable trade of fresh produce and livestock.

Laos plans to export 400 tons of premium durian to China this year via the Laos–China Railway, which has already transported more than 150,000 tons of durian from the region in 2025. The railway has become a critical channel for accelerating agricultural trade, cutting transport time from southern Laos to Kunming to less than 24 hours.

Beyond fruit exports, cooperation is broadening into aquaculture and forestry. Earlier in April 2025, Laos shipped its first farm-raised pangasius fish from the Mekong River Pangasius Industrial Park, which has a capacity of 20,000 tons annually.

Both sides also pledged closer coordination on environmental issues, including combating illegal logging and wildlife trafficking, while advancing plans to establish a Laos–China (Yunnan) Joint Rubber and Agricultural Research Center to promote innovation and sustainable rural development. [The Laotian Times]

Malaysia, China deepen defence Ties through Aman Youyi 2025 Exercises

(ga) Malaysia and China conducted their largest-ever joint military exercise, Aman Youyi 2025, from October 15 to 23 across Malaysia's Selangor and the Straits of Malacca, focusing on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief (HADR), and maritime security cooperation. The biennial drill, involving over 1,000 personnel from both countries' armed forces, aims to strengthen operational coordination in land, sea, and air domains.

According to the Malaysian Joint Forces Headquarters (JFHQ), the exercise enhances interoperability and preparedness for regional humanitarian and security operations. It includes urban search and rescue (USAR) training at the Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART) headquarters in Puchong — the first of its kind between the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The USAR component involves SMART personnel training both forces in high-angle rescue, collapsed structure stabilization, and field hospital deployment.

At sea, two Royal Malaysian Navy vessels and three PLA ships are participating in a Maritime Security (MARSEC) exercise in the Straits of Malacca, one of the world's most critical shipping lanes.

The PLA contingent includes a Type 052D destroyer, Type 071 amphibious landing ship, and Type 056A corvette, supporting operations such as amphibious coordination, search and rescue, and maritime interdiction.

Originating in 2014 as a tabletop exercise, Aman Youyi has evolved into a full-scale field operation integrating air, land, and naval elements. This year's edition underscores continued defence cooperation between Malaysia and China in enhancing disaster response, maritime safety, and multi-agency operational coordination in Southeast Asia. [Defence Security Asia] [Bernama]

Malaysia, China hold bilateral talk on sidelines of ASEAN summit

(tl) Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Chinese Premier Li Qiang held a meeting on the sidelines of the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, focusing on strengthening trade, investment, and regional cooperation.

The leaders discussed expanding collaboration in automotive, high-tech, and semiconductor industries, including the Automotive High-Tech Valley (AHTV) project in Tanjung Malim, rare earth elements (REE) development and high-value export.

Infrastructure projects such as the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) extension and the Perak-Penang water pipeline were also on the agenda, along with cooperation in halal industry, digital economy, and green technology. Both sides reaffirmed support for the ASEAN Power Grid (APG) and explored ways to enhance air connectivity and tourism.

China expressed its backing for Malaysia's peace efforts in Cambodia-Thailand and Myanmar, while Anwar highlighted Malaysia's commitment to deepening ties under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia, South Korea conclude Free Trade Agreement

(tl) Malaysia and South Korea have officially concluded negotiations for the Malaysia-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement (MKFTA), according to the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI). The agreement will cover a broad range of areas including goods, services, investments, customs facilitation, digital trade, green economy, bioeconomy, and economic cooperation.

MITI Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said the deal will deepen collaboration in industrial development, trade, and investment, while enhancing Malaysia's economic resilience and market diversification. The MKFTA will be Malaysia's 19th free trade agreement, offering duty-free access to key products such as food and agricultural goods, palm oil, cocoa, chemicals, and tropical timber.

In 2024, South Korea was Malaysia's eighth-largest trading partner, with trade totaling USD 23.9 billion (MYR 109.68 billion), dominated by exchanges in electrical and electronics, petroleum, and machinery. Both sides also signed an MoU on supply chain to strengthen economic cooperation and human capital development. MITI highlighted Malaysia's intention to learn from South Korea's digital innovation policies and expand collaboration. [The Edge Malaysia]

New concrete wall to be constructed along Malaysia-Thailand border

(tl) The Malaysia government is considering building a new concrete wall, covering 110.7 kilometers length, along the Malaysia and Thailand border to boost the the border control, and national security.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories), Datuk Seri Dr Zaliha Mustafa said that the project will prioritize the high-risk areas between Chuping and Padang Besar in Perlis, replacing the aging and the easily damaged barbed wire fencing.

An allocation of USD 69 million (MYR 327 million) has been approved to develop and upgrade border infrastructure. The proposal will be submitted to the Economy Ministry via the National Security Council (MKN) for final approval.

Additionally, the government also approved USD 4.2 million (MYR 20 million) to install clean and treated water pipelines at border security posts, addressing long-standing issues of clean water shortages and inadequate living conditions for personnel stationed at border. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia, Vietnam push to finalize comprehensive strategic partnership plan

(tl) On the sidelines of the 47th ASEAN Summit, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh held talks to finalize the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Action Plan, aiming to deepen cooperation across multiple sectors.

The discussions focused on enhancing collaboration in trade, investment, electrical and electronics, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and the halal industry. Both leaders also explored expanding green energy cooperation through the Gentari-TNB-Petrovietnam project, which involves wind and solar initiatives. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia, U.S. ink reciprocal trade deal

(tl) Malaysia and the United States have formalized a new reciprocal trade agreement that expands Malaysia's access to the U.S. market while maintaining the previous 19 percent import tariff agreement. Signed by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and U.S. President Donald Trump, the deal grants tariff exemptions for 1,711 Malaysian export items, including palm oil, rubber, cocoa, and pharmaceuticals, valued at about USD5.2 billion and roughly 12 percent of total export to the U.S.

Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Zafrul Aziz said the U.S. also agreed to consider semiconductor exports under Section 232 of its Trade Expansion Act. Under the pact, Malaysia will not restrict exports of critical minerals or rare earth elements to the U.S., a move significant to the U.S. following China's new export restrictions.

The agreement also includes major Malaysian purchases of American products, such as aircraft, semiconductors, liquified natural gas, coal, aerospace and telecom equipment.

Tengku stressed that the agreement would allow to lower the import tariffs on US goods, making the high-quality items such as medical devices, IT equipment and machinery components more accessible to local businesses and consumers. [Malay Mail 1]

In addition, an agreement on elevating bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) was also

signed to deepen cooperation in trade, investment, technology, defence, energy security, regional stability, and people-to-people relations.

The partnership highlights Malaysia's role as a trusted U.S. partner in the Asia Pacific, with total trade between the nations reaching MYR 324.91 billion (USD 71.39 billion) in 2024. [Malay Mail 2]

Furthermore, during the press conference, Tengku confirmed that Malaysia is not required to seek U.S. approval before entering digital trade agreements with other countries, despite a clause under Article 3.3 in the recently signed reciprocal trade deal suggesting consultations with Washington. He reaffirmed that such consultations are non-binding and do not affect national sovereignty. [Malay Mail 3]

Meanwhile, Malaysia's Parliamentary Special Select Committee on International Relations and International Trade will hold a hearing on November 12 to review the recently signed Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) between Malaysia and the United States.

The committee plans to invite representatives from the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI), the US Embassy, economists, and trade chambers to provide insights and respond to questions. The committee is comprised of 12 Members of Parliament from both government and opposition parties. [Malay Mail 4]

Malaysia, Finland strengthen ties

(tl) During a bilateral meeting ahead of the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Finland agreed to enhance cooperation in high-technology transfer, satellite development, and education. Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan highlighted Finland's expertise in these sectors, noting that two Malaysian schools in Damansara and Cyberjaya have adopted Finland's education model.

While trade between the two countries remains limited, Mohamad emphasized shared priorities on global security. [Malay Mail 1]

At the ASEAN summit, Finland formally acceded to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), marking a major milestone in its engagement with Southeast Asia.

Both nations expressed shared priorities in education, human capital development, and regional stability, with Valtonen emphasizing Finland's readiness to deepen collaboration with ASEAN member states. [Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia, Brazil strengthen cooperation with MoUs in key sectors

(tl) Malaysia and Brazil signed several memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to boost collaboration in semiconductors, science, technology, innovation, and agriculture during Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's visit to Kuala Lumpur for the ASEAN summit. The exchange ceremony, witnessed by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and President Lula, marked a major step in advancing bilateral relations.

Key agreements include partnerships between the two governments on semiconductor development, science and innovation cooperation, and agricultural research. Additional MoUs were signed between Malaysia's Mimos Bhd and Brazilian institutions MDE Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais and CTI Renato Archer, focusing on semiconductor technologies.

Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) and Brazil's Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation (FUNAG) also formalized cooperation on international relations research, while both countries agreed to enhance training for diplomats.

In 2024, Brazil ranked as Malaysia's second-largest trading partner in Latin America, with bilateral trade valued at MYR 20.36 billion (USD 4.46 billion), covering sectors such as electronics, palm oil, rubber, and processed food. [Free Malaysia Today]

Maldives and Pakistan leaders discuss stronger cooperation

(lm) Maldives and Pakistan have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening bilateral ties during a meeting in Malé between Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of Pakistan's Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. The meeting was part of General Mirza's official visit to the Maldives and concluded with a pledge to expand cooperation across multiple sectors in the coming years. [The Sun]

Mongolia, Saudi Arabia hold first political consultations

(fs) The first political consultation between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia and Saudi Arabia was held in Riyadh on October 20.

Both sides reviewed recent political, social, and economic developments and discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation through concrete economic initiatives. The meeting emphasized expanding collaboration in food security, agriculture, mining, infrastructure, education, digital economy, and tourism.

The two countries also reaffirmed their commitment to work together within the United Nations and other international organizations. [Montsame]

Mongolia, South Korea test water-saving smart farming technology

(fs) The Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry of Mongolia (MoFALI) held a meeting with representatives from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and South Korean agritech company Midbar to discuss testing the “Air farm system” under Mongolian conditions.

The project is part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution sustainable development campaign, aiming to introduce innovative, water-efficient agricultural technologies to Mongolia.

