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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Independence Day of Albania, Barbados, Mauritania, Panama, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Yemen and the Republic Day of Chad and the Republic of the Congo.

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: Xi Jinping uses Hu Yaobang tribute to press for renewed reform and party discipline

(dql/ajs) At a ceremony marking the 110th anniversary of the birth of Hu Yaobang, former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), President Xi Jinping invoked the legacy of the late reformist leader to urge party officials to confront China's structural problems and push forward with reforms. Xi praised Hu's role in launching post–Cultural Revolution political and economic opening and framed Hu as a model of integrity, discipline and ideological commitment. [Xinhua]

Xi used the commemoration to reinforce current policy priorities: removing institutional barriers to growth, strengthening party governance, and sustaining

China's modernization amid mounting external and domestic pressures, including U.S. technological containment, demographic decline and local government debt. He also tied Hu's legacy to the party's anti-corruption drive and to maintaining ideological cohesion. [SCMP]

Hu was a prominent reform-minded party leader whose career became closely associated with the country's early post-Mao transformation. Rising through the party's ranks as a protégé of Deng Xiaoping, Hu played a central role in rehabilitating victims of the Cultural Revolution and promoting a younger, more technocratic leadership.

As General Secretary of the CCP from 1982 to 1987, he advocated political openness, intellectual liberalization, and a more pragmatic approach to governance, which earned him strong support among students and reformists but also growing criticism from conservative Party elders. His perceived leniency during student protests and his tolerant attitude toward public debate ultimately led to his forced resignation in 1987. Hu's death in April 1989 catalyzed the mass student demonstrations that culminated in the Tiananmen Square crackdown, cementing his legacy as both a symbol of reform and a reminder of the party's internal struggles over China's political future. [SCMP]

By spotlighting Hu, Xi signals that reform remains compatible with strict party control, but only under the leadership's chosen direction. The speech also seeks to rally cadres behind Xi's agenda at a sensitive moment, fueled with speculations over a sustained and fierce power struggle within the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. [The Diplomat]

China: Suspended death sentence for ex-insurance chief

(dql) China has handed former New China Life Insurance (NCI) chairman Li Quan a death sentence with a two-year suspension after finding him guilty of large-scale embezzlement and bribery amounting to more than CNY 200 million (USD 28 million). (NCI) is one of China's largest state-linked life insurers.

His conviction extends the sweeping anti-corruption drive that has targeted top figures in China's financial system since 2021, signaling Beijing's determination to tighten political control over a sector it sees as strategically sensitive and prone to factional influence.

The ruling follows a similar suspended death sentence against a former Bank of China chairman last year, underscoring how the campaign is reshaping elite governance in finance and reinforcing Xi Jinping's authority over key economic institutions. [Reuters]

China: Authorities formally arrest 18 leaders of underground church

(dql) China has intensified its pressure on unsanctioned Christian communities, formally arresting 18 leaders of Zion Church—one of the country's largest underground congregations— on November 18 on charges of "illegally using information networks." Zion Church founder Jin Mingri and other leaders remain in detention, while nine others have been released.

The arrests, which follow the October detention of nearly 30 pastors and staff (see AiR No. 41, October/2025, 2). mark the most sweeping crackdown on house churches since 2018.

Although about 44 million Christians are registered with state-approved churches in China, tens of millions more worship in underground house churches outside state control. Zion Church—founded in 2007 and now counting around 5,000 worshippers nationwide—has long been a target of official pressure, including the closure of its Beijing building in 2018. [Reuters]

China: New privacy rules for storage of personal data in large online platforms

(ajs) A draft of the "regulations on personal information protection for large online platforms" was released by the Cyberspace Administration of China and the Ministry of Public Security for public comments. The new regulations would require personal data that was collected and generated in China should be stored in China. There would be new guidance for overseas storage and transfers of data should platforms need to move data to the Chinese mainland. The draft further encourages the use of national network identity authentication services, data labeling, and personal information protection certifications to increase the level of data protection on the affected platforms. The public consultation is open until December 22nd. [China Daily]

China: Draft rules tighten control over big tech data practices, reinforce digital sovereignty

(dql) China has unveiled a draft of the "Regulations on Personal Information Protection for Large Online Platforms," issued jointly by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) and the Ministry of Public Security for public comment until 22 December. [CAC, in Chinese]

The proposal targets major tech platforms with extensive user bases, cross-sector services, and data whose misuse could threaten national security or societal stability. These firms would face substantially reinforced obligations governing how they gather, handle, and safeguard personal information.

The draft requires that all personal data generated or collected inside China be stored domestically, with overseas transfers permitted only under tightly controlled procedures. Platforms that rely on foreign storage must follow new guidance to move such data into compliant, China-based facilities. To raise overall protection standards, the regulation also promotes the use of national digital-identity authentication services, standardized data-labeling practices, and formal personal-information protection certifications.

Designated platforms must appoint a senior, China-based data-protection officer with real decision-making authority, build dedicated compliance units, run regular risk assessments, and publish annual reports. These measures draw heavily from European Union regulatory frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA), and the Network and Information Security Directive 2 (NIS2)—signaling China's intent to align with global best practice while embedding a distinctly Chinese emphasis on data sovereignty and state-verified infrastructure.

The proposal represents a strategic tightening of China's digital governance architecture. By ensuring sensitive data remains under domestic jurisdiction and by enabling regulators to compel data migration into approved facilities, the rules effectively curtail the ability of foreign companies to route Chinese user information back to overseas headquarters. At the same time, Beijing encourages large platforms to adopt advanced protection technologies and engage in international rule-setting, reflecting its ambition to shape emerging global norms on data governance. [Geopolitechs]

China–Hong Kong: Government moves to outlaw overseas pro-democracy groups

(dql) Hong Kong authorities are weighing a formal ban on two overseas pro-democracy groups — one operating from Canada and the other from Taiwan — on the grounds that their agendas threaten national security.

Officials argue that both organisations promote ideas such as “self-determination” and the drafting of a “Hong Kong constitution,” which they view as attempts to undermine China’s constitutional order and challenge central authority.

If the security secretary issues a prohibition order, members or participants could face up to 14 years in prison and heavy fines. The consideration follows the recent sentencing of a 19-year-old woman for promoting the Canada-based group, which Hong Kong has already accused of subversion and linked to activists with bounties on their heads. The Taiwan-based group, which advocates Hong Kong independence, has similarly been tied to subversion investigations, with several of its members arrested earlier this year. [SCMP]

Japan: Ruling party opens landmark debate on defense build-up and nuclear principles

(dql) The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has launched a comprehensive review of the country’s national security framework, signaling a readiness to reconsider even long-standing defense norms amid mounting regional threats from China and North Korea. The discussions, led by the LDP’s Research Commission on Security and National Defense Division, focus on revising three core security documents—including the National Security Strategy last updated in 2022—with the aim of submitting party proposals by April next year and completing government revisions by 2026. [NHK]

A central issue is Japan’s plan to raise defense spending to at least 2 percent of GDP. While the current strategy targets fiscal 2027, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has called for reaching the goal by March 2026, and reports indicate the United States is quietly urging Japan to move toward 3.5 percent of GDP. The LDP is also expected to debate abolishing the “five-category” restrictions that limit defense-equipment exports to rescue, transport, warning,

surveillance, and minesweeping missions—an issue supported by many lawmakers and outlined in the coalition agreement with the Japan Innovation Party, which will form a joint council with the LDP by year-end.

In a notable shift, senior LDP figures say all security policies should be open for discussion, including the Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, producing, or permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons. While the current National Security Strategy reaffirms these principles, Takaichi has avoided committing to retaining them in the revised documents.

The review will also assess a broader range of defense priorities, including the development of long-range strike capabilities, expanded use of unmanned systems, and even the feasibility of acquiring a nuclear-powered submarine. These deliberations reflect Japan's increasingly severe security environment—shaped by China's maritime assertiveness, North Korea's accelerating missile and nuclear programs, and Russia's war in Ukraine—at a moment when Tokyo seeks to align its defense policy with evolving strategic realities. [The Asahi Shimbun] [Kyodo News]

Japan's Nobel Prize–winning atomic bomb survivors group, Nihon Hidankyo, has sharply criticized Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's reported consideration of revising Japan's Three Non-Nuclear Principles, which prohibit the possession, production, and introduction of nuclear weapons. In a statement, the group condemned any move to weaken these long-standing commitments, warning against turning Japan into a base for nuclear conflict or a potential target. [Anadolu Ajansı]

Japan: Niigata prefecture backs first TEPCO reactor restart since Fukushima

(dql) Niigata Governor Hideyo Hanazumi has approved the restart of two reactors at the Kashiwazaki–Kariwa nuclear plant—the first restart for Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) since the Fukushima disaster—despite a sharply divided local population and lingering distrust of the operator's past safety failures. TEPCO Japan's largest electric utility and the operator of both the Fukushima Daiichi and the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. The latter is the world's largest in terms of nameplate capacity.

The decision advances the national government's shift toward heavier reliance on nuclear energy to stabilize

power supply and meet climate goals, even as more than half of Japan's operable reactors remain offline. Final approval now rests with the prefectural assembly, which is expected to decide by year-end, potentially allowing one reactor to restart as early as January.

Hanazumi conditioned his approval on new evacuation routes and clearer risk communication, reflecting persistent public anxiety and TEPCO's troubled safety record. For TEPCO, the reboot is financially critical, expected to strengthen revenues for Fukushima-related compensation and help reduce electricity costs. [Kyodo News]

Local opinion remains polarized, signaling enduring distrust of TEPCO after the Fukushima disaster. Nationally, the political momentum favors restart: newly elected Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi sees nuclear energy as vital for reducing Japan's dependence on imported fuels.

More than a decade after Fukushima, Japan has gradually restored nuclear power—14 reactors have restarted, and more are under review—but the Kashiwazaki–Kariwa case illustrates how social divisions and safety concerns continue to shape the country's nuclear revival. [Oilprice.com]

Japan: Prime Minister Takaichi unveils new stimulus to counter inflation and accelerate defense build-up

(dql) The government has approved a JPY 21.3 trillion (USD 136 billion) stimulus package—its largest since the pandemic—as Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi moves to counter rising living costs, slowing growth, and the threat of higher U.S. tariffs. When combined with spending by local governments and the private sector, the package totals JPY 42.8 trillion (USD 274 billion), reflecting a clear shift toward more expansionary fiscal policy under Takaichi, who took office only a month ago. Under former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the government earmarked JPY 13.1 trillion (USD 84 billion) for fiscal 2023, while his successor, Shigeru Ishiba, increased the figure to JPY 13.9 trillion (USD 89 billion) for fiscal 2024.

The package is built around three priorities, including easing inflation pressures, supporting economic growth, and strengthening defense and crisis-response capabilities. Short-term relief measures include cash handouts of JPY 20,000 (USD128) per child, JPY 3,000 (USD 19) rice or food coupons, and JPY 7,000 (USD 45) in average household savings through electricity and

gas subsidies during the first three months of next year. The government will also scrap a provisional gasoline tax, raise the tax-free income threshold, and provide JPY 2 trillion (USD 12.8 billion) in grants for local governments to design their own support measures.

Beyond immediate relief, Tokyo plans significant investment in shipbuilding and artificial intelligence—sectors viewed as critical for national security and long-term economic competitiveness. The government also reaffirmed its path toward raising defense spending to 2 percent of GDP by fiscal 2027.

To finance the program, the cabinet will draft a JPY 17.7 trillion (USD 113 billion) supplementary budget—larger than last year's—though Takaichi insists the overall bond issuance for this fiscal year will remain below the previous year's JPY 42.1 trillion (USD 269 billion). The package is expected to temporarily reduce consumer prices by up to 0.7 percent and lift real GDP by JPY 24 trillion (USD154 billion), or about 1.4 percent on an annualized basis.

Financial markets have reacted nervously, with the yen and government bonds coming under pressure amid concerns about Japan's already severe fiscal position—public debt exceeds twice the size of the economy. Economists are divided: while the government argues the measures will not fuel "demand-pull" inflation, some warn that injecting demand during a period of elevated prices could worsen inflationary pressures. [Kyodo News] [CNBC] [The Asahi Shimbun]

Japan: Strong wage momentum builds

(dql) Japan's early signals for next year's wage negotiations suggest another year of strong pay increases, even as U.S. tariffs squeeze profits in key export sectors. Labor unions, including major groups in tariff-hit industries such as automakers, intend to push for wage gains of 5 percent or more—continuing the momentum that delivered Japan's largest pay rise in over three decades.

Sustained wage growth is central to the Bank of Japan's (BOJ's)policy outlook. Governor Kazuo Ueda has said he needs clearer evidence that companies facing tariff pressure will still raise pay before moving further on rate hikes. Robust wage settlements would help reinforce household spending and give the BOJ room to continue normalizing monetary policy despite inflation still running above target and real wages remaining negative.

Corporate sentiment remains resilient, supported by a weak yen, solid orders, and tight labour conditions. Surveys indicate that most firms plan to lift wages again, and some sectors with acute labour shortages—such as hospitality—are committing to multi-year increases. Economists expect average pay hikes close to or above the 5 percent threshold for a third consecutive year, reinforcing expectations that Japan's wage-inflation cycle is becoming more durable. [Reuters] [The Japan Times]

Japan: Government boosts investment to rebuild strategic next-generation chip industry

(dql) Japan is sharply increasing state backing for Rapidus as part of its push to rebuild a strategic domestic semiconductor base and reduce reliance on foreign suppliers. Rapidus is a Japanese semiconductor venture founded in 2022 by a consortium of major Japanese companies, operating as a state-supported "national project" designed to strengthen Japan's economic security.

Tokyo plans to channel more than JPY 1 trillion (USD 6.4 billion) in subsidies and investments into the company between 2026 and 2027, on top of earlier commitments totaling over JPY 1.7 trillion (USD 10.9 billion). Rapidus, which now estimates it will need JPY 7 trillion (USD 44.8 billion) in total investment, aims to start producing cutting-edge 2-nanometer chips by late 2027 and to advance to 1.4-nm and 1-nm technology in the following years. [Kyodo News]

The move comes as Japan's long-established strength in power semiconductors is increasingly under pressure as Chinese competitors rapidly close the technological gap and expand their market footprint. Japan's fragmented industry structure—split among five major firms, each with less than 5 percent global share—has reportedly slowed coordinated strategy and hindered consolidation efforts needed to maintain competitiveness. Attempts at deeper collaboration have not translated into broader integration, while Japanese producers face shrinking profits amid weak EV demand and rising SiC competition. SiC chips are power semiconductor devices made from silicon carbide instead of conventional silicon. [TrendForce]

Japan: Government to condition chip subsidies on strict cybersecurity

compliance

(ay) Japan's industry ministry will require semiconductor plants to meet mandatory cybersecurity standards in order to qualify for subsidies from fiscal 2026. The move converts previous "recommended" guidelines into binding conditions as ransomware and supply-chain intrusions target an expanding share of Japan's manufacturing base.

Under the new framework, subsidized chip facilities will need to demonstrate hardened network segmentation, intrusion-detection systems, and incident-response capabilities calibrated to the threat profile of advanced fabrication lines. Officials argue that a single breach at a strategic plant could reverberate across automotive, electronics, and defense sectors, particularly as Tokyo commits record funds to build domestic capacity and reduce exposure to foreign disruptions.

The shift also reflects METI's concern that without enforceable standards, Japan's broader semiconductor revival effort risks becoming a liability rather than an asset if critical nodes remain vulnerable. Companies seeking next-round funding for expansions or new fabs will be required to clear cybersecurity audits as part of the approval process. [Nikkei Asia]

Japan: Defense ministry think tank warns of deepening China–Russia–North Korea alignment

(ay) Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies, an arm of the Defense Ministry, warned in its latest annual report that China, Russia and North Korea have effectively formed a "de facto alliance" whose rivalry with the U.S.-led security framework involving Japan and South Korea is likely to intensify.

The report highlights deeper China–Russia military cooperation through joint exercises and patrols, Beijing's tolerance of North Korean troop deployments in support of Russia's war in Ukraine, and the rare joint appearance of Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un at a Beijing military parade in September as signals of tightening strategic coordination. It cautions that expanded China–Russia defence cooperation will strengthen China's operational capabilities, while the Moscow–Pyongyang rapprochement risks further entrenching North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes, collectively increasing strategic uncertainty across the Indo-Pacific. [Japan Today]

Japan: Defense minister confirms deployment of missiles to island near Taiwan

(ay) Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said on November 23 that Japan's plan to deploy medium-range surface-to-air missiles to Yonaguni remains on schedule. Dismissing claims that the move will heighten regional tensions, he argued that the deployment strengthens deterrence at a time when Tokyo faces what he described as its most severe security environment since World War II.

The Yonaguni installation, located roughly 110km from Taiwan, is part of a broader reinforcement of Japan's Nansei island chain which already includes anti-ship missile units on Ishigaki and expanded air-surveillance infrastructure on Miyako. U.S forces recently conducted logistics drills to simulate the creation of a forward-operating base in the area.

Koizumi declined to address hypothetical Taiwan scenarios but said Japan must deepen defense cooperation with the United States to safeguard local communities and national security. [The Straits Times]

Mongolia: Ruling party elects new leader

(fs) At the opening session of the 31st Congress of the ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP), First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Development Uchral Nyam-Osor was elected as the party's new chair.

The two candidates were Nyam-Osor, nominated by the Executive Council, and Lkhagvajav Tur-Od, President of the Mongolian National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, nominated from the floor. Uchral won decisively with 94.95 percent, or 1,974 votes, while Lkhagvajav received 105 votes, or 5.05 percent. [Montsame]

Nyam-Osor was also elected as the new speaker of parliament, following a vote in which 97 out of 126 members participated and 82.5 percent supported his nomination. The Democratic Party had tried to boycott the session, arguing that the speaker should remain politically neutral rather than serve concurrently as a party chair. [Bloomberg TV]

The leadership change comes as the MPP faces declining public confidence. Despite holding power

nearly continuously since 2016, its credibility has eroded following major corruption scandals, including a 2025 coal reserve case and earlier losses from the Tavan Tolgoi mine. These controversies led to the resignation of key figures, including the parliamentary speaker Dashzegve Amarbayasgalan and the prime minister Gombojav Zandanshatar, and pushed party approval ratings below 30 percent (see AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3).

Nyam-Osor, viewed as a pragmatic figure without ties to the coal sector, is seen internally as a candidate capable of restoring trust. A member of parliament since 2016, he previously served as minister of digital development and communications, chief cabinet secretary, and since June 2025, first deputy prime minister. His record includes advancing Mongolia's digital agenda and negotiating notable economic agreements, such as a 2025 trade pact with the Eurasian Economic Union (see AiR No. 26, July/2025, 1) and a uranium deal with Orano Mining (see AiR No. 3, January/2025, 3).

Nyam-Osor's election has prompted questions over whether he will remain solely in the party leadership or eventually pursue higher office. Although he is not expected to immediately seek the premiership, the possibility remains open should Zandanshatar face setbacks, particularly in implementing the 2026-2030 New Trust-Action Innovation development plan, which aims for annual economic growth of 6 percent and improved global competitiveness, making its success a crucial test for the government. [The Diplomat]

Mongolia: Government submits bill to stabilize fuel supply and expand storage capacity

(fs) Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources G. Damdinnayam submitted a draft law on supporting the supply of strategically important products on November 24. The proposal aims to ensure a stable nationwide fuel supply by maintaining sufficient reserves and providing financial support to importing companies. It also seeks to expand fuel storage capacity.

If adopted, the law is expected to stabilize the supply of petroleum products, prevent shortages, increase storage infrastructure, reduce air pollution, and support economic and social development. The minister noted that the draft includes a plan for the Bank of Mongolia to provide about MNT 500 billion (approximately USD 139.5 million) in repo financing to

businesses under favorable conditions to enlarge fuel storage facilities.

Mongolia remains fully dependent on petroleum imports, with demand rising due to mining sector growth. In the first ten months of the year, the country imported 2.3 million tonnes of petroleum products worth USD 1.7 billion, while diesel imports increased by around 10 percent compared to the same period last year. [Bloomberg TV]

Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar outlines 2026 budget priorities

(fs) Deputy Governor of the capital city A. Amartuvshin announced that Ulaanbaatar expects revenue of MNT 4.38 trillion (USD 1.22 billion) next year. These funds will support public-private cooperation, expand the city's economy, improve housing in ger (yurts) districts, reduce air pollution, and increase the number of connecting roads to ease congestion.

The city will also prioritize reforms in public transport to reduce traffic and improve access to educational facilities. Previously launched investment projects will be completed to strengthen the availability of basic social services.

Under the 2026 Budget Law approved by Parliament, the capital's base revenue is set at USD 973 million and base expenditure at USD 725 million. Additionally, USD 11.9 million from the Unified Local Development Fund will be distributed across Ulaanbaatar's nine districts for priority projects. The City Council confirmed current-year revenue at USD 496 million. [Bloomberg TV]

South Korea: Task forces begin sweeping review of officials linked to martial-law declaration

(dql) South Korea launched on November 24 an extensive set of government task forces to investigate officials suspected of involvement in former President Yoon Suk Yeol's December 3 martial-law declaration, initiating reviews across 49 ministries and agencies. The scale and speed of the probes have stirred anxiety within the civil service, where many fear politically driven investigations, excessive pressure for results, and the risk of scapegoating.

Prime Minister Kim Min-seok urged restraint and strict adherence to legal procedures, insisting that inquiries focus only on deliberate actions directly tied to the declaration. Nonetheless, concerns persist due to the use of digital forensics, possible demands for personal devices and memories of sweeping internal probes under the Moon administration, which left lasting distrust among bureaucrats.

Twelve key agencies — including the military, prosecution, police and several major ministries — face intensive scrutiny. The investigation runs on a compressed timeline, with findings due by February, and includes mechanisms for public tip-offs through an "Insurrection Reporting Center."

The opposition People Power Party (PPP) has denounced the initiative as unconstitutional overreach and set up its own hotline to document alleged abuses. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency]

The party also has launched a nationwide series of outdoor rallies aimed at attacking President Lee Jae Myung, as the first anniversary of the martial-law declaration nears. Although framed as a listening tour, the campaign focuses on portraying Lee as undermining the rule of law, particularly in light of prosecutors' recent decision to drop their appeal in the Daejang-dong corruption case linked to him.

The rallies also target the Lee administration's judicial reforms and denounce the newly formed government task force investigating officials' involvement in Yoon's martial-law scheme. PPP leaders describe the task force as political retaliation that threatens bureaucratic integrity.

The ruling Democratic Party counters that the opposition is defending Yoon and staging rallies to distract from the approaching anniversary of his illegal martial-law declaration. It argues that the task-force investigations are necessary to clarify responsibility for an attempted insurrection and to restore democratic norms. [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea: Former President Yoon Suk Yeol indicted for alleged interference in Marine death investigation

(mo) Former President Yoon Suk Yeol was indicted on November 21 on charges of abusing his authority and obstructing an official investigation into the death of a Marine Corporal. The case centers on the July 2023 drowning of Corporal Chae, who died after being

swept away by strong currents during a search operation for flood victims in Yecheon County.

A special counsel concluded that Yoon gave unlawful instructions to the presidential office and the Ministry of National Defense to overturn the initial findings of the investigation in order to protect a Marine commander from responsibility. Prosecutors stated that these directions exceeded the legal limits of presidential authority and violated the principles of due process and investigative independence.

This indictment comes in addition to earlier charges Yoon already faces in connection with the brief declaration of martial law on December 3.

Ten other officials were also indicted, including former Director of the National Intelligence Service Cho Tae-yong and former Minister of National Defense Lee Jong-sup, whom Yoon appointed as ambassador to Australia in 2024. They are accused of helping carry out efforts to interfere with the investigation into Corporal Chae's death. [The Korea Times] [Anadolu Agency]

South Korea: Raids target firms in probe of luxury gift to ex–First Lady

(mo) The special counsel probing former First Lady Kim Keon Hee's acceptance of a luxury handbag raided the office of French branch Roger Vivier and a major Seoul department store on November 20. The move follows a November 6 search of Kim's residence, where investigators found the handbag and a handwritten note dated March 17, 2023, apparently from the wife of lawmaker Kim Gi-hyeon, nine days after his election as People Power Party chair.

The bag, worth about USD 1,220, exceeds the legal threshold under the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act. Prosecutors are assessing whether the gift was linked to alleged political maneuvering during the 2023 party leadership race, which critics say favored pro-Yoon candidates after rivals withdrew under pressure.

Investigators suspect the gift may have been intended to win favor with then-President Yoon and his wife. The special counsel plans to summon Kim Gi-hyeon's wife for questioning.

Kim's camp denies wrongdoing, calling the gift a courtesy gesture, while representatives for the former first lady describe it as a routine ceremonial exchange without ulterior motive. [The Korea Herald 1]

Key suspect in Deutsche Motors stock-rigging case tied to ex–First Lady arrested

A key suspect in the Deutsche Motors stock manipulation case, which allegedly involves Kim was arrested on November 20 after months of hiding.

Lee had been wanted under an arrest warrant after disappearing during the special counsel's probe into alleged stock-rigging at Deutsche Motors, a BMW dealer, from December 2009 to October 2010.

Prosecutors believe Lee played a central role in the first phase of the scheme, managing a brokerage account belonging to Kim and introducing her to Jeon Seong-bae — the imprisoned shaman known as "Geonjin," who is a key figure in multiple corruption allegations surrounding the former First Lady. [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea: Court fines lawmakers for 2019 National Assembly clash but allows them to keep seats

(mo) A Seoul court has fined, but not unseated, dozens of conservative lawmakers and officials over their physical obstruction of fast-tracked reform bills in 2019 — a rare case of legislators being convicted for disrupting parliamentary procedure. Former party leaders Na Kyung-won and Hwang Kyo-ahn received the heaviest penalties, but all six incumbent opposition People Power Party lawmakers avoided sanctions severe enough to cost them their seats.

The judges condemned the group for undermining the legislature's own decision-making rules and eroding public trust, stressing that the confrontation was unlawful and not protected by parliamentary immunity.

Prosecutors had sought prison sentences of up to two years for Na and 18 months for Hwang, but the court opted for fines. Under Korean law, lawmakers only lose their seats if sentenced to prison or fined at least USD 3,400 specifically for violating the National Assembly Act—a threshold none of the defendants crossed.

A separate ruling for Democratic Party lawmakers charged in the same incident is expected early next year. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Rights chief urges swift action to protect North Korean POWs in Ukraine

(mo) South Korea's top human rights official has urged the government to act quickly to secure the safe transfer of two North Korean soldiers captured in Ukraine, stressing they must not be sent back to the North.

Ahn Chang-ho, head of the National Human Rights Commission, called for active diplomatic engagement to bring the men to South Korea and protect them as they seek asylum. He said the case is a human rights issue and asked the government to involve the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross to ensure compliance with international law, noting that the Geneva Conventions forbid returning prisoners of war against their will. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: New labor decree grants subcontractor unions separate bargaining rights

(mo) South Korea is preparing a major overhaul of its collective-bargaining framework as the "Yellow Envelope" Act takes effect in March 2026, aiming to clarify when parent companies must negotiate with unions representing subcontracted workers. The government plans to broaden the definition of "employer" to include firms that exercise substantive control over subcontractors' working conditions — a shift that could require large conglomerates with layered supply chains to engage in separate negotiations with subcontractor unions.

To prevent smaller unions from being overshadowed by dominant in-house unions, the proposed enforcement decree allows labor authorities to divide unions into distinct bargaining groups based on job type, interests, or organizational characteristics. The National Labor Relations Commission would determine bargaining-unit splits and whether parent firms are obligated to negotiate; it could also compel documents and impose fines when employers refuse to cooperate.

Officials argue the reform strengthens bargaining rights for precarious subcontracted workers while preserving the single-channel principle where feasible. But business groups warn the changes will dilute that system and trigger a proliferation of parallel negotiations, while major labor federations say the plan still forces subcontractor unions through multiple

procedural layers and may ultimately weaken their leverage. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald] [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Government launches project to upgrade submarines

(mo) South Korea has launched a USD 319.5 million program to modernize its 1,800-ton KSS-II submarines, replacing key combat and sonar systems with domestic technology by 2033. The upgrades will improve detection, communications and strike capability, strengthening Seoul's underwater readiness.

The move comes as South Korea accelerates naval modernization amid heightened tensions with North Korea and growing Chinese and Russian activity in the region. [Korea Joong Ang Daily]

South Korea: Marines conduct large-scale amphibious assault drills during National Defense Exercise

(mo) South Korea conducted large-scale amphibious assault drills from November 15–20 as part of its annual Hoguk exercise, underscoring the Marine Corps' expanding capabilities amid heightened regional tensions. About 2,400 Marines carried out landing with armored vehicles, tanks and helicopters, followed by simulated strikes on enemy command nodes and rear-area positions.

The drills also incorporated supply drones and joint logistics with the Navy, reflecting Seoul's push to modernize amphibious and unmanned warfare.

The exercise comes as South Korea strengthens island-defense readiness and upgrades Marine Corps capabilities in response to increasing military activity by North Korea, China and Russia. [USNI News]

South Korea: Airbus launches tech hub

(mo) Airbus has opened a new tech hub in Daejeon, strengthening South Korea's position as a strategic technology partner in aerospace and defense. The hub will focus on three pillars aligned with South Korea's industrial strengths — future energy technologies, advanced lightweight composites, and next-generation

defense and space systems — and is being established in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and Daejeon City.

To accelerate joint R&D, Airbus signed MoUs with MOTIE, Daejeon and the Korea International Trade Association, enabling rapid project deployment and open-innovation sourcing. Initial projects include work with LIG Nex1 on space chip antennas and with EMCoretech on active filtering technologies for aircraft electrification. [Asian Aviation]

South Korea: U.S. reaper drone crashes during routine mission

(mo) A U.S. MQ-9 Reaper reconnaissance drone crashed into the Yellow Sea early November 24 during a routine mission, according to U.S. Forces Korea. The unmanned aircraft, operated by the 431st Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron from Kunsan Air Base, went down near Maldo-ri Island off Gunsan, North Jeolla Province. No injuries or property damage were reported, and an investigation is underway to determine the cause.

The incident occurred just two months after the U.S. confirmed the permanent deployment of Reaper drones to the Korean Peninsula and follows a series of recent U.S. military aviation accidents in the region. More than 28,500 U.S. troops are currently stationed in South Korea under the allies' defense treaty. [Anadolu Anjasi]

Taiwan: Legislature restores rule allowing referendums to coincide with national elections

(yl) Taiwan's Legislature passed an opposition-backed amendment to the Referendum Act reinstating the practice of holding referendums on the same day as national elections if the voting window overlaps. The opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP), which together hold a legislative majority, argued the change will boost turnout and dismantle the so-called "birdcage" restrictions on referendums.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) opposed the move, saying it disregards the 2021 referendum outcome that rejected coupling referendums with elections, and warned the change

could again create logistical chaos similar to the 2018 local elections when an excessive number of referendums resulted in confusion for voters and a disorderly ballot counting process. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Opposition push to let mainland-born spouses hold office sparks debate

(dql) The main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), is advancing legislation that would allow mainland-born spouses with Taiwanese residency and ID cards to run for public office, despite their inability to renounce Chinese citizenship — a requirement under current law. The proposal, likely to pass the KMT- and TPP-controlled legislature, has ignited a broader debate over national security, constitutional interpretation, and political identity.

The issue was triggered by the removal of a mainland-born village chief who could not produce renunciation documents that Beijing does not issue, since it considers Taiwan part of China. The KMT argues that mainland spouses should not be treated as foreign nationals, invoking Taiwan's constitutional framework that defines Taiwan and the mainland as parts of one state.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) strongly opposes the amendments, warning that people still deemed PRC nationals would face unavoidable loyalty conflicts and pose security risks, especially given China's intelligence laws and rising cross-strait tensions. The interior ministry insists that existing nationality rules leave no legal flexibility.

Supporters — the second opposition Taiwan People's Party (TPP), and several local leaders — frame the change as a matter of equality and immigrant rights, accusing the DPP of politicizing the issue and applying impossible legal standards. Critics of the current system argue that the requirement to prove renunciation imposes an obligation no mainland-born spouse can fulfil, effectively stripping them of political rights. [SCMP] [Taipei Times 1] [Taipei Times 2]

Meanwhile, the Cabinet has referred nine local government offices to the Control Yuan—Taiwan's government watchdog body—for failing to enforce rules requiring elected officials to renounce foreign citizenship, including Chinese nationality. Under the Nationality Act, officials must give up any foreign nationality within one year of taking office or face dismissal.