The Air Farm system monitors soil moisture, air temperature, and plant growth in real time, improving productivity and reducing water consumption by up to 99 percent compared to traditional farming. Designed for quick setup and use in water-scarce or remote areas, the technology is expected to enhance Mongolia’s food security and advance its sustainable agricultural development goals. [Qazinform]

Mongolia, Russia agree to increase fuel trade

(fs) Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources of Mongolia Damdinnyam Gongor met with Russian Ambassador to Mongolia Evsikov Alexey Nikolaevich in Ulaanbaatar on October 22 to discuss fuel supply cooperation.

During the meeting, Gongor requested Russia's support in increasing fuel exports and expediting transportation to address what he described as an artificially created fuel shortage. Nikolaevich rejected recent social media claims about reduced Russian fuel supplies to Mongolia, clarifying that deliveries remain stable and that there are no disruptions in shipments.

Following the meeting, the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources of Mongolia announced that the volume of fuel imported from Russia will be increased to ensure market stability and meet domestic demand. [Montsame]

Mongolia, Jordan hold first political consultations to strengthen bilateral cooperation

(fs) The first Political Consultative Meeting between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia and Jordan was held on October 23 in Amman, capital city of Jordan.

Both sides exchanged views on political, social, and economic developments in their respective countries and discussed opportunities to expand cooperation in areas such as food, agriculture, energy, culture, and education. They also expressed support for deeper engagement between chambers of commerce and business communities. [Montsame]

A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the two foreign ministries was signed by Mongolian Ambassador to Jordan Bulgan Enkhtuvshin and Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan Al-Fayez. [Zawya]

Myanmar energy minister discusses joint oil and gas exploration with China

(su) Myanmar and China are preparing to expand energy cooperation through joint ventures in offshore oil and gas exploration, according to discussions held during the Myanmar delegation's visit to Beijing from October 21–22.

Union Minister for Energy U Ko Ko Lwin, who attended the 2025 International Energy Transition Forum, met senior officials from the China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Corporation (CNODC), China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and

China Oilfield Services Limited (COSL). Talks focused on jointly exploring and producing oil and gas in Myanmar's offshore blocks, accelerating exploration activities, and developing human resources through training and exchanges in project management, economics, and law.

Both sides also discussed improving the efficiency of the Southeast Asian natural gas pipeline, ensuring continuous crude oil and gas supplies for refinery expansion projects, and strengthening security along pipeline routes. Additional meetings were held with Sino-Pipeline International (SPI), the contractor for the Thanbayakan Refinery Project, and with the BGP Company, which demonstrated new seismic and exploration technologies.

Myanmar's Ministry of Energy stated that the discussions aim to begin exploration and production "as soon as possible," reflecting efforts to revive the country's energy sector amid declining output and growing regional energy competition. [Eleven Media Group]

China reopens four border gates with KIA-controlled territory in Northern Myanmar

(anl) On October 25, the Chinese government reportedly reopened four key border gates with Kachin State, where territory is under the control of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), following nearly a year of closure, according to the ethnic armed group.

The KIA confirmed the reopening, saying that they [China] closed them first, and now they have reopened them. He added that we did not make any deal with China to reopen them—we only said the border closure creates hardship for the people.

While the crossings have resumed operations, China continues to restrict exports of electronics and fuel to Myanmar. For now, only food, construction materials, cement, and iron are reportedly permitted to cross into Kachin State.

The reopened gates link to the Myanmar towns of Kanpaikti, Laiza, Mongjaryang, and Lweje—with Kanpaikti and Lweje serving as the state's largest official border trade hubs.

Over the past few years, the KIA and its allies have seized control of these border towns from junta forces, prompting China to close its border crossings to pressure the group to halt its offensive. The Kachin

Independence Organization (KIO), the KIA's political wing, later negotiated with China to reopen the gates primarily for humanitarian and food trade purposes, and talks continue over the reopening of smaller checkpoints.

Several smaller crossings—including Phimaw, Pangwar, and Kangfan in Chipwi Township, and Parjawng and Man Wein Gyi in Waingmaw Township—also remain under KIA control. The Pangwar, Phimaw, and Mongjaryang routes are used for rare earth exports, while Kanpaikti and Lweje serve as official trade gates with China.

Since December 2023, the KIA and allied forces have captured 13 towns in Kachin State and now control the entire border with China, along with one additional town in northern Shan State—marking a significant shift in power dynamics along Myanmar's northern frontier. [The Irrawaddy]

India conducts cross-border drone strike in Myanmar, killing child and separatist leader's son

(lm) India has reportedly carried out its second cross-border drone strike on Myanmar this year, targeting Karm Way Lawri village in Lahe Township of Sagaing Region, near India's northeastern Mizoram State. According to reports from Naga and Myanmar media, the strike occurred on October 20 and hit a residential area instead of a military camp, killing an eight-year-old child and the 27-year-old son of a senior commander of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN-K), an armed Naga separatist group seeking autonomy for Naga communities living in parts of India and northwestern Myanmar. Four others were reported injured.

Sources cited by *Myanmar Now* said this was the second Indian cross-border attack into Myanmar in 2025, following similar drone strikes in July on suspected NSCN-K positions in Nanyun and Lahe townships. The outlet also quoted observers as saying that Myanmar's military regime has remained silent about India's repeated drone operations and reconnaissance missions inside its territory. NSCN-K has issued a statement condemning the latest strike. [Myanmar Now]

North Korea reaffirms friendship with Laos, vows to deepen bilateral ties

(sm) North Korean leader Kim Jong-un reaffirmed North Korea's commitment to strengthening ties with Laos on October 22, emphasizing that the relationship will continue to grow following recent high-level exchanges. Kim conveyed his message in a letter to Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith on October 19, replying to the latter's congratulatory telegram on the 80th anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea.

Kim praised the countries' long-standing friendship and expressed confidence that cooperation across political and economic sectors would progress further in the coming years. [Korea JoongAng Daily] [Yonhap News Agency]

The statement follows the Laotian leader's rare visit to Pyongyang earlier on October 7, where the two sides held their first summit since establishing diplomatic relations over five decades ago. The meeting and subsequent correspondence reflect Pyongyang's continued outreach to regional partners as it seeks to reinforce solidarity among socialist and non-aligned states amid its diplomatic and economic isolation. [NK News]

Russian president meets North Korean foreign minister as bilateral ties deepen

(dql/sm) Russian President Vladimir Putin met North Korea's Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui at the Kremlin on October 27 in the latest high-level engagement reflecting the deepening ties between Moscow and Pyongyang amid the Ukraine war.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also attended the meeting, during which Putin conveyed regards to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, while Choe passed on Kim's "warm wishes" and praised the "spiritual closeness" of the two nations. Putin stated that bilateral relations and development prospects are progressing "according to plan."

The meeting underscores growing cooperation between the two heavily sanctioned countries, which signed a 2024 defense pact pledging mutual military support in the event of aggression (see AiR No. 26, June/2024, 4). North Korea has reportedly sent around 10,000 troops to assist Russia in Ukraine, with at least 600 casualties, a deployment Pyongyang formally acknowledged in April. Kim recently held a ceremony

honoring those troops, describing their involvement as marking "a new history of militant solidarity" with Russia (see AiR No. 41, October/2025, 2).

The Russia–North Korea partnership has raised concern in Washington, amid reports that Moscow is providing North Korea with technology support, including in space and satellite programs. The deepening alliance, highlighted by Putin's and Kim's September meeting in Beijing, reflects Moscow's strategic efforts to secure regional partners while navigating Western sanctions. [Kremlin] [Al Jazeera]

Economic cooperation with Russia gains depth

The meeting comes as North Korea has also expanded its partnership with Russia into a broader economic relationship centered upon energy, food, and natural resources. The effort reflects Pyongyang's push for self-reliance and stable supply channels amid international sanctions with new projects reportedly underway including alternative payment systems, logistics routes through the Russian Far East, and resource processing facilities in border regions. [Daily NK 1]

The strengthening of economic ties has coincided with closer military cooperation, including North Korea's reported transfer of weapons, troops, and ammunition to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine. The relationship now spans both defense and trade, positioning Pyongyang as one of Moscow's few public partners during the conflict. [The Chosun Daily]

North Korean authorities have credited cooperation with Russia for modest improvements in energy access, food imports, and industrial output. The partnership has also expanded opportunities for labor and resource exports, offering limited relief to sectors weakened by isolation. [Daily NK 2]

North Korea builds memorial for troops killed in war in Ukraine

Meanwhile, North Korea has begun constructing a Memorial Museum of Combat Feats in Pyongyang to honor its soldiers killed while fighting in Russia's war on Ukraine. Leader Kim Jong-un attended the groundbreaking ceremony alongside Russia's ambassador to North Korea, describing the museum as a "sacred sanctuary dedicated to the immortality of true patriots" and hailing Moscow–Pyongyang ties as "rising to their historic peak."

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, North Korea has emerged as a key ally, sending

thousands of troops and weapons to support Russian forces, particularly in the Kursk region. Estimates from South Korea suggest at least 600 North Korean soldiers have been killed and thousands more wounded. [The Guardian]

Bangladesh and Pakistan renew cooperation as relations thaw after two decades of limited engagement

(my) Bangladesh and Pakistan are reestablishing broad bilateral cooperation after more than two decades of limited engagement, marking a cautious thaw in relations following political changes in Dhaka. The renewed momentum was underscored by Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza's visit to Dhaka on October 26, during which he met Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and senior military leaders to discuss defense, economic, and regional security cooperation.

The visit continues a series of high-level exchanges since 2024, when the two countries began reopening diplomatic and military channels following the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose government had maintained close alignment with India. Talks in Dhaka focused on expanding collaboration in trade, investment, and defense, while reopening institutional mechanisms that had been dormant for two decades.

General Mirza emphasized historical and cultural ties and announced that a Karachi–Chattogram shipping route is now operational, with plans to launch a Dhaka–Karachi air connection to enhance trade and connectivity. Both sides also exchanged views on regional and global security, including Middle East tensions and the proliferation of disinformation by non-state actors, which Yunus described as a growing threat to peace and stability requiring coordinated international response.

At the same time, preparations are underway for the ninth Joint Economic Commission (JEC) — the first in 20 years — to deepen economic cooperation. Officials from both capitals said new memorandums of understanding are expected in agricultural research, Halal food certification, information technology, and shipping. Bangladesh aims to reduce its significant trade imbalance, with imports from Pakistan reaching USD 787 million in FY 2024–25 compared to exports of USD 80 million, and will seek duty- and quota-free access for Bangladeshi goods in Pakistani markets.