Despite repeated reminders, several township and district offices did not process required removals, leaving four borough chiefs still holding Chinese citizenship. One earlier dismissal in Hualien was overturned on appeal, though without reinstatement.

The Taiwan FactCheck Center noted a legal nuance: naturalized spouses from China are not required to renounce PRC nationality when obtaining Taiwanese citizenship due to the lack of mutual recognition between Taipei and Beijing, unlike naturalized spouses from other countries. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Cabinet's revenue-sharing plan sparks clash with opposition-led legislature

(dql) The Cabinet has endorsed revisions to the revenue-sharing law that would substantially increase how much tax money the central government distributes to all 22 local administrations, totaling a record NTD 1.2 trillion (USD 38.5 billion). Under the plan, major municipalities would see a 15 percent boost, while other counties and cities would receive 25 percent more than in 2025.

The Cabinet argues that last year's opposition-backed legislative rewrite of the revenue-sharing law contains major calculation and distribution errors that have left NTD 34.5 billion (USD 1.1 billion) in tax funds impossible to allocate. It also disputes local governments' claim that the law guarantees every municipality the same subsidy level as the previous year.

However, the proposal is set to collide with political realities: the opposition-led Legislature already passed its own version of the law, and both the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), which together hold the majority in the parliament, insist that the legislative bill takes priority.

They accuse the Cabinet of overstepping its authority and using misleading fiscal calculations, warning that the dispute could trigger constitutional challenges. [Focus Taiwan] [Taipei Times]

The standoff in the tax-allocation issue underscores an ongoing partisan struggle in Taiwan legislation and politics rooted in the current balance of power in which President Lai Ching-te's Democratic Progressive Party holds only a minority in the Legislature.

Taiwan: Opposition parties seek closer alliance ahead of 2026 local elections

(dql) Leaders of Taiwan's two opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), met publicly to explore coordinated strategies for the 2026 local elections, building on their joint majority in the Legislature.

Both sides signaled a strong interest in forming a more structured partnership after past failed attempts at cooperation, including their collapsed 2024 joint presidential ticket. They emphasized creating a unified candidate-selection mechanism and presenting a combined opposition front, with some even floating the idea of a "unity government" after 2028.

The meeting reflects a growing push within the opposition to consolidate political strength against the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which won the presidency in 2024. The DPP criticized the talks as little more than an anti-government show, underscoring the sharpening partisan competition ahead of Taiwan's next election cycles. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Union backs draft bill on pay floor for delivery workers

(acl) On 22 November, the National Delivery Industrial Union (NDIU) announced it would accept a draft bill issued by the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that sets delivery workers' hourly pay at no less than 1.25 times the minimum wage.

The proposal requires platforms to calculate pay per order while guaranteeing at least USD 7.81 per hour based on next year's minimum wage. The standard delivery rate, set by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications (MOTC), factors in vehicle costs, profit margins and average orders per kilometer, with extra fees permitted for waiting time or walk-up deliveries.

The NDIU called the pay floor reasonable, noting that platforms report average earnings of USD 8.61 to USD 9.25. The Digital Economy Association Taiwan warned the measure could raise consumer costs, cut up to 145 million orders and push as many as 50,000 couriers out of the market—claims the union dismissed as exaggerated.

The draft also requires platforms to provide group accident and liability insurance, with reimbursement

available for self-purchased occupational accident coverage. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Legislature approves establishment of new immigrant development agency

(yl) Taiwan's parliament has passed an amendment to formally establish a "new immigrant development agency," a third-level body under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) tasked with overseeing governance and services for new immigrants.

Under the New Immigrants Basic Act, "new immigrants" include foreign or stateless spouses of Taiwanese nationals, foreign professionals with residence permits, and certain Chinese nationals admitted through special programs.

The new agency will coordinate policy planning and provide services related to education, employment, empowerment, social care, and other needs of new immigrants. Following its passage, the amendment will take effect three months after promulgation, after which the government will appoint the agency's first director-general and deputy.

MOI officials previously estimated that the agency, expected to launch in 2026, will operate with a budget of about NTD 700 million (USD 22.6 million) and roughly 100 full-time staff. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: New solar project rules spark investment concerns

(acl) Legislation passed on November 14 by the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) has significantly tightened environmental impact assessment (EIA) requirements for solar power projects, prompting industry warnings that investment has largely stalled.

The revised rules require coordination among eight ministries, a change developers say is already discouraging new projects. Some firms have begun shifting their expansion plans to Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

On November 21, Minister of Economic Affairs (MOEA) Kung Ming-hsin said the ministry is assessing the impact of the amendments. Another official reported

an unusually high volume of complaints from affected companies.

The new thresholds trigger EIAs for solar projects on slopes or floating installations exceeding 5 hectares or 10,000 kW. Cumulative projects surpassing 40,000 kW, covering more than 40 hectares, or sited on state-owned land must also undergo review.

Industry representatives argue that these provisions effectively freeze ground-mounted solar development, noting that coordinating reviews across eight agencies will be extremely difficult given past challenges in convening even a single interministerial meeting.

Kung expressed regret over the legislation during a recent committee hearing and pledged to propose revisions within a month. While the law is overseen by the Ministry of Environment, the MOEA may file an appeal, warning that the new requirements could undermine Taiwan's renewable-energy goals and the rising power needs of the semiconductor and technology sectors. [Taiwan News][Liberty Times, in Chinese]

Taiwan: Foxconn, Nvidia to build largest AI data center by 2026

(acl) On November 21, Hon Hai, one of the world's largest contract electronics manufacturers globally known as Foxconn, announced that the USD 1.4 billion supercomputing center it is building in partnership with Nvidia will be operational in the first half of 2026. The facility will house Taiwan's largest advanced GPU cluster, with 27 megawatts of capacity, and will be the first data center in Asia to adopt Nvidia's new GB300 platform.

The project is central to the company's push for "sovereign AI," enabling Taiwan to develop and govern AI systems using domestic data, infrastructure, and talent. Foxconn has already deployed four GB200-powered racks – server racks tailored for AI workloads that house chips, cables, and other equipment – and plans to install 144 GB300 platforms at the facility next year.

The center will help Taiwan's more than 1.6 million small and medium-sized enterprises upgrade production technologies by providing domestic computing power and reducing cybersecurity risks linked to overseas services.

Foxconn plans to invest USD 2–3 billion annually in AI as demand for AI infrastructure accelerates. [Reuters] [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Drone push accelerates asymmetric defence against China

(dql) Taiwan is sharply expanding its drone and uncrewed-systems capabilities as part of a broader asymmetric defence strategy in response to intensifying military pressure from Beijing. A new NTD 1 billion (USD 32 million) program, running from 2026–2028, will accelerate the integration of advanced technologies—such as anti-jamming communications, LEO-based navigation, optical-reconnaissance systems and composite materials—into military drones and unmanned platforms.

The plan marks a shift toward low-cost, expendable drones for reconnaissance-strike missions, which will also assume high-risk surveillance duties in peacetime. It includes new training standards, dedicated units, and the incorporation of drones into joint exercises.

This initiative is part of a larger push to build a "non-red" (non-China) supply chain and a vertically integrated drone ecosystem for military and civilian use. Taipei has approved a six-year NTD 44.2 billion (USD 1.4 billion) industrial plan and aims to deploy nearly 100,000 drones across civil and defence sectors within three years. Taiwan seeks deeper cooperation with US and European partners to reduce reliance on Chinese components, which currently dominate the global supply chain.

Analysts warn that Taiwan's industry remains fragmented and overly focused on hardware, lacking key components such as specialized drone chips, and that the military has not yet published a coherent doctrine or spectrum-management plan for mass drone deployment. [SCMP]

Taiwan: Prosecutors probe ex-TSMC executive over alleged theft of company secrets

(acl) On November 18, the Taiwan High Prosecutors Office launched an investigation into the actions of Lo Wei-Jen, a former executive of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) — the world's largest and most advanced semiconductor foundry, who allegedly

stole information on TSMC's 2 nanometer, A16 and A14 processes before retiring as senior vice president for corporate strategy development in July. [Reuters]

Fears are that he transferred the trade secrets to Intel, his former employer, after rejoining the company a few months after his retirement from TSMC. According to local media reports, Lo asked subordinates to brief him on these advanced technologies and took around 80 boxes of confidential data and books with him when he left the company, raising suspicions.

Economics Minister Kung Ming-Hsin said the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) will cooperate with the Taiwan High Prosecutors' Office to see whether Lo has violated the National Security Act, given the strategic importance of semiconductors to Taiwan's industrial development, and whether his actions may have undermined Taiwan's semiconductor supply chain and its client relationships. [Focus Taiwan]

Intel, for its part, rejected the allegations that a Lo transferred confidential TSMC know-how. Lo's move to Intel is sensitive given the companies' strained relationship. Intel is simultaneously a client and a rival to TSMC and has repeatedly warned of U.S. vulnerability due to dependence on Taiwan for top-tier chip production. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Ruling party lawmaker rejects China's legal threats during Netherlands visit

(yl) Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislator Puma Shen, currently in The Hague for an executive meeting of Liberal International — a global federation of liberal political parties —, said Beijing's attempts to intimidate him through legal threats, including being listed as "wanted" by China and comments suggesting he could be pursued via Interpol, "will not work."

Last month, mainland Chinese authorities opened a criminal investigation into Taiwanese legislator Puma Shen, labeling him a "hardline separatist." Chongqing police announced that Shen is suspected of promoting secession by helping establish Kuma Academy, a civil-defense training group he cofounded with entrepreneur Robert Tsao to strengthen public preparedness for a potential conflict with China. [SCMP]

Shen emphasized that China's moves are symbolic propaganda aimed at deterring Taiwanese from international engagement, adding that his recent trips

to South Korea, Germany, the U.S., and the Netherlands demonstrate that Beijing's threats have no practical effect. He argued that China's coercive tactics toward Taiwan and other democracies are escalating and that democratic nations must deepen cooperation.

Shen also posted a video in front of the International Criminal Court, framing it as a symbolic rebuttal to China's intimidation. [Focus Taiwan]

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

Bangladesh: Supreme Court restores caretaker government system

(lm) Bangladesh's Supreme Court has reinstated the non-party caretaker government model for overseeing national elections, reversing its own 2011 decision that had abolished the system. The ruling applies prospectively, meaning the February 2026 election will still be held under the current interim government, while the restored caretaker mechanism is expected to take effect from the 14th parliamentary election, likely around 2031 unless parliament is dissolved early.

The caretaker model—originally created in the 1990s as a safeguard during the country's democratic transition—was abolished in 2011 by the government of now-ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League. At the time, the government argued that the system was unconstitutional and allowed unelected actors to take control, but opposition parties and civil society viewed its abolition

as a political decision that paved the way for incumbent-led elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024, all of which were widely questioned for credibility. Last year's mass uprising revived demands for a neutral election-time authority, leading to extensive consultations under the National Consensus Commission and a series of review petitions that paved the legal path for last week's decision.

The Supreme Court's ruling restores the constitutional provisions governing non-party caretaker administrations but does not pre-empt parliamentary reforms: the July draft charter, a comprehensive reform blueprint, which remains subject to a referendum and subsequent parliamentary approval, envisions an alternative method for forming caretaker governments. Under that proposal, a multi-stakeholder selection panel—comprising figures from both government and opposition—would choose a chief adviser from a pool of nominees, replacing the earlier convention of automatically appointing the immediate past chief justice.

Legal experts stress that the court's revival of the 1996 caretaker provisions and the political process surrounding the July draft operate on parallel tracks: the judiciary can restore what was wrongfully annulled, while parliament retains the authority to redesign the system if a political consensus emerges. The reactivation of the caretaker model is therefore both a judicial correction and a political reset, reopening space for negotiations over longer-term electoral reform. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh's two largest opposition camps, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the historical archrival of the Awami League – and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami – the country's largest Islamist party and a former BNP ally – have welcomed the Supreme Court's decision, arguing that it reopens a path toward free and fair elections and helps repair damage to public trust in state institutions. Civil society actors likewise framed the ruling as a significant moment for judicial accountability, noting that the Supreme Court's earlier verdict had contributed to eroding confidence in the electoral process. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Government and Election Commission move toward constitutional referendum amid divisions between major political parties

(lm/mml) Bangladesh's interim government and the Election Commission (EC) intensified preparations for holding a constitutional referendum on the same day as the February 2026 national election, after the government formally instructed the EC to prepare for both votes simultaneously. Officials confirmed that a referendum law will be enacted within days, providing the legal basis for a nationwide vote on whether to approve the July Charter, a package of four constitutional reform proposals that emerged from the post-uprising transition. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

A central political divide has emerged over the timing and meaning of the referendum. Jamaat-e-Islami — Bangladesh's largest Islamist party and a long-standing political actor — leads a coalition of eight like-minded parties that rejects the same-day referendum plan. This alliance is campaigning nationwide for the referendum to be held before the election and is urging voters to cast a "yes" vote to approve the July Charter. The group's five-point program includes demands already met (the death sentence against Hasina and the directive to implement the July Charter) and others still pending, such as trials for the July killings and a ban on parties they describe as accomplices of the former Awami League–led system. [The Daily Star 4] [The Daily Star 5]

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), historically the country's main opposition and a former coalition partner of Jamaat in earlier political periods, is taking a different position. Although BNP welcomed the decision to hold a referendum on the July Charter, it has not yet decided whether it will support a "yes" or "no" vote. BNP leaders argue that voters may struggle with the ballot design, which combines four constitutional issues into a single question, and say public understanding remains limited.

The relationship between BNP and Jamaat has become increasingly strained. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir criticized Jamaat for "misleading people" by linking votes with religious promises, saying Islam does not support the use of religion for political gain. He added that Jamaat had shown "no visible effort" in opposing the former Awami League government during the past decade, contrasting this with the sacrifices claimed by BNP activists. BNP figures argue that the July Charter commission later added points beyond what political parties had agreed. [The Daily Star 6] [The Daily Star 7]

Jamaat and its partners, in turn, continue to organize rallies across all divisions to press for what they call a "proper referendum." They say the EC has not provided

a clear explanation of how it will manage both the election and referendum on the same day and urge the authorities to reconsider the schedule. [The Daily Star 8]

Bangladesh: Preparations for 2026 polls advance as authorities sideline former ruling bloc

(lm) Bangladesh's preparations for the February 2026 national election continued to accelerate last week, with the Election Commission (EC) and the interim government advancing extensive logistical, administrative, and political processes.

The EC finalized the voter list, confirmed two new political parties, updated constituency boundaries, issued revised polling guidelines, and launched the country's first system enabling expatriates in more than 140 countries to vote by postal ballot. The government simultaneously reshuffled district administrators, initiated transfers of police superintendents, and began a nationwide voter-awareness campaign. These steps, officials say, aim to restore public confidence after years of contested elections and ensure a "free, fair, and festive" poll. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

In parallel, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) announced that all candidates must fully disclose foreign income and overseas assets — not only domestic holdings — in their election affidavits. [The Daily Star 3]

At the same time, a central question now shaping the pre-election environment is which parties should be considered legitimate contenders. Since last year's uprising, the interim administration has banned all activities of the former ruling Awami League (AL), and the EC has suspended its registration on allegations of killings, crimes against humanity, and related offences. This debate over legitimacy was also reflected in the EC's pre-election dialogue, which was cut short unexpectedly. Seven registered parties — many with long-standing links to the Awami League — were not consulted, including the Jatiya Party (JP), the Workers Party of Bangladesh, and the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu). [The Daily Star 4]

The JP, founded by former military ruler Hussain Muhammad Ershad, remains politically relevant because it served as the official parliamentary opposition under the last Awami League–led government — a role that emerging political groups

cite as evidence of alignment with the previous ruling structure. At a rally in Dhaka, leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP) — a youth-driven party formed after the uprising — argued that efforts were underway to "rehabilitate the Awami League through the Jatiya Party." The NCP also reiterated that no party linked to the former ruling system should re-enter the political arena and renewed calls for the execution of the death sentence issued last week against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who remains in India. [The Daily Star 5]

Against this backdrop, an internal faction of the Jatiya Party led by senior leader Anisul Islam Mahmud has warned that it may boycott the 2026 election unless what it calls "false cases" and travel bans on its members are lifted. During a meeting with Commonwealth Secretary-General Shirley Botchwey, Anisul argued that a level playing field does not currently exist, citing politically motivated cases, restrictions on movement, and what he described as the persistence of "mob culture." His faction said the JP is an election-oriented party but cannot participate without changes to the political environment. [The Daily Star 6]

Meanwhile, although Bangladesh's three principal active parties — the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, and the NCP— broadly agree that the former Awami League–aligned bloc should remain excluded from the 2026 poll, the EC's consultations showed that this consensus collapses when attention shifts to the mechanics of election management. Each group has distinct demands: the BNP insists that returning officers must come from within the EC to prevent administrative interference; Jamaat-e-Islami questions recent reshuffles of district officials and police commanders; and the NCP calls for stricter rules on political symbols and stronger safeguards for expatriate voting. [The Daily Star 7] [The Daily Star 8]

Bangladesh: Government moves forward with Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance

(lm) Bangladesh's advisory council has given final approval to the draft *Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance 2025*, a measure intended to shift authority over the careers and discipline of lower court judges from the executive to the Supreme Court. Once implemented, the Supreme Court Secretariat will assume responsibility for transfers, promotions, postings, and disciplinary matters for judges engaged

exclusively in judicial functions—replacing the current system in which these powers sit with the government. Judicial officers serving in administrative positions in state bodies such as the law ministry, the Election Commission, or the Anti-Corruption Commission will remain under government authority.

The ordinance will only take effect after the new Supreme Court Secretariat is fully established. Its financial provisions, however—granting the judiciary control over its own budget—will take effect once the gazette notification is published. Under the new framework, the chief justice will be able to approve project proposals valued at up to BDT 500 million (about USD 4.1 million), with larger expenditures requiring approval through the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council. Judicial expenses will also be charged directly to the Consolidated Fund, which is the state's protected budget for key constitutional institutions. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Upcoming corruption verdicts add to legal pressure on fugitive former prime minister

(lm) Bangladesh's interim administration is preparing for another major legal milestone as a Dhaka court is set to deliver verdicts on November 27 in three corruption cases involving former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her daughter Saima Wazed Putul, and her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy. The cases concern allegations brought by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) that Hasina, in collusion with senior officials of the capital development authority (Rajuk), unlawfully secured six residential plots in the diplomatic zone of the Purbachal New Town project despite eligibility restrictions. A total of 23 people are accused; only one former Rajuk member is currently in jail, while Hasina and the remaining defendants are absconding.

These graft cases form part of a broader set of six ACC cases filed between January 12 and 14, all involving alleged irregularities in plot allocations. Charge sheets were submitted in March, naming Hasina as a common accused in all six. Three additional cases involving Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana's family remain pending at a separate Dhaka court. [The Daily Star]

The forthcoming corruption verdicts come shortly after a far more consequential ruling earlier this month, when the International Crimes Tribunal-1 sentenced Hasina to death in absentia for crimes against humanity related to the 2024 student-led protests.

That judgment found her responsible under command-responsibility principles for lethal force used by security agencies in Rangpur, Dhaka's Chankharpul area, and Ashulia. Hasina, who has lived in India since her government fell in 2024, has rejected the tribunal and its findings. [AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]

Bangladesh: Tribunal schedules hearings in enforced-disappearance cases involving military intelligence units

(lm) Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal-1 — a special domestic tribunal that recently sentenced former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to death in absentia for crimes against humanity — has scheduled December 3 and 7 to hear charges in two major enforced-disappearance cases. Both cases concern abuses allegedly committed between 2016 and August 2024, during the Awami League government led by Hasina.

13 current and former army officers were produced before the tribunal under heavy security. The first case, to be heard on December 3, focuses on the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) Cell, an interrogation platform operated by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) — an elite paramilitary unit long accused of torture and extrajudicial killings.

The second case, set for December 7, concerns the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) run by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Bangladesh's military intelligence agency. Investigators say 24 victims were detained and tortured at the JIC during the period in question.

In total, prosecutors have charged 28 individuals in the two cases, including Hasina herself and 23 senior and mid-level army officers. Earlier, the tribunal ordered 15 other officers into jail custody and issued public notices for fugitives. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: New study highlights systemic misuse of digital speech laws as political actors trade accusations over media freedom ahead of 2026 polls

(lm) A new study by the Clooney Foundation for Justice and the Centre for Governance Studies finds that Bangladesh's now-repealed Digital Security Act (DSA) was systematically used by politicians and government

officials—predominantly under the former Awami League administration—to intimidate journalists, settle personal disputes, and suppress critical reporting. The study analyzed 222 cases involving 396 journalists and concluded that vague, overly broad provisions criminalized defamation, alleged misinformation, and "offensive" speech, often before any court review. Most cases never proceeded to trial, making the legal process itself the punishment; only one journalist in the dataset was ultimately convicted. Large, late-night arrests by plainclothes police, non-bailable charges added to otherwise bailable cases, and a lack of information provided to families and lawyers were common features of enforcement.

Although the DSA was replaced in stages by the Cyber Security Act (CSA) in 2023 and later the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO), the study warns that risks persist because many DSA cases have not been withdrawn, and because the CSO retains a broad provision that could still enable arbitrary arrests. Researchers also noted that authorities have not published a complete list of which pending DSA cases were dismissed in 2025, leaving uncertainty for those previously prosecuted. [The Daily Star 1]

Against this backdrop, political actors are intensifying rhetoric around media conduct as campaigning for the 2026 election accelerates. National Citizen Party (NCP) convener Nahid Islam accused several newspapers of conducting a "media trial" aimed at discrediting the party, saying false reports were being circulated despite the NCP's declared intention to field candidates in all 300 constituencies. He rejected any pre-poll seat-sharing arrangements and said the NCP would only cooperate with parties whose positions align with its manifesto. Nahid also warned that the absence of a level playing field persists and claimed that some political groups are attempting to influence the administration ahead of the vote. According to NCP officials, the party has faced administrative obstacles from the Election Commission during registration and symbol allocation. [The Daily Star 2]

Media freedom also featured prominently in remarks by main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, who told a gathering of broadcast journalists that the BNP would establish an independent media commission if elected. He criticized divisions among journalists' unions and argued that partisan alignment within the media had helped enable authoritarian tendencies over the past decade and a half. Fakhrul said that reforms must be tied to broader institutional changes, not treated as an isolated sector, and added that recommendations from the interim government's own

media reform commission remain unaddressed. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Government approves draft anti-trafficking ordinance with significantly harsher penalties

(lm) Bangladesh's advisory council has endorsed a new anti-trafficking ordinance that would replace the 2012 law and significantly broaden the state's ability to prosecute both human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

The draft *Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Ordinance 2025* introduces sharply higher penalties, including the possibility of the death penalty for members of trafficking networks, alongside fines of BDT 500,000 (about USD 4,100). Individuals involved in trafficking outside organized groups would face between five years and life imprisonment, with fines beginning at BDT 50,000 (about USD 410).

The ordinance defines trafficking broadly to cover abduction, confinement, debt bondage, and sexual exploitation, reflecting long-standing concerns about the abuse of Bangladeshi migrants transiting through Libya and the central Mediterranean. It also brings migrant smuggling under the law for the first time, penalizing the facilitation of illegal entry of Bangladeshis abroad or foreign nationals into Bangladesh. Fines in smuggling cases start at BDT 100,000, with higher penalties if the migrant suffers serious harm or if organized groups are involved.

The draft outlines investigative procedures, the creation of a specialized tribunal, and measures for victim protection, rehabilitation, and legal assistance, including the establishment of a dedicated victims' fund. Further rules, to be issued separately, will specify which offences fall under the death-penalty provisions. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Two deaths in Detective Branch custody prompt calls for investigation

(lm) Two individuals have died while being held by Bangladesh's Detective Branch (DB) of police in separate incidents in Dhaka and Sirajganj, with family

members alleging the deaths resulted from torture during detention.

The incidents have drawn scrutiny because they add to a wider pattern: according to figures cited by rights monitors, at least fifteen people have died in police, paramilitary, or intelligence custody nationwide between January and November 22.

In response, two prominent Bangladeshi human rights organizations publicly requested an independent judicial inquiry into the circumstances of the deaths and the conduct of DB officers involved. Authorities have not yet announced whether formal investigations will be initiated. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: UNICEF warns child marriage now costs USD 7–8 billion a year

(lm) UNICEF has warned that Bangladesh loses an estimated USD 7–8 billion annually due to child marriage, even as government spending on prevention remains extremely low. According to new data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS-2025), the share of girls aged 15–19 who are currently married has risen from 32.9 percent in 2019 to 38.9 percent in 2025, reinforcing Bangladesh's position among the countries with the highest child-marriage prevalence.

UNICEF criticized the government for allocating just 0.01 percent of GDP to child-protection systems, leaving the country without enough trained social workers, case workers, or community-level services to intervene in at-risk households. The agency noted that child marriage creates long-term economic losses by pushing girls out of school and into low-paid work, thereby reducing future earnings, labor-force participation, and overall human-capital development.

Violence and harmful practices remain widespread: 86 percent of children aged 1–14 experienced violent discipline in the past month, and violence against women and children is estimated to cost the economy 3–4 percent of GDP annually. UNICEF also highlighted Bangladesh's persistently low human-capital investment, citing education spending at 1.7 percent of GDP (with only 60 percent utilized) and health spending at 0.7 percent. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: UN experts urge stronger action to stop exploitation of migrant

workers

(mml) UN human rights experts report that fraudulent recruitment and fee-related abuses continue to affect Bangladeshi migrant workers bound for Malaysia, despite previous reforms. According to the experts, workers recruited through formal channels are still paying fees more than five times the legal ceiling, leaving many either stranded after taking on significant debt or exposed to exploitation after arrival.

The UN assessment points to recurring patterns: passport confiscation by employers, discrepancies between recruitment contracts and actual job terms, and unauthorized circulation of workers' personal information. These issues indicate continued gaps in Bangladesh's monitoring of private recruitment agencies and the absence of effective complaint or redress mechanisms. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Earthquake triggers major power-sector disruption

(mml) A 5.7-magnitude earthquake on November 21 caused an immediate shock to Bangladesh's national power system, knocking out roughly 1,100 megawatts of generation capacity and exposing structural vulnerabilities in several key plants. The epicenter near Ghorashal affected multiple facilities simultaneously and led to a nationwide power shortfall. [The Daily Star]

The Bangladesh Power Development Board reported partial restoration of about 200–250MW later the same day, but full stabilization is expected to take longer as damage assessments continue. [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh: Government affirms LDC-graduation timetable

(mml) Bangladesh has submitted its annual report to the UN Committee for Development Policy confirming that the country remains on track to exit the least-developed country (LDC) category on November 24, 2026, following the five-year preparatory period that began in 2021. According to the report, the trajectory reflects overall resilience and policy continuity, though the interim administration stresses that the submission is a routine procedural requirement rather than a policy commitment.

The report highlights a series of risks that could complicate the transition, including reciprocal tariffs from the United States, ongoing energy shortages, higher energy costs, weaknesses in the financial sector, sluggish investment, inflation, unemployment, rising external-debt servicing needs, and general political uncertainty. Businesses—especially export-dependent sectors—have urged the government and the United Nations to consider a deferral of up to six years, warning that the loss of duty-free and quota-free access could reduce export earnings by around USD 8 billion. Private-sector representatives and UN-affiliated assessment teams have begun consultations to evaluate preparedness. [The Daily Star 1]

The debate over the graduation timeline has gained political weight amid concerns that major economic decisions are being taken by the unelected interim government. Tarique Rahman, the acting chairman of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), criticized the administration for proceeding with both LDC graduation and long-term port-management contracts without an electoral mandate. Referring specifically to the planned lease of Chattogram Port's New Mooring Container Terminal to a foreign operator [see article below], he argued that decisions affecting national strategic assets and long-term economic conditions should be made by an elected government.

Tarique also warned that smaller factories and workers —particularly in industrial hubs such as Narayanganj and Gazipur—would be the first to feel pressure from export-market adjustments after graduation. Citing precedents such as Angola and Samoa, he said UN rules allow flexibility when countries face economic shocks and argued that seeking additional time would fall within established procedures.

The UN Committee for Development Policy is expected to review Bangladesh's submission under the Enhanced Monitoring Mechanism in its upcoming session. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Labor unions welcome amended labor law, while factory owners warn of higher compliance burdens

(lm) Bangladesh has approved amendments to its labor law that expand the legal definition of a "worker," strengthen job protections, and lower barriers to union formation.

Labor unions broadly welcomed the changes, noting that the updated definition now includes many mid-

level factory executives who were previously treated as managerial staff and could be dismissed without access to standard service benefits. Domestic workers have also been formally recognized under the law for the first time, closing a longstanding legal gap. The minimum requirement to form a trade union has been reduced to 20 workers, a major shift from the earlier rule that required signatures from 20 percent of the entire workforce — a threshold that often made union registration impossible in large factories.

Union representatives said the amendments will increase protection for vulnerable groups and make union formation more realistic, although some warned that having up to five unions within a single factory could pose coordination challenges, especially in small enterprises. The revised law also increases paid maternity leave from 112 to 120 days.

Industry leaders, however, expressed strong opposition. Major business associations, including the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and other sectoral groups, said key points agreed in the Tripartite Consultative Council — the government's highest body for labor law reform — were not reflected in the final law. Factory owners argue that the lower union threshold could make small factories more susceptible to external influence and that the broadened definition of "worker" will significantly increase labor costs. They also warn that the new provisions may deter foreign investors at a time when the country is competing for orders in the global apparel market.

Several companies said Bangladesh is not yet prepared to adopt all elements of the revised framework and that implementation is likely to be difficult without additional state support. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government's lease of key container terminal triggers legal scrutiny and widespread protests

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government is pressing ahead with plans to lease the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT)—the largest operating facility at Chattogram port—to the UAE-based logistics firm DP World, accelerating a process that has become a focal point of public controversy. Chattogram port is the country's main maritime gateway, and NCT, constructed with the port authority's own funds in 2007, handles a major share of Bangladesh's container traffic. [The Daily Star 1]

The plan comes immediately after two other agreements signed this month: one with Denmark's APM Terminals to operate the new Laldia Terminal and another with Switzerland's Medlog SA to run the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal. These sequential deals have heightened concerns that strategic port assets are being transferred to foreign operators without adequate transparency or parliamentary oversight. [The Daily Star 2]

Critics argue that the pace and opacity of the NCT process are unprecedented. Evaluations and approvals have reportedly been completed far faster than the timelines recommended by international advisers, while civil-society groups, workers, and political parties —including the local leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's main Islamist party—claim that the interim government is making far-reaching decisions without open tendering or public consultation. Workers' unions have mobilized torch processions and rallies across Chattogram, warning that the outsourcing of a critical national asset threatens both economic control and sovereignty. [The Daily Star 3] [The Daily Star 4]

The dispute has now reached the High Court, which is examining a writ petition filed earlier this year questioning the legality of awarding the contract without an open tender. Petitioners argue that the process violates Bangladesh's Public Private Partnership Act (2015) and the Government-to-Government Guideline (2017), which require oversight by a prime-minister-led board of governors—a body currently inactive during the political transition. During hearings, the government assured the court that it will not move forward with the NCT lease until the judicial review concludes. The next hearing was set for November 25; at the time of writing, no update was available. [The Daily Star 5] [The Daily Star 6]

Tarique Rahman—the exiled political leader who heads the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) from abroad—publicly criticized the lease as exceeding the interim government's mandate. In a statement, he argued that decisions involving long-term control over critical national infrastructure should be made by an elected authority, warning that the NCT deal constitutes a strategic commitment that could shape Bangladesh's economic trajectory for decades. [The Daily Star 7]

Bangladesh: Interim government overhauls policing for 2026 election with

district-level reshuffle and intensified vetting of station chiefs

(lm) Bangladesh's interim administration has launched a coordinated restructuring of election-period policing, combining a full reshuffle of district superintendents of police (SPs) with a nationwide process to identify "clean-image" officers to lead police stations during the February 2026 national election.