Bangladesh's government has framed the outreach as part of a pragmatic policy shift toward normalized relations and regional cooperation. For Pakistan, the engagement offers a chance to expand its economic footprint in South Asia and strengthen its defense diplomacy following decades of estrangement since Bangladesh's 1971 independence. The revival of direct trade earlier this year — including a 50,000-ton rice shipment from Port Qasim to Bangladesh — and renewed military dialogue suggest that both sides are testing limited normalization while managing enduring political sensitivities. [Arab News] [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

China–Pakistan Economic Corridor expands into quantum technology cooperation

(lm) Pakistan and China have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to extend the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into quantum technology research and digital innovation, signaling a shift in bilateral cooperation toward advanced science and high-tech development.

The agreement, part of CPEC Phase II, focuses on industrial modernization, technology transfer, and digital transformation. It provides for the establishment of a National Center for Quantum Computing in Pakistan with Chinese technical and institutional support. The accord was signed between China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC), a major Chinese state-owned technology enterprise, and Pakistan's Emerging Technologies Lab under the Ministry of Planning.

Officials said the collaboration aims to build Pakistan's capabilities in quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and data security—areas viewed as critical for economic competitiveness and strategic autonomy. It also links with the government's "Uraan Pakistan" initiative and a proposed Quantum Valley Project, envisioned as a national hub for applied research and innovation. [Arab News]

U.S. cautiously expands engagement with Pakistan through critical-minerals cooperation and post-conflict diplomacy

(my) The United States is broadening its engagement with Pakistan, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio

confirming that Washington sees “an opportunity to expand our strategic relationship with Pakistan,” while stressing that this does not alter its long-standing partnership with India. [DAWN] [Geo News]

Rubio’s remarks come amid a renewed phase in U.S.–Pakistan relations, following President Donald Trump’s mediation of a ceasefire between Pakistan and India after their four-day border conflict in May 2025. The ceasefire marked a diplomatic turning point, followed by the reduction of U.S. tariffs on Pakistani exports from 29 percent to 19 percent and a series of economic agreements aimed at building non-security cooperation.

The most significant of these was the USD 500 million agreement signed in September 2025 between U.S. Strategic Metals (USSM) and Pakistan’s Frontier Works Organization (FWO) to develop Pakistan’s critical-minerals sector. The deal covers joint exploration, extraction, and refining of antimony, copper, gold, tungsten, and rare earth elements, including the construction of a poly-metallic refinery in Pakistan to process materials for export to the U.S. market.

According to official statements from Islamabad, the project seeks to attract investment into a largely underdeveloped mining industry, which contributes only 3.2 percent to GDP and 0.1 percent to global exports. In August, U.S. and Pakistani officials also discussed strengthening transport and logistics infrastructure to support mineral supply chains.

Pakistan and Poland expand cooperation through high-level visit and new agreements

(lm) Polish Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski arrived in Pakistan on October 23 for a two-day official visit—the first by a Polish official of his rank in 14 years. [Arab News 1]

During meetings in Islamabad, the two sides signed two memorandums of understanding: one between their foreign ministries and another between Pakistan’s Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad and Poland’s Polish Institute of International Affairs. The agreements aim to enhance coordination in diplomacy, research, and policy dialogue.

Talks focused on expanding trade, energy cooperation, defense, and educational exchanges. Bilateral trade between the two countries reached about PKR 260 billion (USD 922 million) in 2023, with Pakistan’s

exports at PKR 224 billion (USD 794 million) and imports at PKR 36 billion (USD 128 million). Sikorski emphasized Poland's interest in public finance, fintech, mining, water management, and energy sectors, highlighting the continued operations of the Polish Oil and Gas Company (PGNiG) in Pakistan's petroleum exploration since 1997.

Both ministers also discussed regional and global developments, with Dar raising Pakistan's concerns over Indian actions in Kashmir and cross-border threats from Afghanistan, while Sikorski reaffirmed Poland's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and the two-state solution in the Middle East. [Arab News 2]

Pakistan, Romania air force chiefs discuss expanded defense cooperation

(lm) Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Chief Air Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar Sidhu met Romanian Air Force Chief Lt. Gen. Leonard-Gabriel Baraboi in Bucharest to discuss joint air exercises, exchange training programs, and defense-industrial cooperation, marking a significant step in Islamabad's efforts to strengthen defense partnerships with European states. The two commanders reviewed regional security developments and agreed to deepen collaboration in aerospace technology and training for air and ground personnel.

Sidhu's visit follows the PAF's confrontation with India in May, after which several countries have sought closer ties with Pakistan's air force. The PAF has recently intensified international defense cooperation, including new training and joint exercise arrangements with Belarus, Turkiye, and Iraq, underscoring Islamabad's push to diversify its security and defense partnerships amid regional tensions. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Qatar move to formalize investment and labor frameworks, expand food and infrastructure cooperation

(as) Pakistan and Qatar concluded the sixth session of the Pakistan–Qatar Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) in Doha with an agreement to formalize investment and trade cooperation. The session ended with a protocol on economic, trade, and technical cooperation signed by Pakistan's Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan and Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani Al Thani.

The protocol establishes coordination between the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and Pakistan's Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to identify and expedite investment projects. It is intended to implement the USD 3 billion investment pledge previously made by the Amir of Qatar.

Pakistan proposed creating a joint working group on agriculture and food production, linking cooperation to Qatar's Food Security Vision 2030. The group will oversee agricultural investment and technology transfer and identify food-production projects for joint financing. Qatar's commerce minister is expected to visit Islamabad later this year to finalize the structure.

Talks also covered transport and infrastructure, with Pakistan inviting Qatari investment in projects such as the Kharian–Rawalpindi (M-13) and Karachi–Hyderabad motorways. Both sides agreed to hold civil aviation consultations in early 2026 to discuss expanded flight operations.

On labor cooperation, Pakistan and Qatar agreed to finalize a new memorandum on employment and labor mobility, updating a 1987 agreement. The framework will expand recruitment of Pakistani professionals in Qatar, particularly in health, construction, and technical services. Qatar's Ministry of Education and Pakistan's National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) are drafting a skills-recognition mechanism to align vocational standards.

Health cooperation will continue through a joint working committee, which will coordinate medical staff exchanges and product approvals between Pakistan and Qatar. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2] [DAWN]

Pakistan and Turkey establish joint working group to enhance railway cooperation

(my) Pakistan and Turkey have agreed to form a joint working group aimed at strengthening bilateral railway cooperation. The decision was made during a meeting between Pakistan's Federal Minister for Railways, Hanif Abbasi, and Turkey's Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Abdulkadir Uraloglu, held on the sidelines of the Regional Transport Ministers Conference in Islamabad.

The newly established working group will oversee the implementation of ongoing and future collaborative projects in the railway and transport sectors. Key areas of focus include the development of logistics corridors,

enhancement of port connectivity, and the digital modernization of Pakistan Railways.

This initiative is part of broader efforts to bolster regional connectivity and economic integration, aligning with the objectives of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) railway corridor and other regional infrastructure projects. [Profit]

Pakistan-Afghanistan ceasefire strained as Istanbul peace talks stall amid border clashes and mutual accusations

(my/lm) Peace talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan in Istanbul have failed to produce a breakthrough, as both sides continue to exchange accusations over cross-border violence following the deadliest clashes since the Taliban's return to power in 2021. The negotiations—mediated by Türkiye and Qatar—began after the October 19 ceasefire agreement was reached in Doha, but tensions remain high along the frontier despite efforts to sustain the truce.

The crisis escalated after Pakistan's airstrikes on October 11, which Islamabad said targeted leadership figures of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) following an attack that killed twelve Pakistani soldiers. Kabul condemned the strikes as a violation of Afghan sovereignty. Since then, border skirmishes have intensified, with the Pakistani military reporting that five soldiers and 25 militants were killed in Kurram and North Waziristan during recent infiltration attempts from the Afghan side. The incidents have fueled doubts in Islamabad about Kabul's willingness to curb militant activity. [Al Jazeera]

Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif warned on October 25 that failure to reach an agreement could result in "open war," even as he expressed hope that Afghanistan's Taliban government preferred peace. Islamabad maintains that militants from the TTP operate from sanctuaries inside Afghanistan and continues to demand "concrete and verifiable steps" from Kabul to dismantle those bases. Pakistani negotiators accused the Afghan delegation of showing a "non-cooperative attitude" during talks, though Turkish mediators were reportedly attempting to narrow differences. [Spiegel, in German]

The Taliban government, led by officials under Deputy Interior Minister Haji Najib, rejected the accusations, asserting that all disputes can be resolved peacefully and warning that any foreign military action within Afghan territory would be met with a "reciprocal

response." Afghan state broadcaster RTA reported that Kabul submitted a draft proposal urging Pakistan to respect Afghanistan's sovereignty, airspace, and territorial integrity. The document also proposed a quadrilateral mechanism for information exchange and monitoring ceasefire violations. [Arab News 1]

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump, speaking in Kuala Lumpur, repeated his offer to mediate between the two neighbors, saying he could help reach a quick settlement. [Arab News 2]

Pakistan and Iran form joint committee to address border trade and logistics bottlenecks

(my) Pakistan and Iran have agreed to create a joint committee to resolve long-standing border trade and logistics problems, as both sides seek to expand regional connectivity and economic cooperation. The decision was made during talks in Islamabad between Pakistan's Communications Minister Abdul Aleem Khan and Iran's Minister for Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh.

The two countries share a 900-kilometer porous border that traverses Pakistan's Balochistan and Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan provinces—both underdeveloped and affected by decades of insurgency and cross-border militancy, which have hindered trade and infrastructure projects.

Iran's minister expressed interest in deepening cooperation through the Chabahar and Gwadar ports, positioning both as complementary hubs for regional maritime connectivity. Pakistan, in turn, reaffirmed its commitment to supporting cross-border transport and trade corridors as part of efforts to stabilize its economy and reduce dependency on external loans.

The initiative follows recent high-level discussions in which Islamabad and Tehran reiterated their aim to raise bilateral trade to USD 10 billion, integrating border markets, road links, and port access into wider energy and logistics networks across South and West Asia. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Uzbekistan enhance tourism ties with direct flights and cultural initiatives

(my) Pakistan and Uzbekistan are strengthening their tourism partnership through increased air connectivity and cultural initiatives. Uzbekistan Airways announced plans to double the frequency of its direct flights between Tashkent and Islamabad, operating on Tuesdays and Saturdays, starting October 28, 2025. Additionally, flights between Tashkent and Lahore will operate on Wednesdays and Fridays. These enhanced flight schedules aim to facilitate travel for tourists and business travelers between the two countries.