The first step came with the selection of new SPs for all 64 districts through a manual lottery. Representatives from the Chief Adviser's Office, the Home Ministry, and police headquarters supervised the draw. Officials said the randomized process was chosen to avoid accusations of political influence after internal disagreements over whether incumbent SPs should remain in their posts. Officers who had previously served as district SPs or held commanding roles in the last three national elections were excluded at the initial stage. [The Daily Star 1]

Parallel to the SP reshuffle, Police Headquarters (PHQ) has begun selecting inspectors who may serve as officers-in-charge (OCs)—the commanding officers of Bangladesh's roughly 530 range police stations, 110 metropolitan stations, and 24 railway stations. On November 16, PHQ instructed major police units, including the CID, SB, and DMP, to submit names of inspectors regarded as professionally credible and impartial. According to senior officials, priority will go to officers who were not implicated in abuses during the July 2025 uprising that toppled the former government, nor in earlier elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024, all of which faced widespread credibility concerns. The process builds on a July directive requiring a comprehensive vetting of officers—from inspector to DIG—to assess political ties and prior conduct.

The vetting takes place after an extensive internal clean-up: more than 200 officers involved in previous election operations were placed on special duty or removed, and around 15,000 new recruits have been added over the past year, bringing total force strength to roughly 193,000. [The Daily Star 2]

The tightened scrutiny coincides with Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Sajjat Ali's public appeal to halt what he described as attempts to "break police morale." Responding to controversy over a wireless message reminding officers that Bangladeshi law permits the use of firearms during life-threatening arson or crude-bomb attacks, he stressed that he had issued no new powers but had merely reiterated existing legal provisions.

He warned that a collapse in police morale would again force ordinary citizens to defend their neighborhoods, as seen immediately after last year's upheaval. He also cited rising hostility toward officers during recent protests—including the assault of a policeman with a crude explosive near a station—as evidence of the pressure facing the force. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Debate intensifies over future of controversial state surveillance body

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government is facing internal divisions over whether to dismantle the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC), the state agency that enables real-time interception of mobile communications. The body—criticized for facilitating politically driven surveillance during the previous Awami League administration—became a focal point during a high-level meeting on the draft Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, chaired by Home Adviser Jahangir Alam.

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, the Chief Adviser's special assistant overseeing the telecommunications portfolio, argued strongly that the NTMC should not continue in its current form. He cited allegations of unlawful activities by former NTMC chief Ziaul Ahsan, a former army officer now under arrest for crimes against humanity, and maintained that any lawful phone tapping should require prior court approval.

Senior security agencies objected. Representatives from the police, Rapid Action Battalion, Border Guard Bangladesh and other forces argued that real-time interception is essential for responding to drug trafficking, smuggling, and national-security threats. They warned that requiring a court order would be unrealistic during late-night emergencies. According to participants, more than 15 agency heads supported retaining the NTMC or creating an equivalent entity with similar capabilities. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Arson and crude bomb attacks intensify following death sentences against ousted ex-premier

(lm) A wave of arson and crude bomb attacks continued across Bangladesh, including in Dhaka, two days after the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced

deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death. Following the verdict, the Awami League — whose political activities are currently banned — announced lockdown and shutdown programs. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Rohingya fishermen seized by Myanmar's Arakan Army near southern island frontier

(lm) 16 Rohingya fishermen from Bangladesh were seized by the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed group that controls significant territory in Myanmar's western Rakhine State and runs parallel administrative and law-enforcement structures. The men were taken while returning from a fishing trip near Cheradia Island, close to Saint Martin's Island, Bangladesh's southernmost territory in the Bay of Bengal and a recurring hotspot for cross-border maritime disputes.

The two Bangladeshi trawlers were reportedly intercepted in waters claimed by both Bangladesh and the Arakan authorities as part of their respective fishing zones. Local officials in Teknaf, the coastal sub-district bordering Myanmar, said they are verifying the incident. Fishing associations in the area note that many vessels hire Rohingya refugees as crew due to labor shortages, increasing their exposure to risks along this contested maritime frontier.

According to local trawler owners, the Arakan Army is currently believed to be holding around 150 people—Bangladeshi nationals and Rohingya refugees—following a series of vessel seizures this year. The Global Arakan Network, a media outlet aligned with the group, said that while Arakan authorities released 188 Bangladeshi fishermen and 30 boats earlier this year as a goodwill gesture, they have shifted to prosecuting new detainees, citing what they describe as insufficient cooperation from Dhaka. [The Daily Star]

Bhutan: Parliament prepares broad winter agenda with major bills and key reviews

(lm) Bhutan's National Assembly announced that the fourth session of the Fourth Parliament will run from November 27 to December 27, with a wide-ranging agenda that includes three new bills, several international agreements, committee reports, and multiple joint sittings.

The core legislative items are the Financial Services (Amendment) Bill of Bhutan 2025, the Livestock Bill of Bhutan 2025 and the Co-operatives and Farmer Groups Bill of Bhutan 2025. Committee chairs said updates to the livestock law are necessary because the existing legislation dates back to 2001, while the co-operatives bill aligns with mandates of newly created ministries and departments. Parliament will also consider two international instruments: the Framework Agreement establishing the International Big CAT Alliance—an Indian conservation initiative launched in 2023—and an amendment to Bhutan's reservation to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Several major committee reports will be tabled, including findings on tourism policy and the Anti-Corruption Commission's Annual Report for 2024–25. Parliament will further re-deliberate the Free Trade Agreement between Bhutan and Thailand and two BIMSTEC conventions on maritime transport and mutual legal assistance.

The session will review 13 Action Taken Reports on issues ranging from transmission lines on private land, disparities in bank interest rates and services for border communities to mobile-network gaps in highland areas. Lawmakers will also deliberate matters such as crime-prevention initiatives, building-height rules in *dzongkhag yenlag throms* (satellite towns administered under a district), reinstatement of the former Class 10 cut-off point in education, bar-licensing rules, and the regulation of online content.

A joint sitting will address disputed sections of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (Amendment) Bill of Bhutan 2024 and the National Assembly (Amendment) Bill of Bhutan 2024. Members will also examine the Performance Audit Report on WASH facilities in Thimphu Thromde schools before finalizing the session's resolutions. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: WFP commits USD 14.6 million to strengthen climate-resilient food systems

(lm) The World Food Programme (WFP) will invest USD 14.6 million in Bhutan between 2024 and 2028 under its new Country Strategic Plan, aimed at improving food security, climate resilience, and nutrition. The plan allocates USD 8.73 million to climate-resilient livelihoods and USD 5.87 million to strengthening human capital, aligned with Bhutan's 13th Plan and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

WFP's focus includes expanding climate-smart agriculture, improving market access for smallholder farmers, and supporting women and youth, who make up the majority of Bhutan's agricultural workforce. Despite gradual improvements—Bhutan's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index rose from 126 to 103—structural vulnerabilities remain significant. According to WFP, 12.4 percent of Bhutan's population lives in poverty, 27 percent of households cannot afford a nutritious diet, and stunting affects 21 percent of children under five. Outmigration continues to place a heavy labor burden on rural women and elderly farmers.

To strengthen national resilience, WFP is also supporting emergency-preparedness systems and helping integrate nutrition-sensitive approaches into social protection programs. Bhutan still imports more than half of its food, leaving the country exposed to climate shocks and external price volatility. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Health-sector attrition and weak labor-market conditions expose structural pressures

(lm) Bhutan is confronting mounting human-capital pressures across its health and labor sectors, with the rapid loss of experienced medical staff coinciding with worsening employment conditions for young people.

The Ministry of Health reports that 936 health professionals have left the system over the past five years—including nearly 400 with more than five years of experience—creating an acute expertise gap at a time when services and specialized facilities are expanding. Only 4,555 of 5,975 approved positions are currently filled, leaving shortages most visible in district facilities where junior staff operate with minimal supervision, contributing to rising public concern about service quality. Authorities are seeking to stabilize the workforce through new career-path and performance-management frameworks, pending review by the Royal Civil Service Commission. [Kuensel 1]

At the same time, labor-market data show that many young Bhutanese remain confined to low-quality jobs with limited social protections and weak wages. Youth earnings remain close to BTN 9,000 (USD 108) per month, far below expectations captured in national surveys that anticipate reaching BTN 25,000 (USD 300) within five years. Returns to education remain comparatively low, and youth are significantly more likely to work overtime, lack access to paid leave and

social insurance, and occupy vulnerable forms of employment. Skill mismatches and a persistent preference for public-sector work—leading many to decline private-sector offers—further restrict mobility. [Kuensel 2]

India: Supreme Court examines challenges to nationwide voter-roll revision

(ppms) India's Supreme Court has begun examining a growing set of legal challenges to the ongoing nationwide voter-roll revision, formally called the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). This is a month-long, resource-intensive exercise in which authorities verify, update and correct electoral rolls through door-to-door checks and document audits. The Kerala government, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) have all petitioned the Court to postpone the revision in Kerala, arguing that it directly overlaps with local body elections scheduled for December 9 and 11.

CPI has asked the Court not only for a postponement but for the entire process to be quashed on constitutional grounds, warning that the revision risks disenfranchising legitimate voters. The IUML alleges that holding the revision during an election period is "loaded with ulterior motives," while the CPI(M) describes the procedure as too cumbersome for parallel implementation.

These petitions will be heard on November 26 together with earlier challenges brought by Tamil Nadu's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and leaders from West Bengal, who argue that the second phase of the revision—now covering roughly 510 million voters across 12 States and Union Territories—amounts to a "constitutional overreach" and resembles a de facto National Register of Citizens (NRC) undertaken without state consultation. A separate petition by the Indian National Congress in Uttar Pradesh has added to the accumulating legal pressure, prompting the Bench to remark that political parties nationwide are increasingly approaching the Court over this revision process. [The Economic Times] [The Hindu]

While these challenges raise fundamental questions about timing, administrative capacity and constitutional design, newly analyzed data from Bihar —where the revision was completed before the Assembly elections—offers a contrasting assessment of the exercise's political effects. A detailed review of

Election Commission data by India Today shows that the removal of around 6.5 million names—primarily illegal or duplicate entries—did not produce systematic partisan outcomes. Although the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ultimately won 202 out of 243 seats, the patterns of deletions, additions, turnout and margins displayed no coherent political logic. [India Today]

India: Government brings four new labor codes into force, replacing 29 older laws and introducing uniform national rules

(lm) India has implemented four new labor codes, replacing 29 existing labor laws in what the government describes as the country's biggest update of worker regulations in decades. The codes cover wages, industrial relations, social security, and occupational safety, and will now apply uniformly across India. The codes formally became law after parliamentary approval in 2020 but were delayed until now due to political resistance in some states.

The new rules introduce several changes. Companies with up to 299 employees can now lay off workers without prior government approval, raising the threshold from 100. Daily work shifts may run 8–12 hours, provided they do not exceed 48 hours per week, and overtime must be paid at double the normal wage rate. Workers must receive formal written employment letters, and a national floor wage will apply across sectors. The codes require equal pay for equal work, and introduce free annual medical check-ups. Contractors may obtain a single license valid throughout India for five years.

The new framework includes provisions for groups previously outside many labor regulations. The codes define gig and platform work for the first time and extend social security benefits to these categories. Government think-tank NITI Aayog is cited as estimating that the gig workforce numbered around 10 million in 2024/25 and could reach 23.5 million by 2030.

Women may now work night shifts with safety measures, and maternity benefits—including 26 weeks of paid leave—are extended to women in unorganized sectors. The codes also expand social security portability nationwide and include annual health-check requirements.

Economists say the reforms may initially affect small and unorganized firms but could strengthen protections and incomes over time. Trade unions,

meanwhile, remain opposed, saying the codes will reduce rights previously available under older laws. The government and the prime minister publicly defended the changes. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [India Briefing]

Maldives: Opposition party enters 2028 cycle deeply fractured as rivalry between two key figures resurfaces after resignation of party chair

(lm) The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) is entering the 2028 presidential cycle in a state of pronounced internal fragmentation, following the resignation of party chairperson Fayyaz Ismail and renewed public criticism from former President Mohamed Nasheed toward former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

Fayyaz stepped down during a closed National Council meeting on November 23, later confirming the decision on social media. He wrote that unresolved factional tensions—especially the enduring split between the Nasheed and Solih blocs—had made it increasingly difficult for the party to function and that "seeking payback for past grievances" continued to obstruct MDP decision-making. His resignation, he said, was intended to remove any perception that he was complicating the work of the party's leadership or leveraging his position to influence the 2028 presidential primary, for which he has declared his candidacy. [the edition 1] [the edition 2] [the edition 3]

Fayyaz, elected chair in May 2022, had spent much of his tenure trying to bridge internal divisions dating back to the breakdown of relations between Nasheed and Solih—two figures who once led the MDP together but whose political visions and personal rivalry ultimately fractured the party. Nasheed served as president from 2008 to 2012, later returning from exile to become Speaker of Parliament under Solih's administration from 2019 to 2022. Their relationship deteriorated mid-term when Nasheed pushed for a shift toward a parliamentary system that would have positioned him as prime minister, a proposal Solih rejected. Their dispute culminated in the bitter 2023 presidential primary, which Solih won. Nasheed and his faction then left to form The Democrats, running under the slogan "Anyone but Ibu" to prevent Solih's re-election. While they succeeded in denying Solih a second term, The Democrats performed poorly and dissolved in 2025, with Nasheed and his associates

returning to the MDP—though the underlying factional hostility persisted.

It is within this context that Nasheed, writing to a WhatsApp group of current and former MDP lawmakers hours after Fayyaz's resignation, said the party's defeats in both 2023 and the 2024 parliamentary elections stemmed from Solih's belief that he could win without the support of Nasheed's bloc. He argued that repeating such divisions in 2028 would be disastrous and declared that the "most responsible" path for the MDP would be for both himself and Solih to step aside from the upcoming presidential race so that the party could unite behind a single candidate. Nasheed also revealed that he had twice attempted to give Solih an uncontested path to the 2023 nomination, but these overtures were rejected. While praising Fayyaz for his service to the party—including periods when he faced imprisonment—Nasheed conceded that the MDP remains deeply divided despite the formal reunification of its factions. [The Sun 1] [the edition 4]

Within the party apparatus, Solih's supporters still hold significant influence, but critics argue that MDP's opposition work has been weak and that governance failures and corruption allegations from its last administration continue to undermine public confidence. Some observers note that even former President Abdulla Yameen—operating informally from his residence—appears more effective in rallying support than the fragmented MDP. The party is now preparing for several internal primaries, including a competitive contest for the Malé mayoral ticket, where rival candidates are backed by different factions. [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

Maldives: Shifting power dynamics inside ruling party sideline Speaker as Majority Leader rises

(lm) A political analysis by domestic Maldivian news outlet *JDS* describes a marked power shift inside the ruling People's National Congress (PNC), where Parliament Majority Leader Ibrahim Falah has emerged as President Mohamed Muizzu's closest political ally. This shift has effectively sidelined Speaker of Parliament Abdul Raheem Abdulla, once the president's most influential confidant.

According to the reporting, Abdul Raheem was instrumental during Muizzu's rise, from steering internal party negotiations to shaping the administration's early messaging. His influence

collapsed after January 28, when the president abruptly dismissed his son from the tourism ministry, signaling a wider political break. Since then, Abdul Raheem has been increasingly absent from key public roles and major party events where he previously dominated.

Anonymous PNC insiders told *JDS* that the administration now relies on Falah to manage parliamentary strategy, defend the government, and coordinate political operations. Falah led speeches at the administration's two-year anniversary rally and again at an official event on November 18, reflecting his expanded authority. While Abdul Raheem still occupies the Speaker's chair, party figures described his role as largely ceremonial, with real influence concentrated in Falah's hands.

Sources say President Muizzu no longer trusts Abdul Raheem and has consolidated decision-making through Falah, who now functions as the de facto political operator for both the party and the government. Although there have been discussions about removing Abdul Raheem as Speaker, insiders suggest this will only happen if a public controversy provides political justification, as the administration currently controls parliamentary outcomes without replacing him. [The Sun]

Maldives: High Court judge resigns as sweeping disciplinary drive triggers political backlash over judicial independence

(lm/ya) The Maldivian judiciary is facing yet another contentious shake-up, as corruption investigations, disputed disciplinary proceedings, and the abrupt resignation of a High Court judge converge into the latest political confrontation over judicial independence.

High Court Judge Mohamed Faisal resigned on November 23, shortly after presiding over a terrorism case and days after stepping down as the court's chief judge. While the court offered no explanation, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has confirmed it is investigating a High Court judge—identified by multiple outlets as Faisal—on allegations of corruption and money laundering. His departure comes amid a broader inquiry by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), which is currently reviewing disciplinary complaints against five of the High Court's eleven judges, including some of its most senior members.