The two nations are also focusing on cultural collaboration to promote tourism. Uzbekistan has invited Pakistan to revive their historic Silk Road connections through joint tourism initiatives. This includes launching cultural festivals, heritage tourism packages, and promoting shared Islamic heritage sites. Both countries are working to simplify visa procedures and enhance digital connectivity to attract tourists. [Profit by Pakistan Today]

Philippines, China tensions emerge over sea debris, disinformation claims

(ghd) Tensions between the Philippines and China have been highlighted by separate incidents on the seas and in the information space, involving debris from a Chinese rocket and accusations of a "Chinese-backed disinformation" campaign.

A Philippine Navy patrol ship made two discoveries during a routine patrol in the South China Sea. On October 18, near Escoda (Sabina) Shoal, the crew recovered a floating black bag that had been reported by a civilian auxiliary unit. Inside were 32 plastic bags containing 16 kilograms of high-grade cannabis with an estimated street value of approximately USD 327thousand. The origin of the narcotics is now under investigation.

On October 19, the same naval vessel found suspected rocket debris floating off Bataraza town in Palawan. According to the navy, the debris was notable for bearing a Chinese flag. The wreckage is believed to be from a Long March 8A rocket that was launched from Hainan, China, on October 16, as confirmed by the Philippine Space Agency. [Straits Times]

Concurrently, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) issued a warning about what it called a "Chinese-backed disinformation" campaign. An AFP spokesperson accused the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of orchestrating the operation to "agitate" retired Filipino military and uniformed personnel, with the

goal of organizing and mobilizing them. The AFP suggested this campaign was exploiting recent discussions about the potential suspension of pensions for retirees who spread false or seditious information.

This accusation was swiftly denied by the Association for Philippines-China Understanding (APCU), an NGO promoting relations between the two countries. APCU Chairman Lambino labeled the AFP's statement "anti-China propaganda." He argued that pensions are the property of retirees and cannot be withheld without due process, stating that retired Filipino officers are too "bright" and disciplined to be influenced by any foreign power. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippine, US Marines hold interoperability exercises

(ghd) The Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) and the US Marine Corps (USMC) have concluded their joint military exercise, Marine Air Support Activity 2025 (MASA 25). The exercise, which ran for two weeks, officially ended on October 24. The joint drills took place across various locations in the Philippines, including Ilocos Norte, Zambales, Cavite, and Palawan.

The primary goal of MASA 25 was to strengthen interoperability and cooperation between the two marine forces. It focused on enhancing their air-to-ground operational skills, improving their readiness to meet evolving security challenges, and leveraging new capabilities related to maritime defense to promote regional stability.

Key activities conducted during the exercise included drills for coastal defense, maritime strikes, and military free fall, along with expert exchanges on medical and operational readiness. The exercise involved 524 Filipino personnel, 130 US troops, marine reservists, and personnel from the Philippine Air Force and Philippine Coast Guard. [Manila Bulletin]

Swedish funding boosts Philippine cargo rail project

(ghd) Sweden has provided a USD 1.3 million grant to support the feasibility study for the Subic-Clark-Manila-Batangas (SCMB) Railway Project, a major component of the Luzon Economic Corridor (LEC). The funding, provided through the Swedfund International, will

specifically finance a comprehensive feasibility study, which is essential in evaluating the technical, economic, and environmental viability of the proposed cargo railway before potential construction.

The LEC is a strategic infrastructure initiative aimed at connecting major economic hubs in Luzon through improved transport links, thereby boosting trade, investment, and logistics efficiency. The SCMB Project is envisioned to significantly enhance the movement of goods, reduce logistics costs, ease road congestion, and stimulate economic activity in Luzon's key industrial and port areas. Sweden's grant for the feasibility study underscores international support for the project's potential and marks a crucial first step in advancing this major Philippine infrastructure goal. [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

Philippines, Australia strengthen partnership against transnational crime

(ghd) The Philippine National Police (PNP) announced it has reinforced its collaborative efforts with the Australian government to tackle cross-border crimes. The focus of this strengthened partnership is on fighting child exploitation, cybercrime, terrorism, and organized crime. The alliance was bolstered during a recent visit by Australian officials, including Ambassador Marc Innes-Brown, to the acting PNP chief Lt. Gen. Jose Melencio Nartatez. Nartatez stated that the partnership is strong and productive, emphasizing that cooperation in intelligence sharing and capacity building is key to enhancing the police force's capabilities and contributing to regional security. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

China and Singapore sign new cooperation deals during Li Qiang’s visit

(ms) Singapore and China signed a series of new and renewed agreements on green development, the digital economy, and maritime cooperation during Chinese Premier Li Qiang’s two-day official visit, held on October 25 and 26. The accords include the establishment of a Green and Digital Shipping Corridor, expanded collaboration in low-carbon technologies, and new partnerships on emergency management and food safety.

The agreements were announced following Li’s meeting with Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence

Wong, where both sides reaffirmed their commitment to open trade and regional economic integration. Li said China would continue to support multilateralism and oppose protectionism, while Wong emphasized Singapore's goal of strengthening cooperation with China under frameworks such as ASEAN and the China–Singapore Free Trade Agreement.

The visit marked the first by a Chinese premier since 2018 and coincided with the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Li also attended a business roundtable with Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong, where he presented China's upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) and said Beijing would further open its markets and ensure fair treatment for foreign companies.

Both leaders noted ongoing progress in joint projects such as the Suzhou Industrial Park and Tianjin Eco-City, and highlighted new areas of cooperation in carbon services, hydrogen energy, and digital trade. Before departing for Malaysia to attend the East Asia Summit, Li met with Acting President Eddie Teo, with both sides agreeing to align their development strategies and maintain stable, mutually beneficial economic ties. [Channel News Asia] [China Daily] [South China Morning Post]

Cambodia, South Korea to launch joint task force against transnational scams

(dql) South Korean President Lee Jae Myung and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet agreed on October 27 to establish a joint law enforcement task force to combat the rise of transnational scams targeting Koreans in Southeast Asia. The announcement came during their meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Malaysia.

The task force, set to begin operations in November, will coordinate investigative and enforcement efforts between South Korea Korean and Cambodian authorities, focusing on illegal detention, online fraud, and organized crime. Details on the size and structure of South Korea's police deployment are still being finalized.

The initiative follows a series of recent incidents, including kidnappings and violent crimes against Korean nationals in Cambodian scam compounds, which prompted Seoul to impose travel restrictions earlier this month (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3). Up to 2,000 South Koreans had reportedly been lured

to Cambodia by fake job ads and coerced into participating in scam operations.

Lee indicated that successful outcomes from the task force could lead to the easing of travel advisories for affected areas, such as Phnom Penh.

President Lee emphasized that South Korea will enhance cooperation with ASEAN member states through ASEANAPOL and bilateral criminal and judicial channels to dismantle organized networks and prevent transnational crimes from taking root in the region. Prime Minister Hun highlighted Cambodia's ongoing domestic security improvements and welcomed deeper collaboration with Korean authorities. [The Korea Herald] [SCMP]

South Korea reports Chinese personnel spotted on disputed Yellow Sea structure

(mo) South Korean lawmaker Yi Byeong-jin report that Chinese personnel have been observed for the first time on a structure Beijing installed in a maritime area claimed by both countries in the Yellow Sea. Yi neleased a photo showing five individuals on the facility, including one in a wetsuit handling an oxygen tank, alongside a nearby high-speed vessel.

Yi questioned the structure's declared civilian purpose, noting that the use of diving gear is unusual for routine marine farming, and suggested the installation could have a military function. He warned that people might be living inside the structure and called on the government to act swiftly to safeguard maritime sovereignty, emphasizing that China is unlikely to withdraw voluntarily.

Seoul has already raised its concerns through diplomatic channels, the foreign ministry confirmed. [Yonhap] [The Korea Herald]

South Korea, Japan coordinate first Lee–Takaichi summit on APEC sidelines

(mo) South Korea and Japan are working to arrange a bilateral summit between President Lee Jae-myung and newly appointed Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi during the APEC summit in Gyeongju, tentatively scheduled for October 30.

Both governments appear eager to maintain momentum in improving bilateral relations. Japan has

confirmed Takaichi's three-day visit, beginning Thursday, noting that she will also engage in other bilateral meetings. Separately, President Lee is scheduled to meet U.S. President Donald Trump on October 29 and Chinese President Xi Jinping on October 31. [Asahi Shimbun] [Asia Business Daily]

South Korea, Philippines discuss joint action on transnational crime amid rising scam activity in Southeast Asia

(mo) Senior officials from South Korea and the Philippines met in Manila for regular policy talks, focusing on cooperation against transnational crime. South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Park Yoon-joo urged stronger collaboration with ASEANAPOL to counter regional scam centers and thanked the Philippines for efforts to protect South Korean nationals. Park also requested Manila's support for Korean firms joining the Philippines' military modernization projects.

The talks come as Seoul increases efforts to respond to crimes targeting its citizens in Southeast Asia, including recent abduction cases involving South Koreans linked to scam operations in Cambodia. [Yonhap]

South Korea–US trade talks stall ahead of APEC summit

(dql) South Korea and the United States remain divided on key issues in their ongoing trade negotiations, despite some progress, senior South Korean officials announced on October 24. Presidential policy chief Kim Yong-beom and Industry Minister Kim Jung-kwan, returning from follow-up tariff discussions in Washington with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, emphasized that major differences persist over the implementation of Seoul's USD 350 billion investment pledge.

With the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit approaching this week, officials warned that time for additional face-to-face negotiations is limited, though they remain committed to last-minute efforts to narrow gaps. Industry Minister Kim described the talks as "still underway" and at a "critical juncture," underscoring the high stakes for bilateral economic relations.

US President Donald Trump is scheduled to meet South Korean President Lee Jae Myung during his visit to the region this week, coinciding with the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, signaling an opportunity for potential breakthroughs at the highest political level. [Yonhap]

U.S. Defense Secretary Hegseth to visit South Korea

(mo) U.S. Defense Secretary Hegseth is scheduled to visit to South Korea on November 3-4. His two-day stay will mark the final stop of his multi-nation Indo-Pacific tour this week, which includes stops in Hawaii, Japan, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Hegseth is traveling to the region to reinforce alliances and press partners to increase defense spending and shoulder a larger share of collective security responsibilities amid growing competition with China and an accelerating North Korean nuclear threat.

In South Korea, Hegseth is scheduled to hold the annual Security Consultative Meeting with Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back, addressing policy alignment on North Korea, combined defense posture, and extended deterrence. The Pentagon noted that Hegseth will commend Seoul for its increased defense spending and growing contribution to alliance responsibilities. [Yonhap]

Meanwhile, a senior U.S. defense official said Washington "very much" supports South Korea taking a greater lead in conventional defense against North Korea, as Seoul aims to regain wartime operational control (OPCON) within President Lee Jae-myung's term.

The issue is expected to feature prominently when Hegseth will meet Ahn Gyu-back at the Security Consultative Meeting in Seoul on November 4. The official noted that the allies have been holding extensive discussions on Seoul assuming primary responsibility for conventional defense and confirmed that the OPCON transition is a key priority for President Lee.

Asked about potential U.S. troop reductions, the official said there are no changes to report. South Korea transferred wartime OPCON to the United States during the Korean War and has maintained only peacetime control since 1994. [Yonhap]

South Korea, U.S. poised to link tariff deal and nuclear pact revision at APEC summit

(mo) South Korea and the United States are preparing to start negotiations to revise their civil nuclear cooperation pact before it expires in 2035, with Seoul aiming to gain expanded rights to enrich uranium and reprocess spent nuclear fuel.

Foreign Minister Cho Hyun said Washington has accepted the proposal in principle, as the two allies also work to produce a joint outcome on tariffs and security during the upcoming Lee–Trump summit on the sidelines of APEC this week.

South Korea argues that enrichment and reprocessing are needed to secure nuclear fuel supply, manage growing spent-fuel stockpiles and sustain its competitiveness as a nuclear exporter, including in small modular reactors. The United States remains cautious due to proliferation concerns, and Cho warned that domestic advocacy for independent nuclear weapons would jeopardize talks. A joint document at APEC could affirm the intent to revise the pact, but the detailed schedule and targets for negotiations have not been fixed. [The Korea Herald]

USFK slams Pyongyang's missile launch ahead of APEC summit

(sm) On October 23, the United States Forces Korea (USFK) stated that they strongly condemned North Korea's recent ballistic missile launches, describing them as unlawful and destabilizing actions that undermine regional stability. The launches on October 22, that reportedly involved two hypersonic-type projectiles fired from Pyongyang's toward targets in North Hamgyong Province mark the North's fifth missile provocation this year and the first time since President Lee Jae-Myung took office. [Yonhap News Agency]

USFK reaffirmed that its alliance with South Korea remains "ironclad," stressing close coordination with Seoul to ensure military readiness and deterrence. The launches took place just days before the APEC Summit in Gyeongju on October 31-November1, thereby fueling speculation that Pyongyang intended to draw attention ahead of a high-profile diplomatic gathering attended by U.S. and Chinese leaders like President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping. [The Asia Business Daily] [United States Forces Korea]

The missile tests add to the concerns over the North's accelerating weapons development, including efforts to advance hypersonic and solid-fuel missile capabilities. It's recorded that these repeated launches serve both as demonstrations of deterrence and political messaging directed at Washington and Seoul particularly at moments of regional diplomatic engagement. The pattern underscores Pyongyang's continued strategy of combining military displays with calibrated timing to influence the international agenda.

Sri Lanka's ruling alliance deepens engagement with China's Communist Party on governance and reform

(lm) ri Lanka's ruling National People's Power (NPP) alliance has expanded its political engagement with the Communist Party of China (CPC) as part of efforts to draw lessons from China's governance model and economic transformation. Transport, Highways, and Urban Development Minister Bimal Rathnayake, a senior member of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—a Marxist-Leninist party that leads the NPP and traces its roots to Sri Lanka's radical leftist movements of the 1960s—visited China in late October for talks with Liu Haixing, the newly appointed head of the CPC's International Department.

According to Rathnayake, discussions centered on China's approach to maintaining political stability, economic growth, and public trust through progressive reforms, anti-corruption efforts, and environmental and social welfare policies. The visit also reviewed progress under the memorandum of understanding signed between the NPP and CPC earlier this year, which aims to institutionalize cooperation and political dialogue between the two parties.

The CPC maintains ties with all major Sri Lankan political parties, including the United National Party (UNP), Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), and Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB). The latest exchange follows President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to Beijing earlier this year and JVP General Secretary Tilvin Silva's earlier engagements with Chinese officials. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka signs USD 39 million bilateral debt restructuring deal with Australia

(lm) Sri Lanka and Australia signed bilateral agreements on October 27 to restructure approximately USD 39 million in outstanding debt, marking another step in Sri Lanka's ongoing external debt restructuring process. The deal follows the memorandum of understanding reached earlier this year with the Official Creditor Committee (OCC)—a coordination platform of Sri Lanka's key bilateral lenders, co-chaired by Japan, India, and France—which seeks to ensure consistent and comparable debt treatment among creditors.

The agreement also complements Colombo's broader efforts to finalize restructuring terms with other major creditors, including China, Japan, and members of the Paris Club, an informal group of creditor governments that coordinates sustainable solutions for countries facing debt repayment challenges. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka and Belize establish formal diplomatic relations

(ss) Sri Lanka and Belize have formally established diplomatic relations through an agreement signed between their governments, expanding Colombo's network of international partnerships beyond Asia. The move gives Sri Lanka a new diplomatic presence in Central America, while providing Belize with a South Asian counterpart for potential cooperation in trade, investment, and tourism. [Ada Derena]

Taiwan voices 'grave concern' over Singapore PM's one-China remarks

(yl) Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) expressed "grave concern" after Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong reaffirmed his country's opposition to Taiwan independence during a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Singapore.

The Singaporean foreign ministry's statement said Wong reiterated Singapore's "clear and consistent one-China policy." In response, MOFA stressed that it is an "objective fact" that the Republic of China (Taiwan) is a sovereign, independent state and that its future can only be decided by the Taiwanese people.

The ministry urged Singapore to avoid remarks that could damage long-standing bilateral friendship and

called for respect toward Taiwan's democratic system and sovereignty. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News]

U.S. President Trump to raise Taiwan issue in meeting with Xi at APEC Summit

(yl) U.S. President Donald Trump said he will discuss Taiwan with Chinese President Xi Jinping during their upcoming meeting on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in Busan, South Korea, on October 30. The meeting marks Trump's first direct engagement with Xi since beginning his second term and comes amid heightened global focus on U.S.-China relations. [Focus Taiwan]

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reassured Taiwan that it would not be used as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations with China. Speaking en route to Qatar from Israel, Rubio emphasized that no U.S. trade deal would involve compromising Taiwan's security or interests. [Taiwan News]

U.S. Senate committee advances four pro-Taiwan bills

(yl) The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has approved four Taiwan-related bills, signaling bipartisan support for strengthening U.S.-Taiwan ties. The PORCUPINE Act seeks to streamline arms sales to Taiwan by aligning procedures with NATO standards, while the Deter PRC Aggression Against Taiwan Act would authorize U.S. economic countermeasures against China in the event of an attack on Taiwan.

The U.S.-Taiwan Partnership in the Americas Act aims to assist Latin American and Caribbean allies maintaining diplomatic ties with Taiwan, and the Taiwan International Solidarity Act directs U.S. opposition to China's distortions of Taiwan's status in international organizations.

The bills are now moved to the Senate for further consideration. [Focus Taiwan] [Taipei Times]

Taiwan Air Force deploys officers to U.S. to oversee missile system deliveries

(dql) Taiwan's Air Force is deploying two officers to the United States to oversee the delivery of NASAMS (National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System) batteries. Their responsibilities include supervising contracts, managing logistics and spare parts, and resolving technical issues to ensure timely and accurate delivery. Additionally, six personnel will travel to the U.S. for an eight-day review of delivery progress, system configuration, missile maintenance, and training arrangements.

The Air Force has allocated NTD 35.74 billion (USD 1.16 billion) for three NASAMS batteries between 2025 and 2030. Each package includes three mobile launchers, three Sentinel radar units, and 123 extended-range AMRAAM missiles with a range of up to 50 km. NASAMS is compatible with AIM-120 AMRAAM and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles, enabling interoperability with Taiwan's fighter jets.

Looking ahead, Taiwan plans to acquire nine additional NASAMS batteries with 339 missiles for NT$110 billion, which will be deployed to urban centers, airports, military bases, and other strategic locations in central and southern Taiwan, significantly enhancing the island's air defense coverage. [Taiwan News]

Austria restores recognition of Taiwan-issued international driving permits

(yl) Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) announced that Austria has resumed recognition of Taiwan-issued international driving permits (IDPs), allowing Taiwanese travelers to legally drive in the country again.

The ministry aid the Austrian transport ministry updated its administrative regulations in October following sustained talks between MOFA, Taiwan's representative office in Austria, and Austrian authorities.

Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung welcomed the decision and said Taiwan will coordinate with the Ministry of Transportation and Communications to reinstate reciprocal treatment for Austrian-issued IDPs. MOFA said the move is expected to facilitate business, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges between Taiwan and Austria. [Focus Taiwan]

Cambodia and Thailand sign border peace declaration amid mistrust and U.S. pressure

(lm/bk/acs) Thailand and Cambodia have signed a peace declaration aimed at ending months of border clashes, following a period of intensive regional diplomacy and international mediation. The signing took place on October 26 on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, which Malaysia currently chairs. The agreement was mediated by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and witnessed by U.S. President Donald Trump, who described the accord—termed the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords—as a "historic step toward stability."