Earlier this year, the JSC had selected a new chief judge for the High Court, but the appointment was never formally finalized; an acting chief has now been installed. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

The scale of the disciplinary drive has fueled accusations of political interference. The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) argues that the government is using disciplinary mechanisms to purge capable judges and replace them with politically aligned figures. As evidence, the MDP highlights the earlier suspension of three Supreme Court justices—Husnu Al Suood, Mahaz Ali Hazir, and Dr. Azmiralda Zahir—two of whom were removed without what the party describes as adequate opportunity to respond, while Suood resigned shortly after his suspension. [The Sun 4]

Former Supreme Court Justice Husnu Al Suood himself has also publicly accused the government of trying to consolidate control over the judiciary. Writing on X, he said the administration had already removed four Supreme Court judges and appointed "unqualified" replacements, and was now expanding its reach to the High Court and Civil Court. He further linked his own suspension by the ACC to a case involving government interests. [The Sun 5]

Former MDP president Ibrahim Ismail (Ibra) issued similar warnings, arguing that the judiciary is being re-shaped into "administrative tribunals" subordinate to the executive. He said the suspension of Supreme Court judges earlier this year illustrated how the system has become politicized, and claimed his appeals to the Supreme Court and Parliament's Judiciary Committee had gone unanswered. [The Sun 6]

Facing mounting criticism, the JSC issued a late-night statement defending its actions, stressing that it does not pursue disciplinary cases based on a judge's identity or court affiliation. According to the Commission, 176 complaints were filed this year, 56 were deemed strong enough to investigate, and actions were taken in just six cases—about 3.4 percent. The JSC said this demonstrates that it is not targeting particular courts, and emphasized that its mandate is to safeguard public trust, judicial impartiality, and the quality of judicial proceedings. [The Sun 7] [the edition]

Maldives: Parliamentary committee backs automatic loss of seat for party-switching MPs

(lm) The Maldives' Parliament has moved a step closer to further tightening anti–floor crossing rules, after the Whole House Committee approved removing a proposed requirement for constituency-level referendums to determine whether lawmakers who change parties should lose their seats.

The decision preserves the automatic-vacancy approach introduced through a controversial constitutional amendment passed on November 20, which already stipulates that MPs will forfeit their seats if they switch parties during their term, are expelled from their party, or—if elected as independents—join one.

Although a government-backed amendment submitted on November 16 originally sought to introduce referendums before seats are vacated, ruling People's National Congress members pushed successfully to eliminate that safeguard, and the committee adopted the revised version with 50 votes in favor and 10 opposed. President Mohamed Muizzu ratified the earlier constitutional changes on the same day they passed, prompting a petition to the Supreme Court that has since stalled. [The Sun]

Maldives: Freedom-of-assembly row intensifies as Parliament rejects repeal bid and parties trade accusations over rallies

(lm/ya) Political tensions in the Maldives have deepened after Parliament voted down an opposition effort to repeal the restrictive Freedom of Assembly Act, while the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) and the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) escalated a parallel battle over the policing and financing of political rallies. The repeal bill, submitted on November 3, sought to overturn the 2016 amendment that requires police permission for demonstrations in Malé and confines gatherings to three Home Ministry–designated locations. Only ten opposition lawmakers supported the proposal, while forty-eight voted against it, keeping in place a framework widely criticized for constraining a constitutional right that successive governments had promised to restore. [The Sun 1]

During the heated debate leading up to the vote, MDP lawmakers argued that all major parties—including their own—have defended protest rights only while in opposition and then shelved reform once in power. They acknowledged that although the MDP previously

controlled both the presidency and Parliament, it still failed to repeal the law. Government ministers have also pledged change, with Attorney General Ahmed Usham saying on October 15 that amendments would be introduced, but no details have been provided. [the edition] [The Sun 2]

This wider dispute has been amplified by a series of recent political events. The MDP abruptly postponed a major anti-government rally planned for November 17, alleging that Home Minister Ali Ihusan took steps to obstruct the gathering. Inside Parliament, PNC parliamentary leader Ibrahim Falah claimed the rally was cancelled because the event was "sold on bid," suggesting the MDP had struggled to mobilize participants—remarks that caused unease within the opposition, where some senior figures privately acknowledged internal disagreement over the rally's cancellation. [The Sun 3]

At the same time, the opposition has accused the government of leveraging state-linked resources for political mobilization. The MDP has petitioned the Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate whether public funds or government facilities were used for a large PNC rally marking the administration's two-year anniversary, an event that drew thousands of participants flown in from the atolls. The petition cites estimated spending of up to MVR 60 million (USD 3.9 million) on transport, charter flights, pocket money, and other logistics. The PNC has not commented on the reported figures. [The Sun 4]

Fallout also continues from the October 3 "Lootuvaifi" protest. The Prosecutor General's Office announced it will not file charges against seven detained participants, stating that their conduct appeared to fall within constitutionally protected activity and caused no injury or property damage. Police investigations into ten other individuals remain open. The MDP has condemned the confiscation of two activists' phones and the subsequent leak of private images from those devices, calling it political intimidation and submitting complaints to oversight bodies. [The Sun 5]

Maldives: Former president Yameen attacks government over stalled housing pledges

(lm) Former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom sharply criticized the government's flagship housing agenda, accusing the administration of failing to deliver any visible progress despite allocating MVR 2 billion (approx. USD 130 million) for housing projects

this year. Speaking at weekly opposition meetings, Yameen said the government had “not placed a single rock” despite branding 2025 as the “golden age for housing.”

President Mohamed Muizzu—himself a former long-serving housing minister under Yameen and later the mayor of Malé—has repeatedly presented 2025 as a “housing-centric” year, pledging to provide housing for all Maldivians aged 18 and above. Yet Finance Ministry figures indicate that of the MVR 1.8 billion allocated for housing projects in 2025 (approximately USD 117 million), only MVR 175 million (about USD 11 million) has been spent so far, roughly 10 percent with less than two months remaining.

The criticism carries added political weight because Muizzu was previously one of Yameen’s closest political allies and his preferred successor in the 2023 presidential race. Muizzu served as Yameen’s housing minister for five years, was politically elevated under Yameen’s patronage, and ultimately secured the presidency as the candidate of the coalition that Yameen led at the time.

The administration recently announced plans to issue 7,500 flats and 15,000 land plots, most of them from the reclaimed island of Rasmale’, one day before marking its two-year anniversary. While the government highlights the scale of land reclamation at Rasmale’, the opposition argues the site is too distant from Malé and will require years to become livable and properly serviced, insisting that more accessible locations should be prioritized. [The Sun]

Maldives: Government commits to stronger protections for expatriate workers and signs new ILO agreement

(lm/ya) Attorney General Ahmed Usham told the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that the Maldives will expand protections for expatriates living and working in the country. Presenting the government’s 13th to 15th periodic report under the Convention, he said that upholding equality and non-discrimination is a constitutional and legal duty, and that the Convention’s provisions apply directly to foreign workers. Usham stated that the Maldives will step up efforts to improve expatriate affairs “in line with modern development” and provide them with stronger safeguards. Committee members questioned the government on its implementation record, and the UN body will issue concluding

observations after reviewing the report and the information presented. [The Sun 1]

In a separate development, the Ministry of Higher Education, Labor and Skills Development signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Labour Organization to implement the Decent Work Country Program (DWCP) 2025–2031. The DWCP focuses on three areas: shared prosperity and inclusive human development; integrating international labor standards into national policies and legislation; and strengthening gender-responsive tripartite and social-dialogue systems. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Fiscal pressures mount as Parliament advances 2026 budget amid debt-repayment strain and expenditure overruns

(ya/lm) The Maldives' fiscal landscape is tightening ahead of a record external-debt repayment of USD 1.1 billion in 2026, as Parliament moved the government's proposed MVR 64.2 billion (USD 4.17 billion) budget forward without major revisions while updated fiscal data shows significant overspending on subsidies and continued pressure on recurrent expenditure.

The Parliament's Budget Review Committee approved the 2026 proposal with 10 votes in favor and four against, rejecting all additional funding requests from state agencies. Committee Chair Ahmed Saleem said expenditure levels leave no space for amendments and noted that urgent needs would have to be handled separately by the Finance Ministry through a special-budget mechanism. Opposition members from the Maldivian Democratic Party attempted to secure additional allocations for skipjack and yellowfin tuna fishermen and for agricultural support and proposed incorporating recommendations made by the Maldives Monetary Authority's governor, but both motions were defeated by the ruling People's National Congress.

At MVR 64.2 billion, the budget is MVR 7.6 billion (USD 494 million) larger than this year's and earmarks a record MVR 16.9 billion (USD 1.1 billion) for debt servicing, the highest repayment burden in the country's history. [The Sun 1]

The government continues to argue that macroeconomic stability is improving. Economic Minister Mohamed Saeed said the administration under President Mohamed Muizzu inherited a weakened fiscal position marked by rufiyaa

depreciation, rising debt and limited options for revenue borrowing. He asserted that the government had taken “no new debt” since assuming office and described this as its most significant achievement over the past two years, adding that investor confidence was beginning to return. Despite this official narrative, international assessments remain negative. Moody’s maintained the Maldives at CAA2 in May, while Fitch downgraded the country to “CC” last August, both citing solvency and debt-servicing risks. The Maldives Monetary Authority has urged the government to issue bonds or sukuk and to reprioritize spending to meet the 2026 repayment. [The Sun 2]

A new fiscal update, however, highlights the scale of the Maldives’ spending pressures. Subsidy expenditure has already reached MVR 3.0 billion (USD 195 million), far above the full-year allocation of MVR 1.9 billion (USD 123.5 million). Pension and retirement payments have risen to MVR 1.81 billion (USD 117.7 million), and Aasandha health-insurance costs are on track to reach their budgeted MVR 1.85 billion (USD 120 million). Recurrent expenditure has continued to grow as well, despite the government’s earlier pledge to save MVR 7.7 billion (USD 500 million) through reforms of subsidies, pensions and health-coverage systems. [The Sun 3]

Maldives: Government intensifies drug and gang crackdowns as authorities withhold key details despite claiming major crime reductions

(lm) The Maldivian government is expanding high-profile crackdowns on drug distribution and gang activity while simultaneously withholding important operational details, even as senior officials claim significant reductions in organized crime under new legislation.

Police continue to refuse disclosure on “Operation Alimagu,” the nationwide counternarcotics sweep launched on November 13 at President Mohamed Muizzu’s instruction, during which 500 officers searched more than 100 locations and arrested over 90 individuals identified by officials as drug sellers. Authorities have released no information on the suspects, remand status, or quantities seized, despite describing the operation as the largest of its kind in recent years. [The Sun 1]

A parallel anti-gang campaign in Malé and Hulhumalé has also intensified, with police conducting 576 raids

and towing six vehicles over a 48-hour period, yet reporting no arrests or reasons for the seizures. [The Sun 2]

Homeland Security Minister Ali Ihusan said gang crime has fallen by 23 percent since 2023, crediting a newly established anti-gang unit and a significantly tougher Anti-Gang Act that now allows warrantless entry and arrest, detention without legal counsel for up to 48 hours, restricted bail, and prison terms exceeding ten years.

The ministry identifies 83 gangs with more than 3,500 active members, mostly in the capital. President Muizzu has argued that the new approach is delivering results and that many gang members have left criminal networks, although the government's own statistical releases provide only limited transparency on enforcement outcomes. [The Sun 3]

Maldives: Former home minister warns of deep criminal infiltration across state institutions

(lm) Former Home Minister Umar Naseer has warned that drug syndicates continue to penetrate key state institutions—including the civil service, police, corrections, and even Parliament—by operating under the cover of political party affiliation. He alleged that drug networks pay thousands of state employees monthly to protect gang interests, saying the influence now extends well beyond street-level crime to businesses and elected office.

Naseer claimed that around 3,000 government employees receive regular payments from gangs, and accused the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) of sheltering drug-linked actors within its ranks. He also argued that major law-enforcement operations, including a recent nationwide sweep involving 500 police officers, yield little long-term impact, asserting that most detainees are typically released within weeks.

Calling for systemic reform, he criticized the current rehabilitation model as ineffective and subject to political interference, citing relapse rates of around 80 percent. He urged replacing it with a model based on Islamic Sharia and argued that the National Drug Agency lacks both capacity and independence. He also lamented that drug shipments transiting Maldivian waters are not being destroyed, despite longstanding legal and policy debates, and said that no meaningful asset seizures have occurred in two decades.

Naseer further alleged that the Bank of Maldives is unable to freeze gang leaders' accounts, allowing criminal networks to retain financial power, and added that some sitting MPs have drug-related criminal histories. Known for his long-standing hardline stance on security, he argued that without structural changes, every administration will remain vulnerable to criminal influence. [The Sun]

Nepal: Voter registration surges as legal battle over House dissolution deepens

(lm/ec) Nepal's political and constitutional landscape is tightening further as preparations for the March 5, 2026, snap elections advance while the Supreme Court delays a key hearing on whether the dissolution of the House of Representatives in September was lawful.

The Election Commission announced that 837,094 new voters have been added to the rolls after an extended registration period that combined biometric enrolment with the integration of National Identity Card data. The provisional tally now stands at 19,005,324 registered voters, up roughly five percent, with more than one million people expected to cast ballots for the first time if the final numbers remain stable. Officials say the surge reflects strong participation from younger cohorts mobilized after the September Gen Z uprising. The final voter list will be published on December 6 after discounting those who will not meet the legal voting age by March 4, 2026.

The Election Commission also reports an unusually high influx of new political actors, with 33 applications for new parties currently under review and the number of parties registered for the House of Representatives election reaching 40. Major parties, including the Nepali Congress (NC), the largest party in the dissolved House, and the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the party of former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, had not registered as of November 23, although all must do so by November 26 to contest the election. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

As these electoral preparations advance, the Supreme Court has postponed the first full hearing on 17 writ petitions challenging the September dissolution of the House, deferring the session to December 8 because several defendants, including the offices of the president and the prime minister, had not yet submitted required written responses. The petitions argue that President Ramchandra Paudel's dissolution order—issued on the recommendation of Prime

Minister Sushila Karki, appointed following the youth-led uprising—violated constitutional provisions on government formation and improperly allowed a former chief justice to assume executive leadership. Petitioners also requested interim limits on the government's authority, but the Court declined to issue such restrictions. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

The political dispute has widened as legal proceedings stall. Prime Minister Karki insists that restoring the dissolved House would destabilize the country and maintains that elections are the only constitutional path forward. She has urged all parties to meet the November 26 registration deadline, framing it as essential for the integrity of the electoral process, and told civil society that the government is actively pursuing high-profile corruption cases in coordination with the anti-corruption authority and the Central Investigation Bureau. Major parties remain skeptical, citing unresolved security risks from the September unrest, including the escape of around 15,000 prisoners and the theft of more than 1,100 police firearms, with thousands of fugitives and hundreds of weapons still unaccounted for. [The Kathmandu Post 4] [The Kathmandu Post 5]

In parallel, the CPN-UML announced it will file its own writ petition demanding Parliament's reinstatement. The party argues that both Karki's appointment and the dissolution were unconstitutional and undermine democratic norms. Party chair KP Sharma Oli, who was prime minister during the protests that killed more than 70 people, declared that there is "no alternative" to restoration and pledged peaceful street mobilizations to press the demand. The Nepali Congress remains divided and has not decided whether to join the CPN-UML in court. While 45 of its lawmakers have supported restoration in principle, senior leaders maintain that elections remain the more prudent path forward. [The Kathmandu Post 6]

A new source of pressure has emerged from outside the mainstream party system, as 23 smaller youth groups with royalist leanings submitted a memorandum to the president demanding the dismissal of the Karki government and formation of a new administration aligned with their demands. They accuse the interim government of failing to advance corruption cases, amend the constitution to allow a directly elected prime minister, ensure proper compensation for those killed in September or address accountability for the earlier crackdown. These groups threaten new protests if their demands are ignored, though the main Gen Z groups that led the September uprising have not endorsed the initiative, reflecting

growing fragmentation within Nepal's broader youth movement. [The Kathmandu Post 7] [Republica]

Nepal: Former ruling parties confront internal fractures as they reposition for March 2026 elections

(lm/ec) Nepal's two dominant political forces—the Nepali Congress (NC), the largest party in the dissolved House, and the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the party of former prime minister KP Sharma Oli—are both confronting severe internal turbulence as they attempt to reposition themselves after being swept out of power by the youth-led Gen Z uprising in September. Their turmoil is unfolding just months before the parliamentary elections scheduled for March 5, 2026, a vote intended to stabilize the political system after the collapse of the previous governing coalition.