The agreement builds on the July 2025 ceasefire, which followed five days of armed clashes along the border that killed more than 40 people and displaced thousands. Under the new declaration, both sides commit to withdraw heavy weapons, clear landmines, suppress cross-border scam and trafficking operations, and establish joint border-management mechanisms. The accord also provides for the release of 18 Cambodian prisoners of war and the deployment of ASEAN observers to monitor ceasefire implementation. [Thai Enquirer] [Bangkok Post 1]

From the Thai side, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul called the declaration "a new chapter in bilateral relations," while emphasizing that peace would depend on Cambodia meeting Thailand's conditions—specifically the withdrawal of troops, the removal of landmines, the dismantling of scam networks, and the relocation of Cambodian civilians allegedly encroaching on Thai territory. Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet, for his part, characterized the deal as a "shared commitment to rebuild trust" and noted that Phnom Penh had agreed to withdraw troops and cooperate on mine-clearance operations. [Bangkok Post 2]

The signing capped several weeks of high-level negotiations. Just last week, Thai and Cambodian defense officials met under the General Border Committee (GBC) and Joint Boundary Commission (JBC) frameworks to finalize the ceasefire framework. The two sides reportedly agreed on four operational steps: the withdrawal of heavy weapons, joint demining, the creation of a task force against scam operations, and joint surveys in disputed zones between Sa Kaeo (Thailand) and Banteay Meanchey (Cambodia). [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

However, diplomatic friction preceded the signing. After the JBC session held in Chanthaburi province on

October 21–22, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet posted on social media that the meeting had produced an agreement to use a 1:200,000-scale map as a reference for future demarcation. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) subsequently denied that any such agreement was reached, clarifying that the map had not been discussed and that the agenda was limited to verifying existing boundary markers. According to Thai officials, the session was technical in nature and fully documented, and a statement was issued after its conclusion. The MFA also reaffirmed that any border fencing would be constructed only within clearly demarcated Thai territory and aimed solely at preventing encroachment. [The Nation 1] [Bangkok Post 5]

Following the signing, Thailand's First Army Region also dismissed reports that crossings in Sa Kaeo Province, bordering Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey, would reopen on November 1, insisting the border will remain closed pending new orders. On the ground, Thai forces demolished Cambodian-built structures and cleared mines in the contested Ban Nong Chan area. [Bangkok Post 6]

Washington, meanwhile, has pressed both governments to move swiftly, with a senior U.S. State Department official urging Thailand to begin the release of the 18 soldiers "immediately" and to implement all commitments without delay [Bangkok Post 7]

In the latest development, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul apologised on October 28 for confusion caused by his earlier statement on potential border encroachment into Cambodia, clarifying that both nations remain committed to their joint peace declaration.

Speaking at Don Mueang Royal Thai Air Force Base, Anutin explained that his previous comment referred to a disputed area still under negotiation. He emphasized that Thailand and Cambodia are adhering to their peace agreement and must continue talks to clarify the boundaries. Anutin said he informed Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet that Thailand is ready to proceed once Phnom Penh fulfils the four agreed conditions, which Cambodia has pledged to expedite.

He confirmed that Thailand will return the 18 detained Cambodian soldiers once the military finalizes preparations, including health checks to ensure humane treatment. Anutin added that no discussion had taken place on reopening border checkpoints and noted that the ASEAN Observer Team, composed

mainly of defence attachés, is overseeing the peace process.

He said mine clearance operations would take one to two months and stressed ongoing cooperation against cross-border online scams. On constructing a border fence, he stated that the issue will be handled through military-to-military talks under careful bilateral consultation. [The Nation 2]

Slow progress and structural bottlenecks stall Thai–Chinese high-speed rail project

(lm) Thailand's Bangkok–Nong Khai high-speed rail project, a central link in China's planned Kunming–Singapore railway corridor, remains mired in delays and bureaucratic hurdles more than a decade after it began. The project, intended to be Thailand's first high-speed line and a symbol of regional integration under China's Belt and Road framework, is now testing Bangkok's infrastructure capacity and political resolve.

The first phase, a 253-kilometer line from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, is less than 50 percent complete, with operations pushed back to 2028. The second phase, from Nakhon Ratchasima to Nong Khai, was approved in early 2025 and is not expected to open before 2031, while the Laos connection beyond Nong Khai remains unconfirmed. Combined, the two Thai segments are projected to cost more than THB 520 billion (around USD 14 billion).

The prolonged delays reflect disputes over financing models, technology transfer, and construction terms between Bangkok and Beijing. Thailand rejected initial Chinese loan conditions and opted to self-fund much of the project, slowing progress but preserving domestic control. Persistent friction over requirements for Chinese materials and engineers has further complicated implementation.

On the ground, the project is also struggling with coordination failures, land expropriation issues, and low public engagement. While China's high-speed rail has transformed Laos's connectivity and boosted cross-border trade, Thailand's segment remains a patchwork of unfinished contracts and shifting political priorities. [Bangkok Post]

Singapore and Thailand expand cooperation on food, energy, and digital

integration

(lm/acs) Thailand and Singapore are advancing a series of concrete trade and investment initiatives ahead of Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's visit to Singapore on November 7, where talks will center on food security, clean energy, and digital connectivity.

The visit follows a new rice export agreement concluded on October 23 between Commerce Minister Suphajee Suthumpun and Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong. The deal, which takes effect in November, secures Thai rice supplies for Singapore while expanding Thailand's agricultural exports across global markets.

Singapore has also sought Thai cooperation in green economy projects, including data centers, electric vehicles (EVs), semiconductors, and renewable energy, reflecting a pivot toward high-technology and sustainability-driven trade.

Thailand, currently chairing ASEAN's Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) talks, will use the visit to push for entry into the Digital Economic Partnership Agreement (DEPA) with Singapore, South Korea, Chile, and New Zealand. Both countries will renew their digital cooperation memorandum, which includes plans to link Thailand's PromptPay and Singapore's PayNow systems through the Nexus Pay network to enable real-time cross-border payments.

Bilateral trade continues to expand. From January to August 2025, total trade rose 6.25 percent to USD 12.14 billion. Thai exports jumped 12.57 percent to USD 7.21 billion, while imports fell 1.81 percent to USD 4.92 billion, leaving Thailand with a USD 2.29 billion surplus.

Regional coordination will also cover ASEAN unity, U.S. tariff impacts, Myanmar's planned 2026 elections, and the ongoing Cambodia–Thailand border dispute. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand backs ASEAN–India free trade area, aims to expand bilateral trade with Malaysia

(lm) Thailand's Commerce Minister Suphajee Suthumpun has voiced support for the creation of an ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (FTA), emphasizing the need to strengthen regional food security and supply-chain resilience. Speaking after talks with Malaysia's

Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Zafrul Aziz at the ASEAN Economic Community Council Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Suphajee said Thailand was ready to back the proposal in upcoming negotiations and urged Malaysia, which chairs the talks, to conclude them within this year by easing regulatory and trade restrictions.

Suphajee proposed leveraging both Thailand's and Malaysia's agricultural and food production strengths to bolster regional food security amid growing risks from climate change, conflict, and pandemics. She also reaffirmed Thailand's readiness to serve as a raw material supplier to Malaysia, particularly in rubber, shallots, and livestock products.

The two countries agreed to deepen cooperation through the Thailand–Malaysia Joint Trade Committee (JTC), with Bangkok offering to host the next round of meetings. Discussions will focus on expanding border trade, transport connectivity, and the Halal food industry, with the goal of raising bilateral trade to USD 30 billion by 2027.

Malaysia currently ranks as Thailand's fourth-largest trading partner globally and its top ASEAN and border trade partner. In 2024, bilateral trade totaled USD 26.05 billion, comprising exports worth USD 12.33 billion and imports of USD 13.72 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of USD 1.38 billion for Thailand. Border trade accounted for roughly 35.6 percent of total trade between the two countries. [Bangkok Post]

New Thailand-U.S. trade framework reshapes export outlook amid tariff transition and industrial adjustment

(lm) The United States and Thailand have launched a Framework for an Agreement on Reciprocal Trade, marking the most significant expansion in bilateral commerce in more than two decades. Announced by the White House on October 26, the framework encompasses Thai purchases of U.S. aircraft, agricultural, and energy products valued at over USD 20 billion, while updating the foundations set by the 1966 Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations and the 2002 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. The framework is designed to pave the way for a formal reciprocal trade agreement expected in 2026.

Under the new arrangement, Thailand will eliminate tariffs on roughly 99 percent of U.S. goods, covering industrial, agricultural, and consumer products. The U.S., meanwhile, will maintain a 19 percent general

tariff on Thai exports under Executive Order 14257, while granting zero-tariff status for selected items under a September 2025 order. The framework also broadens regulatory coordination on non-tariff barriers, including the acceptance of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) certifications, expanded access for U.S. vehicles, medical devices, and ethanol, and new rules on intellectual property enforcement. [Reuters] [The Nation]

In parallel with the trade package, U.S. President Donald Trump and Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul signed a memorandum of understanding on critical minerals and rare earths, pledging to "secure and diversify" supply chains and foster partnerships between American and Thai firms. The deal aims to strengthen regional resilience in electric vehicle (EV), defense, and high-tech industries amid global efforts to reduce dependence on China for strategic materials. [Bangkok Post 1]

Bangkok has further committed to labor-rights and environmental safeguards, enforcement against illegal logging and wildlife trade, and full implementation of the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. The deal also expands cooperation on intellectual property, requiring Thailand to strengthen enforcement against counterfeiting and copyright violations. [Reuters] [The Nation]

Domestically, however, Thai manufacturers are struggling to adjust to new US tariff and content-origin rules. Despite the rate cut from 36 to 19 percent in August, exporters face possible surcharges of up to 40 percent on products suspected of transshipment via Thailand, especially those involving Chinese inputs. The Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) warned that electronics, steel, and pharmaceuticals—each with local content below 40 percent—risk higher tariffs unless the regional value content (RVC) rises to 50 percent under US compliance demands.

The United States' stricter verification follows concerns that Chinese firms are using Southeast Asian assembly hubs to circumvent US trade barriers. In response, Thailand's Board of Investment is promoting domestic sourcing for electric-vehicle (EV) production, with major Chinese automakers pledging to raise local content to 80–90 percent. [Bangkok Post 2]

Despite transitional uncertainty, trade data point to a sharp rebound in exports. Customs-cleared shipments rose 19 percent year-on-year in September, the fastest pace in over three years, buoyed by clarity on US tariffs and renewed demand. Exports to the US surged 35 percent during the month, helping lift overall

shipments by 13.9 percent in the first nine months of 2025. [Bloomberg]

Timor-Leste and Australia strengthen cybersecurity cooperation

(ms) Timor-Leste and Australia held high-level talks on October 24 to deepen bilateral cooperation on cybersecurity, focusing on safeguarding critical digital infrastructure, including the new Timor-Leste South Submarine Cable (TLSSC).

Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers Agio Pereira and the Australian Ambassador discussed emerging cyber threats, technical collaboration, and capacity building during a meeting at the Government Palace in Dili. Both sides emphasized the importance of strengthening inter-institutional coordination and conducting joint cybersecurity exercises to test Timor-Leste's resilience against potential cyberattacks.

Minister Pereira thanked the Australian government, for their ongoing support, describing the partnership as both "technical and strategic," enhancing mutual trust and Indo-Pacific stability.

He noted that the TLSSC will serve not only Timor-Leste but also as a regional interconnection hub—making its protection vital against risks from transnational criminal and cyber groups. By assisting Timor-Leste in securing this network, Australia also safeguards its own regional data and communication flows. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Viet Nam and Thailand strengthen comprehensive strategic partnership

(hn) On October 21, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính held phone talks with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to deepening the Vietnam–Thailand Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, which was elevated in May 2025. Prime Minister Chính congratulated Anutin on his appointment and expressed confidence in Thailand's continued progress. The two sides agreed to boost trade to USD 25 billion annually, enhance investment and transport connectivity under the "Three Connectivity" strategy, and expand collaboration in security, education, and cultural exchanges. They also pledged to work together in maintaining ASEAN's unity

and promoting sustainable development in the Mekong subregion. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnamnet]

Vietnam and Cambodia strengthen media cooperation amid digital and AI transformation

(hn) Vietnam and Cambodia have agreed to strengthen cooperation in the information and communications sector, particularly through enhanced information sharing between media agencies to ensure timely and accurate news dissemination.

During a meeting in Phnom Penh on October 23, Nguyễn Đức Lợi, Standing Vice Chairman of the Vietnam Journalists Association (VJA), briefed the Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ) on Việt Nam's media landscape and the challenges posed by digital technology, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI).

CCJ President Puy Kea noted that Cambodia's media sector is also rapidly evolving under similar pressures and emphasized the need for improved professional training to maintain journalistic quality amid financial constraints. The VJA delegation also visited Apsara Media Services (AMS Media), a major Cambodian multi-platform agency, to exchange experiences in training and the application of AI in journalism.

The VJA delegation's visit, from October 20 - 23, aimed to enhance media cooperation and professional exchange between the two countries. During their stay, the delegation met with Cambodian government officials, visited the Angkor Wat temple complex, and held meetings with the Vietnamese Embassy, the Vietnam News Agency's Phnom Penh Bureau, and Vietnamese businesses in Cambodia. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Deputy Defense Minister accused of sexually harassing South Korean official during Seoul visit

(hn) Vietnamese Deputy Defense Minister Hoang Xuan Chien was accused of sexually harassing a female South Korean defense ministry official during a dinner in Seoul on September 11, while attending the 2025 Seoul Security Dialogue.

Reports say he approached and acted inappropriately toward the woman after the dinner, both physically

and verbally, then left South Korea the next day, making direct investigation difficult.

The South Korean Ministry of National Defense deemed the incident serious, and eight days later summoned the Vietnamese embassy's military attaché to lodge a formal protest and demand measures to prevent recurrence.

The ministry stated it had taken appropriate actions following protocol but did not disclose further details out of respect for the victim's wishes. [The Chosun Daily] [Yonhap News Agency]

Vietnam and Singapore strengthen comprehensive strategic partnership and regional cooperation

(hn) Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Lê Hoài Trung met with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan in Kuala Lumpur on October 26 on the sidelines of the 47th ASEAN Summit.

Both ministers expressed satisfaction with the strong development of Vietnam–Singapore relations, highlighting the recent upgrade of their ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as a key milestone that opens new opportunities for cooperation. They welcomed the completion of the Action Program to implement this partnership for the next five years, which will guide deeper collaboration across multiple areas.

The two sides agreed to strengthen high-level exchanges, effectively implement existing cooperation mechanisms, and explore new ones, including through Party-to-Party channels. They discussed enhancing the Green-Digital Economic Partnership and upgrading the Vietnam–Singapore Industrial Parks (VSIPs) toward greener and smarter models. Cooperation in training high-quality human resources and developing smart cities will also be expanded.

Both ministers reaffirmed their commitment to close coordination at regional and international forums, including upholding ASEAN's common stance on the East Sea (South China Sea) issue. They stressed the importance of fully implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC) and advancing negotiations for an effective and substantive Code of Conduct (COC) in line with international law, including UNCLOS 1982. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam and US announce framework for reciprocal, fair, and balanced trade agreement

(hn) On October 26, Vietnam and the United States issued a joint statement announcing a framework for a new agreement on reciprocal, fair, and balanced trade during the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, attended by US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính.

Building on the long-standing economic partnership established through the 2000 Bilateral Trade Agreement, the new framework aims to expand market access and remove trade barriers. Under the agreement, Vietnam will grant preferential access to nearly all US industrial and agricultural exports, while the US will maintain a 20 percent reciprocal tariff on Vietnamese goods and reduce tariffs on certain products to zero per cent.

Both countries agreed to address non-tariff barriers, including Vietnam's acceptance of US vehicle standards, easing licensing for US medical devices, simplifying regulations for pharmaceuticals, and improving intellectual property protections. They also committed to facilitating the entry of US agricultural products into Vietnam.

As part of the deal, Vietnam Airlines will purchase 50 Boeing aircraft worth over USD 8 billion, and Vietnamese firms signed 20 memorandums of understanding to buy USD 2.9 billion worth of US agricultural goods. The two sides will finalize and sign the agreement in the coming weeks after completing domestic procedures. [Vietnamnews] [Businesstimes] [Reuters]

Vietnam and Russia launch second joint marine survey to study East Sea geology and resources

(hn) The Russian research vessel *Akademik Lavrentyev* arrived at Cam Ranh International Port in Khánh Hoà Province on October 24, marking the start of the second joint marine survey between the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Taking place from October 23 to November 20, the survey aims to collect updated data on geology, geophysics, gas geochemistry, and oceanography to support research on seabed structures, sediment formation, and marine mineral resources.

The program involves 30 Vietnamese and Russian scientists conducting joint measurements and analyzes along Vietnam's coastline. At the welcome ceremony, Professor Trần Tuấn Anh, Vice President of VAST, highlighted the long-standing cooperation between the two academies and expressed confidence that the project would enhance scientific understanding of the East Sea and foster young research talent.

Dr Renat Shakirov, head of the Russian delegation, shared that the expedition spans multiple Vietnamese localities and uses advanced Russian research equipment. Both sides plan to continue joint survey efforts and sign a cooperation roadmap for 2026–2035 this December. This follows their first joint survey in 2019 and reflects their ongoing commitment to advancing marine science and strengthening bilateral scientific ties. Findings from the survey will be presented at a workshop on November 21. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam and Finland establish strategic partnership during General Secretary To Lam's official visit

(hn) General Secretary Tô Lâm, his spouse, and a high-level Vietnamese delegation made an official visit to Finland from October 20 to 22. [Vietnamnet]

During the visit, the two countries issued a joint statement establishing a strategic partnership, marking a significant step forward in their 52-year relationship built on trust, equality, and mutual respect. General Secretary Lâm met with Finnish leaders, including the President, Prime Minister, and key officials, and attended events promoting bilateral cooperation in politics, economy, science, education, and culture. Both sides agreed to enhance high-level exchanges, establish an annual strategic consultation mechanism, and coordinate on regional and global security issues while supporting multilateralism and adherence to international law.

The visit coincided with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties, symbolizing a new chapter of deeper and more comprehensive collaboration between Viet Nam and Finland. [Vietnamnews] [Scandasia]

Vietnam and Bulgaria upgrade ties to strategic partnership

(hn) General Secretary Tô Lâm and the high-ranking Vietnamese delegation had made the official visit to the Republic of Bulgaria from October 22 to 24, 2025,

During the visit, General Secretary Tô Lâm held talks with President Rumen Radev, met with the Bulgarian Prime Minister and National Assembly Chair, attended the Vietnam–Bulgaria Business Forum, witnessed the signing of cooperation agreements, and visited Sofia University and the National History Museum.

The two leaders issued a Joint Declaration upgrading bilateral relations to a “Strategic Partnership”, marking a significant milestone in the 75-year history of Vietnam–Bulgaria relations. Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation across all fields—politics, defense, economy, education, science and technology, agriculture, culture, tourism, labor, environment, and health—while enhancing coordination at regional and international forums.

Vietnam and Bulgaria also agreed to strengthen political dialogue, delegation exchanges at all levels, and collaboration between their parties, governments, parliaments, and local authorities. They committed to facilitating people-to-people exchanges and supporting the Vietnamese community in Bulgaria and Bulgarian citizens in Vietnam.

The visit was seen as a key step in elevating the traditional friendship between Vietnam and Bulgaria to a new strategic and practical level, reinforcing mutual trust and cooperation for peace, stability, and prosperity in both regions and globally. [Vietnam] [Vietnamplus]

Vietnam and South Africa agree to elevate ties to a strategic partnership

(hn) South African President Cyril Ramaphosa paid a State Visit to Vietnam from October 23–24, 2025. During the visit, he held talks with President Lương Cường, met with Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính, and National Assembly Chairman Trần Thanh Mẫn.

Both sides reaffirmed their traditional friendship and agreed to upgrade bilateral relations to a Strategic Partnership in 2025, expanding comprehensive cooperation in politics, economy, defense, science and technology, digital transformation, agriculture, environment, and education. They also agreed to boost two-way trade and investment and to leverage their respective regional roles through ASEAN and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The two leaders agreed to strengthen political consultation and multilateral coordination, uphold multilateralism, the UN Charter, and international law, and enhance ASEAN–African Union cooperation in promoting South–South collaboration.

Both sides also noted progress in negotiating key cooperation documents, which are expected to be signed in 2025. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Vietnamese] [Africanews] [Theeuropetoday]

Vietnam and Argentina enhance trade and scientific cooperation, push for MERCOSUR–Vietnam trade talks

(hn) Vietnam and Argentina have agreed to strengthen trade, investment, and scientific–technological cooperation during the eighth meeting of the Vietnam–Argentina Intergovernmental Committee, held online on October 24. Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Phan Thị Thắng proposed enhancing dialogue, delegation exchanges, and promotion activities across multiple fields.

Thắng affirmed that Argentina serves as a gateway for Vietnamese goods to enter South America, while Vietnam acts as a bridge for Argentina to ASEAN markets. Argentine Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Brun reaffirmed Argentina's commitment to fostering stronger ties and supporting early trade agreement negotiations between MERCOSUR and Vietnam.