The Nepali Congress has formally committed to participating in the March elections and argues that the ballot is the only legitimate avenue to address the political crisis, the constitutional questions raised since the September 8–9 unrest, and the governance demands articulated by younger protest groups. The party has also decided to register for the National Assembly election on January 25, 2026.

Yet it remains deeply divided over how and when to reorganize itself. For more than a month, its central working committee has been unable to agree on whether to hold a special general convention ahead of the March vote, a demand supported by more than half of the elected convention representatives, or to wait until after the elections, as favored by the establishment faction aligned with party president Sher Bahadur Deuba. General secretaries Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma continue to push for a pre-election leadership change, with Thapa stating publicly that the party will not enter the elections under Deuba's signature.

Although leaders close to Deuba are divided on timing, the party as a whole now acknowledges that the political environment is unusually fragile, citing the escape of prisoners during the September unrest, missing weapons, clashes between CPN-UML supporters and Gen Z activists, and concerns about parties' ability to campaign safely. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

The CPN-UML, for its part, is sending mixed signals about joining the elections at all. KP Sharma Oli maintains that the interim administration led by former chief justice Sushila Karki is not authorized to hold a national vote and insists that the House of Representatives must first be restored, framing reinstatement as the only way to meet the demands raised by Gen Z protesters. CPN-UML leaders are therefore divided between those who intend to register the party before the November 26 deadline and those who argue that CPN-UML should boycott the electoral process and instead pursue House restoration in the Supreme Court. The party has already mobilized its full organizational network in a series of nationwide rallies that Oli describes as a demonstration of strength, although some senior leaders suggest these gatherings also function as early election campaigning. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

At the same time, the CPN-UML is entering the most serious internal confrontation it has faced in years. Senior vice-chair Ishwar Pokhrel has formally announced that he will challenge Oli for the party leadership at the general convention scheduled for December 13–15. Pokhrel argues that the party needs new leadership after losing power during the September uprising, which resulted in more than 70 deaths when security forces opened fire under Oli's government. He is backed by a substantial bloc of senior leaders, including several vice-chairs and secretaries, and enjoys the support of former president Bidya Devi Bhandari, a highly symbolic figure within the party's ideological tradition. Oli, however, had pushed through statutory changes just one day before the protests erupted, removing the party's age ceiling and term limits to clear the way for his own re-election. He has publicly downplayed Pokhrel's challenge while warning that past leadership contests triggered damaging party splits. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

Nepal: New left-leaning party launched through merger of Maoist and smaller groups

(lm) Nepal's fragmented left spectrum has undergone another reshuffling with the formal launch of the Pragatisheel Loktantrik Party, created through the merger of several Maoist-aligned and smaller leftist factions. The merger includes groups that had broken away from the Maoist Centre, the party that emerged from Nepal's former Maoist insurgency and has since become a mainstream left force.

The new party's leaders said their objective is to build a "progressive democratic force" capable of responding to the political vacuum created after the September Gen Z uprising, which toppled the Nepali Congress–CPN-UML coalition government and destabilized long-standing party structures. They argue that Nepal needs a reform-oriented left alternative committed to social justice, anti-corruption, and constitutional stability.

While the Pragatisheel Loktantrik Party has not yet presented a detailed electoral strategy, it plans to register with the Election Commission ahead of the March 5, 2026, elections and position itself as a corrective to what it describes as entrenched political complacency among the major parties. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Youth–party clashes, curfews and new paramilitary youth force heighten pre-election tensions

(ec/lm) Nepal's pre-election environment grew more volatile after two days of clashes between Gen Z activists and supporters of the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the party led by former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, whose government was toppled by the Gen Z uprising in September. The incident took place in Simara, an emerging industrial hub in Madhesh Province, where the CPN-UML had scheduled a youth mobilization program.

Tensions escalated on November 19 when around one hundred Gen Z activists staged a protest near Simara Airport as senior CPN-UML leaders arrived. A confrontation between the groups spilled toward the airport gate, prompting police to fire tear gas and impose a curfew that temporarily suspended all flights. Violence continued the next day after Gen Z protesters accused the police of protecting six CPN_UML supporters named in an assault complaint. Demonstrators burned tires in defiance of the curfew, while police used force to disperse crowds. Several Gen Z activists and police officers were injured, and authorities later arrested two CPN-UML ward chairs and one additional accused person. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

The political establishment reacted quickly. Oli questioned whether the interim government would be capable of conducting the March 5, 2026, general elections if major parties cannot campaign freely. The Nepali Congress and the Rastriya Swatantra Party

warned that no group should use the Gen Z label to obstruct legitimate political programs and emphasized the need for political space for all actors. Gen Z representatives rejected accusations of provocation, insisting they had held a separate gathering outside Simara and were attacked by CPN-UML-linked groups attempting to dominate the area. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

To prevent further escalation, the District Security Committee entered negotiations with Gen Z leaders on November 21. The talks produced a verbal six-point understanding: authorities committed to taking disciplinary action against security officials accused of mishandling the situation, pursuing legal cases against the CPN-UML supporters named in the complaint, ensuring medical treatment and compensation for the injured, adding omitted names to the police report, and guaranteeing safety for Gen Z activists. The youth movement warned that public protests would resume if concrete progress is not visible by November 24. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

Amid these tensions, the CPN-UML simultaneously took an unexpected and controversial step by creating a new youth mobilization structure, the National Volunteer Force (NVF). Although formally presented as a civic-support and disaster-response unit, the force is widely seen as a counter-mobilization designed to challenge Gen Z activism. The initiative was driven by senior CPN-UML figure Mahesh Basnet and endorsed by Oli, despite opposition from several senior CPN-UML leaders who warned that forming a parallel force could heighten confrontation and destabilize the electoral environment.

The NVF's coordinator, Pushparaj Shrestha, has an extensive criminal record. Police records show seven cases filed against him between 2006 and 2018, including multiple charges of attempted murder, kidnapping, hostage-taking, extortion, and assault. His public remarks at the NVF launch—declaring readiness to "fight and confront… on the streets"—directly contradicted claims by Oli that the force is nonviolent. Senior CPN-UML members expressed concern that the party is reviving a "muscle-power" model reminiscent of past political militias. [The Kathmandu Post 6] [The Kathmandu Post 7]

As these developments unfolded, the National Security Council—chaired by Prime Minister Sushila Karki—recommended deploying the Nepali Army to ensure secure elections. An integrated security plan involving all police branches, temporary police, and military deployment has been dispatched to all 77 districts to guarantee intimidation-free polling. The council

explicitly discussed the Simara clashes and broader risks of unrest affecting national security and the election process. [The Kathmandu Post 8]

Nepal: Government appoints new chief secretary as Prime Minister's Office faces allegations of nepotism

(lm) Nepal's cabinet has appointed Defence Secretary Suman Raj Aryal as the country's new chief secretary, effective upon the retirement of Ek Narayan Aryal. Suman Aryal, who entered the civil service in 1996 and became a secretary in 2021, was selected on the basis of seniority and work efficiency, following the same precedent used when appointing the new Inspector General of Police earlier this year. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

While the top-level reshuffle proceeded, Prime Minister Sushila Karki's secretariat came under pressure over allegations of nepotism. Media reports and youth groups highlighted that the prime minister's chief personal secretary, Adarsh Shrestha, had appointed his wife, Sangita Shrestha, to a position inside the PM's secretariat on September 19, along with other alleged relatives. Sangita reportedly holds a rank equivalent to a joint secretary.

The Nepal Gen Z Front, a youth group formed after the September protests, demanded Shrestha's dismissal and the revocation of all appointments he facilitated. The group said these appointments undermine good governance and transparency—issues central to the Gen Z movement that brought the current government to power. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The Prime Minister's Office rejected the allegations, saying all appointments follow legal procedures and are operationally necessary. It said the PM's secretariat functions with only 20 of its 67 authorized positions filled and argued that the chief personal secretary must appoint trusted individuals who can provide round-the-clock support. It also asked the media not to assume nepotism solely on the basis of shared surnames or ethnic backgrounds. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

The controversy unfolded alongside a separate unresolved issue concerning Attorney General Sabita Bhandari, who has faced public criticism for dropping a case involving a private fertility company accused of extracting eggs from underage girls. Bhandari was previously a shareholder in the company. The Attorney General's Office denied misconduct, stating that a

deputy attorney general made the decision not to prosecute based on the case file and available evidence.

A further point of criticism arose around Kulman Ghising, the minister for energy and two other portfolios, after the Ujyalo Nepal Party—linked to him—registered with the Election Commission ahead of the March 5 elections. While party members say Ghising will resign before the election code of conduct comes into force, critics argue his continued presence in the cabinet raises ethical concerns. The government has not taken corrective action. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Nepal: Court-ordered release of pro-monarchy activist follows arrest tied to planned nationwide protests

(es/lm) Nepal's Supreme Court has ordered the release of controversial businessman-activist Durga Prasain, overturning his latest preventive detention just days after police arrested him ahead of nationwide protests planned for November 23. The ruling concluded that the grounds for holding him had lapsed following a November 22 agreement between the government and Prasain's supporters to conduct upcoming political activities peacefully. The Court instructed officials to execute the habeas corpus order and hand him over to the responsibility of his son. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Prasain—one of the country's most prominent pro-monarchy agitators and leader of the Citizen and Government Rescue Campaign—was arrested on November 18 under public-security provisions. Authorities cited inflammatory public statements, earlier criminal cases still under review, and the violent history of his March rally, during which two people were killed. It was his fifth detention in recent months, reflecting growing concern within security agencies about his mobilizing capacity amid Nepal's fragile political climate following the September Generation Z uprising.

His followers accused authorities of detaining him without a warrant and issued a 24-hour ultimatum demanding his release, while several members of his personal security team were detained when attempting to meet him at the police office. The arrest also disrupted a second round of talks with the government that had been expected to follow a 27-point demand charter Prasain presented on November 12, which called for abolition of the constitution, restoration of the monarchy, major financial reforms

and mass removal of individuals from banking blacklists. [AiR No. 45, November/2025, 2]

Senior officials had privately warned that Prasain risked detention if he continued to "undermine political decorum," reflecting their assessment that his influence has declined since earlier waves of mobilization. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: President pauses ordinance allowing constitutional appointments without parliamentary hearing

(lm) President Ramchandra Paudel has withheld a controversial ordinance that would allow the government to appoint candidates to constitutional bodies without the constitutionally required parliamentary hearing, reflecting growing tensions over executive attempts to bypass formal oversight. The government had recommended two ordinances last week—one amending the Nepal Special Services Act, which the President issued, and another revising the Constitutional Council Act. Paudel has stalled the latter after two days of review, with officials indicating he is concerned that it contradicts explicit constitutional safeguards.

The disputed ordinance states that if the House of Representatives is dissolved—as it currently is—appointments recommended by the Constitutional Council could proceed immediately, with confirmation hearings postponed until after parliamentary elections scheduled for March 5, 2026. If the new House does not endorse the appointees within 45 days of its first meeting, they would automatically lose their positions. Senior officials say Paudel opposes both the easing of the recommendation process and the elimination of the mandatory hearing requirement, calling the measure more regressive than an earlier amendment he refused to authenticate in July.

The ordinance has been proposed as the Sushila Karki administration seeks to fill vacant positions, including the chief election commissioner. Critics argue the government is undermining constitutional integrity while simultaneously preparing written justifications for two other legally contentious steps: Karki's own appointment as prime minister, despite not being a member of the lower house, and the dissolution of the House—both departures from constitutional norms that were nevertheless accepted by many political actors as crisis-management measures. Legal experts warn the new ordinance would compound these breaches, undermining the spirit of accountability.

Members of the Election Commission say operations have not been affected by two vacant seats, noting that more than 60 percent of election preparations have already been completed. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Speaker removed as Madhesh power struggle deepens amid ongoing constitutional dispute

(lm) Nepal's Madhesh Province has escalated into a deeper constitutional confrontation as the Provincial Assembly removed its Speaker by a two-thirds vote, a move closely tied to the fallout from the disputed appointment of a new chief minister earlier this month. The political crisis, which began with a secret, pre-dawn oath ceremony for a new provincial leader at a hotel, has now evolved into a broader institutional clash involving the provincial executive, legislature, and federal authorities.

Seven parties in the assembly—together holding a clear numerical majority—accused the Speaker of systematically obstructing their participation during the period surrounding the contested appointment of the chief minister. Their allegations stemmed from the episode in which the former province head bypassed coalition consultations and appointed the leader of the largest party under Article 168(3), even though Article 168(2), which requires exploring coalition formation, remained applicable. The decision triggered protests, two Supreme Court petitions, and the federal government's dismissal of the province head on grounds of misconduct. [AiR No. 45, November/2025, 2]

According to the seven-party alliance, the Speaker aligned himself with the beneficiary party of the disputed appointment by selectively blocking opposition lawmakers from the rostrum, ignoring the Business Advisory Committee's recommendations, and facilitating procedures that they say shielded the new chief minister from legitimate scrutiny. The confrontation intensified when the Speaker unilaterally stripped five lawmakers of their seats on claims of prolonged absence, a decision later reversed by the Deputy Speaker after video evidence contradicted the allegation.

Days before the vote, the alliance convened an outdoor session after alleging that the official chamber had been padlocked and key staff removed, which they described as a coordinated attempt to prevent deliberations on government formation. With last week's vote, the Speaker—who had previously lost the

position during the province's first term—was removed without any votes in his favor. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Inquiry into Gen Z crackdown enters final phase as watchdog faults lethal force and security failures

(lm) Nepal's investigation into the September 8–9 Generation Z protests is entering a decisive stage, with the judicial inquiry commission preparing to summon former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak, while Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a sharply critical assessment accusing security forces of unlawful killings and major operational failures.

The three-member judicial inquiry commission—established by the interim government on September 21—reports that more than sixty percent of its work is complete, with the remaining month of its mandate focused on completing testimony and drafting findings. The panel has recorded statements from around 30 security personnel, prison authorities, senior bureaucrats, and political actors present during the unrest, including Rabi Lamichhane, who was in judicial custody when protesters reached Nakkhu Prison.

Early progress was slowed by nearly a month of non-cooperation from Nepal Police, prompting a warning letter to former Inspector General Chandra Kuber Khapung before the chain-of-command documentation was finally submitted. The panel is still awaiting a response from the Nepali Army, which has not yet provided its account of how major state institutions—including the Office of the President, Supreme Court, and Singha Durbar—were left inadequately secured on September 9.

The commission has logged around 300 complaints, examined extensive photo and video material, and conducted field inspections. It seeks to clarify why police opened fire, how weapons were handled, why protesters were able to breach Parliament premises, and why widespread arson and vandalism erupted the following day.

The commission will soon summon Oli and Lekhak, both already subject to travel-restriction recommendations to ensure cooperation. Oli has questioned the legality of the interim government itself, raising uncertainty about whether he will testify. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

HRW's investigation provides the most detailed external assessment to date, concluding that police fired live rounds indiscriminately for several hours on September 8. Seventeen protesters were killed immediately, and pathologists later recorded 35 deaths from high-velocity gunshot wounds among the 47 bodies examined from both days of unrest. HRW said publicly available evidence does not indicate any imminent threat to life that would justify lethal force under international standards.

On September 9, HRW found that security forces were inexplicably absent as mobs—some reportedly unrelated to the original Gen Z demonstrations—torched government buildings and attacked politicians, journalists, schools, and media offices. The organization called for a time-bound, independent investigation not only into police actions but also into the possible involvement of infiltrators or political groups. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Meanwhile, in response to the scale of casualties, the interim government has approved NPR 15,000 (USD 110) in emergency cash relief for each of the 2,429 injured, in addition to earlier assistance to the families of the 76 people who died during and after the unrest. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: Transitional justice tensions intensify as victims demand new leadership and government launches long-delayed reparations fund

(lm) Nepal's transitional justice process entered another phase of confrontation last week as conflict victims marked the 19th anniversary of the Comprehensive Peace Accord—the 2006 agreement that ended the decade-long Maoist insurgency and committed the state to truth-seeking, accountability and reparations.