The two countries also agreed to advance cooperation in agriculture, finance, transport, and science and technology, as well as explore new areas such as IT, space science, and nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. [Vietnamnews]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

29 October 2025 @ 9:00-10:30 (GMT-4), Asia Society (New York), USA

Tech, Targets, and Tensions: Decoding Xi's Priorities for China's Next Five-Year Plan

This webinar will analyze China's economic and political direction as the Communist Party's Fourth Plenum sets the stage for the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). Experts will discuss the implications for domestic policy, U.S.-China relations, and leadership dynamics following the recent disappearance of high-ranking officials, providing insight into the plenum's proposals and their broader significance. For more information and registration, please see [Asia Society].

29 October 2025 @ 9:30 am – 2:30 pm (GMT+9), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

Accelerating Japan-U.S. Cooperation in Quantum Technologies

The webcast brings together leading U.S. and Japanese research universities, national laboratories, government agencies, and industry partners to discuss current initiatives and future opportunities for collaboration in quantum innovation. The event aims to identify strategies to strengthen the quantum industry, enhance cross-border partnerships, and advance large-scale quantum technology development. For more information and registration, please see [CSIS].

29 October 2025 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Supply chain resilience for aerospace and defense

This livestream event will examine the post-pandemic challenges facing aerospace and defense supply chains, where years of globalization and outsourcing have heightened risks and disrupted production. Senior industry executives will discuss the causes of ongoing cost increases, delays, and input shortages, and explore how corporate strategies and public policy can adapt to restore stability and resilience across the sector. For more information and registration, please see [Atlantic Council].

29 October 2025 @ 4:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Hoover Institution, USA

Explaining Israel: The Jewish State, The Middle East, And America

This hybrid event will feature author Peter Berkowitz in a discussion of his book *Explaining Israel: The Jewish State, The Middle East, and America*. For more information and registration, visit [Hoover Institution].

30 October 2025 @ 12:00-1:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

Climate diplomacy in a multipolar world: a new beginning?

As the Paris Agreement marks its tenth anniversary, this webinar will convene climate diplomats from the Global South to examine how international cooperation must evolve to meet today's climate and geopolitical challenges. Ahead of COP30 in Brazil, participants will discuss equity under the Paris framework, effective climate collaboration at multiple levels, strategies for clean technology development, and ways to elevate climate action on the global political agenda. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

30 October 2025 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

Saudi-Pakistan defence pact: What are the implications for regional power and

security?

This webinar will examine the recently concluded Saudi–Pakistan defence pact and its implications for regional security and geopolitics. Panelists will discuss how the agreement could affect Gulf stability, South Asian dynamics, India–Pakistan relations, and the strategic calculations of external powers such as China and the United States.

For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

30 October 2025 @ 2:00-3:15 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

What's next for Gaza?

This webinar will examine the prospects for reconstruction, governance, and security in Gaza following the initial phase of US President Trump's peace plan and the fragile ceasefire. Panelists will discuss the challenges of implementing the plan's provisions, the roles of Hamas, Israel, and regional actors, and the potential for Palestinian leadership to shape Gaza's political future and move toward a lasting resolution of the conflict. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

30 October 2025 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

What to expect in Iraq's 2025 elections

This livestream event will discuss Iraq's upcoming November 11 elections, focusing on how electoral outcomes could shape government formation and future policy directions. Against a backdrop of political fragmentation, public disillusionment, and shifting alliances, experts will examine potential post-election scenarios, voter sentiment, and the implications for Iraq's domestic governance and foreign policy. For more information and registration, please see [Atlantic Council].

30 October 2025 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Belfer Center, USA

How America Failed to Disarm North Korea: Implications for the Future

This hybrid event features Joel Wit's new book, *Flashpoint: The Inside Story of How America Failed to Disarm North Korea*, which draws on decades of interviews and firsthand experience to reveal how six U.S. presidents were unable to halt Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. The event will explore the policy debates, diplomatic efforts, and military strategies behind this struggle, as well as the resulting security challenges facing the United States and Northeast Asia today. For more information and registration, visit [Belfer Center].

31 October 2025 @ 8:30-9:30 (GMT-4), Asia Society (New York), USA

Assessing Trump's Asia Tour

This webinar will analyze U.S. President Donald Trump's first Asia trip since returning to office. Experts will discuss his engagements across the Indo-Pacific, the implications for trade negotiations and agreements, and how regional partners are responding to his return. For more information and registration, please see [Asia Society].

3 November 2025 @ 2:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, Belgium

EU sustainable growth: what is the right mix of structural, monetary and fiscal instruments?

This hybrid event will explore the EU's growth and competitiveness agenda one year after the Draghi report, assessing progress in deepening the single market and the extent to which Draghi's recommendations have been implemented. Panelists will examine the balance between sustainability and economic growth, as well as consider whether current policies should be adapted to address emerging security and political challenges. For more information and registration, visit [Bruegel].

3 November 2025 @ 10:30-11.30 a.m. (GMT+7), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Fade to Blue? What the Revamped Senate Reveals about Thailand's Politics

This hybrid seminar will examine the selection and dynamics of Thailand's new Senate, chosen in June 2024 through a complex process involving local and professional representation. With around three-quarters of senators aligned with the Bhumjaithai Party's "blue faction," the chamber wields significant influence over key appointments and constitutional reforms, while a small progressive minority pushes for greater democracy and transparency. Drawing on elite interviews, the discussion will explore the Senate's role and its potential long-term impact on Thai politics. For more information and registration, visit [ISEAS].

4 November 2025 @ 1:30-2:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

After Khamenei: Iran's Political Culture and the Struggle for Its Future

As Iran nears the end of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's rule, the country faces deep uncertainty about its political future and regional role. This online discussion will examine potential post-Khamenei scenarios, the forces shaping Iran's next political chapter, and the implications for the United States and the broader Middle East. For more information and registration, please see [Carnegie].

Recent and Upcoming Book Releases

Jason Burke, ***The Revolutionists: The Story of the Extremists Who Hijacked the 1970s***, Knopf, 768 pages, to be released January 13, 2026. For a review, see [The Guardian].

Laura K. Field, ***Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right***, Princeton University Press, 432 pages, to be released November 4, 2025. For a review, see [The New York Review of Books].

Fara Dabhoiwala, ***What Is Free Speech?: The History of a Dangerous Idea***, Belknap Press, 480 pages, published August 5, 2025. For a review, see [Columbia Journalism Review].

Moritz Föllmer, ***The Quest for Individual Freedom: A Twentieth-Century European History***, Cambridge

University Press, 264 pages, published June 19, 2025. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs].

Calls

Decolonization Forum 2026, to be held on May 11-12, 2026, invites paper proposals under the theme **"Decolonizing Knowledge Production and Circulation."** The deadline for abstract submission is December 12, 2025. For more information, see [Decolonization Forum].

Macquarie University and the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** invite paper proposals for the ***international conference "Securing justice for the planet: Opportunities for, and barriers to, course correction,"*** to be held on March 18-19, 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is November 7, 2025. For more information, see [Macquarie University].

The **International Association for Human Rights Education (IAHRE)** invites paper proposals for its ***3rd International IAHRE Conference***, scheduled for May 26-27, 2026. The conference theme is "Re-imagining Human Rights Education in a Turbulent World." The deadline for abstract submission is November 3, 2025. For more information, see [IAHRE].

The **University of Nottingham** invites paper proposals for the ***Taiwan Research Hub Conference 2026 "Navigating Technological Futures: Power, Resilience, and Strategy in a multipolar world,"*** to be held on June 22-24, 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is October 31, 2025. For more information, see [University of Nottingham].

The **University of Helsinki** invites paper proposals for its ***21st Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference***, scheduled for May 20-22, 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is October 31, 2025. For more information, see [Helsinki University].

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].

Jobs and Positions

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Senior Adviser** (Rome, Italy). The deadline for application submission is November 13, 2025. For more information, see [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Senior Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Expert**. The deadline for application submission is October 30, 2025. For more information, see [FAO].

The **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** seeks a **Regional Director – South American Regional Office**. The deadline for application submission is November 16, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks a **National Project Coordinator – Cairo, Egypt**. The deadline for application submission is November 23, 2025. For more information, see [ILO].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Programme Manager – Migration, Environment Climate Change and Risk Reduction**. The deadline for application submission is November 6, 2025. For more information, see [IOM].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** seeks a **Principal Political Affairs Officer – Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Sudan**. The deadline for application submission is October 31, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a **Chief of Section/Deputy Director – Kosovo**. The deadline for application submission is November 11, 2025. For more information, see [OSCE].

The **Secretariat of the United Nations** invites applications for the position of **Representative of the Secretary-General for the investment of the assets of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund.** The deadline for application submission is November 17, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **UN Department of Peace Operations (UN DPO)** seeks **a Senior Police Strategic Partnership Officer**. The deadline for application submission is November 23, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** seeks a **Section Head – International Project on Innovative Nuclear Reactors and Fuel Cycles**. The deadline for application submission is October 29, 2025. For more information, see [IAEA].

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** seeks a **Regional Advisor on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism – Asia/Pacific Region**. The deadline for application submission is October 31, 2025. For more information, see [IMF].

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** seeks a **Research Analyst under the Research Analyst Program (RAP)**. The deadline for application submission is January 31, 2026. For more information, see [IMF].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Director** – Home Study and Post Release Services (HSPRS). The deadline for application submission is November 3, 2025. For more information, see [IRC].

The **Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)** seeks a **Gender and Diversity Operational and Analytical Consultant** – Port of Spain, Spain. The deadline for application submission is November 3, 2025. For more information, see [IDB].

Human Rights Watch (HRW) seeks a **Deputy Director – Arms**. The deadline for application submission is November 2, 2025. For more information, see [HRW].

Plan International seeks a **Regional Head – Programs, Partnerships and Influencing**. The deadline for application submission is November 2, 2025. For more information, see [Plan International].

The **Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University** invites applications for the 2026–2027 **Sang Kee Kim Postdoctoral Fellowship in International Affairs of East and Southeast Asia**. The deadline for application submission is November 2, 2025. For more information, see [Harvard University].

The **Department of Economics of Sciences Po** invites applications for a **Professorship in Behavioral Economics**. The deadline for application submission is November 10, 2025. For more information, see [Sciences Po].

Team:

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