Victims' groups held sit-ins outside both transitional justice commissions, demanding the resignation of all office-bearers. They reject the current leadership of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons, arguing that their appointment under a previous government was politically driven and that the bodies have since failed to establish credibility or engage victims directly. The protesters link their campaign to Nepal's broader "Gen Z" anti-nepotism movement, saying the commissions have become

symbols of impunity, misgovernance and political interference. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

At the same time, the government finally operationalized the long-delayed transitional justice fund after publishing the required regulations in the Nepal Gazette—ending more than a year of procedural stalling. The fund is designed to finance interim relief and full reparations for victims and will draw contributions from all tiers of government, former conflict actors, Nepali citizens, and foreign partners.

Within days of the fund's creation, the Cabinet approved the first external contribution: USD 2.1 million from Switzerland. The national budget had already earmarked NPR 1 billion (USD 7.3 million) for the fund, and officials confirmed that this allocation will now be transferred. According to an earlier estimate by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Nepal will require at least NPR 40 billion (USD 292 million) to complete the process.

Diplomatic missions and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office have signaled readiness to provide technical and capacity-building support to the transitional justice institutions. Yet six months after their formation, both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—which has received nearly 80,000 complaints—and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons—with 2,500 cases—have still not begun formal investigations. With the law granting four years to conclude the process, the commissions now have roughly three and a half years remaining to determine prosecutions and design reparations. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Gen Z-led turmoil costs firms billions, highlighting economic fragility

(ec) Nepal's recent youth-driven unrest has caused major financial losses across the economy, with businesses reporting billions of Nepali rupees in damage during what should have been a peak festive season.

The protests, curfews and looting—including attacks on branches of Bhatbhateni Supermarkets—disrupted sales, supply chains and consumer confidence nationwide. Unilever Nepal reported a 43 percent fall in net profit in the first quarter compared to the previous period, with overall income declining by more than 11 percent. The company cited political volatility, damage to retail infrastructure such as a warehouse belonging to one of its key customers, and wider

logistical disruptions as the main reasons for the downturn. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: National carrier Nepal Airlines Corporation sinks deeper into financial trouble

(ec) Nepal Airlines Corporation (NAC) is facing a worsening financial crisis, with operational losses continuing to rise and prompting a government-commissioned review panel to recommend breaking up the company into three separate entities alongside a substantial capital injection. According to the assessment, NAC's accumulated problems stem from ageing aircraft, inefficient flight operations, long-standing political interference in hiring and contracting, and weak corporate governance practices. [Nepal News]

Nepal: Government moves to create first dedicated counter-intelligence wing in National Investigation Department

(lm) Nepal's government has advanced a major institutional reform by requesting an ordinance to replace the Nepal Special Services Act and formally establish a dedicated counter-intelligence wing under the National Investigation Department (NID)—the first such mechanism since the agency was created in 1952. The new structure would introduce explicit legal authority for surveillance, covert operations, informant handling, classified evidence collection and interrogation, and would expand NID's mandate to protect state institutions from foreign espionage, sabotage and hostile intelligence activity. [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: Ruling party dominates by-elections amid tight security and renewed allegations of rigging

(lm) By-elections across 13 national and provincial constituencies in Pakistan's Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces ended with a strong showing for the governing Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N), which won 12 seats according to unofficial results from the Election Commission of Pakistan. Punjab, located in the east, is the country's most

populous province and its main political stronghold, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), in the northwest along the Afghan border, is a strategically sensitive region long affected by militancy and security challenges.

Most of the seats had become vacant after courts disqualified lawmakers linked to jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), a major opposition party known for its strong urban, youth and middle-class support base. The disqualifications followed convictions over the May 2023 unrest, when Khan's supporters attacked military and government buildings after his brief arrest on corruption charges.

PML-N candidates won in key National Assembly constituencies including Haripur (a district in KP), Faisalabad and Lahore (major cities in Punjab), Sahiwal and Dera Ghazi Khan. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) — another of Pakistan's major national parties — secured one provincial assembly seat in Muzaffargarh, a district in southern Punjab.

PTI-aligned independent candidates rejected the results, alleging manipulation of vote counts. The Election Commission, which has repeatedly denied similar accusations in the past, is expected to publish official results shortly. [Arab News] [Arab News] [The Economic Times]

Pakistan: Business community urges constitutional anchoring of economic reforms amid 28th Amendment debate

(lm) A leading Pakistani business association has called for embedding long-term economic reforms directly into the Constitution as political debate intensifies over the proposed 28th Amendment, which would revisit the division of fiscal powers between the federal government and the provinces.

The amendment debate centers on Article 160(3A), which guarantees that provinces' revenue shares under the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award cannot be reduced from one cycle to the next. Federal officials argue that this constraint leaves Islamabad with limited room to manage debt and fund national obligations, while critics warn that altering the provision would undermine the provincial autonomy established under the 18th Amendment. Because the NFC Award governs the distribution of billions in annual revenue, the amendment carries significant implications for fiscal federalism and political stability.

Against this backdrop, the Pakistan Business Forum has urged Parliament to use the constitutional reform window to institutionalize economic continuity, predictable taxation, and currency-stabilization policies. The group argues that Pakistan's persistent tax burden, chronic currency depreciation, and frequent shifts in economic frameworks have eroded investor confidence and deterred both domestic and foreign investment. It highlights Pakistan's long-term structural weaknesses, including an investment-to-GDP ratio stuck below 14 percent and limited public investment, which it sees as major obstacles to sustained growth. [Arab News]

Pakistan: ADB approves loan to upgrade national power transmission network

(lm) The Asian Development Bank has approved a USD 330 million loan to strengthen Pakistan's national power transmission network under the Second Transmission Strengthening Project.

Pakistan continues to face chronic structural problems in its power sector, including frequent outages, rising electricity costs, and a circular debt burden estimated at PKR 1.7 trillion (about USD 9.9 billion). The plan includes building a new 500-kilovolt transmission line of roughly 290 kilometers and upgrading grid infrastructure serving Islamabad and Faisalabad. According to the bank, the project will enable the transfer of up to 3,200 megawatts of hydropower from northern Pakistan to major demand centers, benefiting households and industries and supporting economic growth.

The decision follows a series of recent ADB engagements in Pakistan, including USD 410 million in August 2025 for the development of the Reko Diq copper and gold mine and USD 250 million in late 2023 to expand the high-voltage transmission network in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. [Arab News]

Pakistan: State-owned energy firm revives long-shut gas well and prepares country's first offshore drilling in 2026

(lm) Pakistan's state-owned upstream company Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL)—the country's main government-controlled oil and gas explorer—has taken two significant steps to bolster domestic energy supplies, restoring production from a long-inactive

onshore gas well in Sindh while advancing plans for Pakistan's first offshore drilling campaign.

PPL confirmed that gas output has resumed at the Adam West X-1 well in the Hala Block, a mature hydrocarbon zone in Sindh, after a technically complex workover and sidetrack operation. The well, initially discovered in 2014 and brought into production the year after, was shut in 2019 when water breakthrough made further output impossible. Following detailed reservoir modelling, engineers executed a sidetrack that has now revived production at around 8.5 million standard cubic feet per day. [Arab News 1]

At the same time, PPL is preparing to drill Pakistan's first offshore oil and gas well in the Sirani Block along Sindh's southern coastline. The site, located about 30 kilometers offshore, represents the country's first substantive offshore attempt since seismic surveys were carried out in the mid-2000s. Drilling is scheduled to begin in March 2026, with an initial assessment expected three months later. If results are encouraging, the program could expand to as many as 25 wells. The planned offshore activity complements PPL's recent acquisition of eight additional exploration blocks across southern Pakistan, reflecting a broader strategy to reduce import dependence—Pakistan currently imports more than 60 percent of its oil—and diversify its upstream portfolio.

A commercially viable discovery at Sirani would not only support Pakistan's long-term energy security but could also enhance confidence in nearby Block C, operated by the Turkish Petroleum Corporation, which is considered geologically connected to the Sirani prospect. [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Government advances privatization and market-reform agenda as export pressures deepen and IMF governance demands intensify

(lm) Pakistan has moved to privatize 75 percent of its national airline, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), with bidding set to begin "soon" among four prequalified investor groups. The decision marks the most far-reaching attempt in decades to restructure the debt-ridden carrier, which has accumulated more than USD 2.5 billion in losses, suffered repeated operational crises and faced a 2020 flight ban to the EU and UK after a pilot-licensing scandal. Under the approved plan, the airline's name and branding will be retained, while the fleet is to expand from 18 to 38

airworthy aircraft by 2029 and its domestic network from 30 to over 40 cities. The privatization drive, a key requirement of Pakistan's USD 7 billion IMF program, follows years of failed attempts stalled by union resistance, legal challenges and low investor interest. [Arab News 1]

The announcement comes amid renewed strain on Pakistan's external position as textile exports—the backbone of the country's foreign-exchange earnings—have declined for three consecutive months. Official data show shipments falling in August, September and October, driven by high energy tariffs, flooding-related disruptions, tight liquidity, and weaker demand in key markets such as the United States and Europe. Industry leaders warn that Pakistan's energy costs, interest rates, gas prices and taxation remain significantly higher than those of regional competitors, leaving mills operating below capacity with no new investment. With textiles accounting for more than half of Pakistan's exports, the slump has contributed to a 4 percent drop in total exports and a more than 15 percent rise in imports in July–October, intensifying concerns over the balance of payments. [Arab News 2]

Against this backdrop, the government is pursuing a financial-market diversification strategy that includes issuing Pakistan's first renminbi-denominated Panda bond before February 2026. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb says regulatory clearances in China are advancing, credit-enhancement guarantees from the Asian Development Bank have been approved, and the issuance is strategically intended to broaden access to non-dollar markets. Islamabad has also refreshed its Global Medium Term Note program to enable quicker access to Eurobond and sukuk markets once conditions stabilize. The minister argued that moderating inflation could allow interest rates to return to single digits during the current fiscal year, provided price stability holds.

Fiscal reform remains another critical pillar. Aurangzeb said Pakistan has increased its tax-to-GDP ratio to around 10.2 percent and is targeting 11 percent by expanding enforcement, digitizing compliance, and finally bringing long-exempt sectors—agriculture, retail, and real estate—into the tax net. All provinces have now legislated an agriculture income tax, a breakthrough long seen as politically unattainable in a system where many lawmakers are landowners. He also stressed that reducing leakages—"an euphemism for theft and corruption"—is essential to easing the disproportionate tax burden on manufacturing and salaried workers. [Arab News 3]

These measures intersect with mounting IMF governance requirements. The Fund's new Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment highlights systemic weaknesses in public procurement, regulatory oversight, judicial performance, and state-linked entities, arguing that these failures undermine revenue collection and investor confidence. It estimates that sustained reform could raise GDP by 5–6.5 percent over five years. Publication of the report is a prerequisite for the IMF board's approval of a USD 1.2 billion disbursement next month. [Arab News 4]

Aurangzeb links fiscal progress to energy-sector restructuring, noting that improved governance in state-owned electricity distribution companies is beginning to reduce losses and ease tariffs—historically a major driver of inflation and circular debt. Nearly 90 percent of DISCO boards are now headed by private-sector professionals, and three companies are being transferred to the Privatization Commission for outsourcing or sale.

While foreign direct investment fell 26 percent between July and October, the minister attributed some of the decline to Pakistan's clearance of a multibillion-dollar backlog in profit repatriation earlier this year, and pointed to new inflows from US, Middle Eastern and Asian firms. He also highlighted record monthly IT exports of USD 386 million, expanding crypto and Web3 regulatory frameworks, and opportunities in AI-enabled monitoring across agriculture, health and public-sector operations. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan: Unnamed state signs MoU to acquire JF-17 fighter aircraft

(lm) Pakistan's military has announced that an unnamed "friendly country" signed a memorandum of understanding at the Dubai Airshow 2025 to procure the JF-17 fighter aircraft. The deal represents a new export step for the platform, which has become the backbone of the Pakistan Air Force and is jointly developed with China.

The JF-17 has an extensive operational record inside Pakistan, including counterterrorism operations in North Waziristan, the 2017 downing of an Iranian drone along the Balochistan border, participation in the 2019 aerial clashes with India, Pakistan's 2024 cross-border strikes in Iran and Afghanistan, and its deployment during the May 2025 confrontation with India. Outside Pakistan, the aircraft has been used by the Nigerian Air Force in counterinsurgency missions

and by Myanmar's air force in operations against insurgent groups. [Arab News]

Seychelles: Cabinet adopts broad package of social, economic and governance reforms

(lm) Seychelles has approved a wide-ranging set of reforms touching education, social protection, employment policy, public-sector governance, and national emergency management. Over several Cabinet meetings chaired by President Patrick Herminie, the government signaled an effort to adjust long-standing policies, modernize institutions, and respond to cost-of-living pressures while strengthening administrative standards.

On the social and economic front, the Cabinet endorsed higher stipends for Seychellois students abroad, the phased restoration of welfare measures such as day-care support and reduced bus fares, and a gradual increase in the monthly social-security pension. Retirement age will be lowered from 65 to 63, and from 2025 the full 13th-month salary will again become mandatory for all eligible workers. Small tourism establishments will be exempted from the environmental levy beginning January 2026 to support local operators.

Institutionally, the government approved the creation of new or upgraded bodies focused on disaster risk management, mental-health services, scientific and technological innovation, and the coordination of drug-prevention and rehabilitation programs. A revised Fair Administrative Bill will set clearer standards for public decision-making, and asset-declaration rules for public persons will be tightened, including stronger penalties for non-compliance.

In education, the Cabinet deferred secondary-level reforms for further review and requested new proposals for primary-level changes. Seychelles will also continue participating in the Open Government Partnership, reflecting the administration's emphasis on transparency and governance improvements. [State House, Seychelles]

Seychelles: New principal minister sworn in after parliamentary approval

(lm) Seychelles has appointed a new senior government figure with the swearing-in of Wallace Cosgrow as Principal Minister, following his endorsement by the National Assembly on November 14. Cosgrow, who previously served in several economic portfolios, will combine the Principal Minister role with his existing position as Minister of Fisheries, Agriculture and Blue Economy — a crucial ministry in an island state whose economy depends heavily on marine resources, food security planning and the wider blue-economy strategy. [State House, Seychelles]

Sri Lanka: Anti-government rally dominated by powerful Rajapaksa family as major opposition parties abstain

(lm/ss) A series of political, legal and religious controversies involving the Rajapaksa family and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)—the party they founded—intensified last week, coinciding with a large anti-government protest on November 21 in the Colombo metropolitan area. The Rajapaksas, one of Sri Lanka's most influential political dynasties, held sweeping power between 2019 and mid-2022 but saw their standing collapse after the economic crisis forced President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign.

At the rally, Namal Rajapaksa, the SLPP's National Organiser and son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, declared that opposition parties intend to remove the government at the earliest opportunity. He accused the administration of imposing heavy taxes, weakening the public service, mishandling agriculture policy and protecting individuals implicated in drug-related cases. Speakers from allied groups echoed these criticisms and portrayed the event as proof of growing public dissatisfaction, even though major opposition parties—including the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Sarvajana Balaya and the National Freedom Front (NFF)—did not participate. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

The rally unfolded under operational restrictions. Police removed loudspeakers placed outside the venue and limited sound amplification because national Advanced Level examinations were taking place nearby. Organizers also reported a power cut as the event began, prompting accusations of interference. Pro-government groups placed bundles of grass in surrounding streets as a local form of mockery, implying that "only buffaloes" would attend. [Daily Mirror 3] [Daily Mirror 4]

In a separate development, organizers reported a power cut just as the event commenced, prompting accusations of interference — allegations the government has not addressed publicly. Pro-government groups also hung bundles of grass in surrounding streets as a form of mockery, suggesting that "only buffaloes" would attend. [Daily Mirror 5]

Two days before the rally, Namal Rajapaksa publicly seized on a dispute involving the removal of a Buddha statue in the eastern city of Trincomalee, accusing the government of offering contradictory explanations and failing to clarify why resident monks had allegedly been assaulted during the incident.

The dispute itself began when a Buddha statue was placed at a Dhamma school within a local Buddhist temple and was then removed by police on the Public Security Minister's orders — a step that initially reassured many Tamil residents, who view unilateral Buddhist installations in Tamil-majority or mixed areas as symbols of state-backed Sinhala-Buddhist influence. That confidence shifted when the minister later told Parliament the statue would be reinstalled, prompting the main Tamil party, the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), to demand the resignation of all Tamil members of the ruling coalition. [AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]

The issue has since escalated further with a related court petition filed by the Chief Incumbent of a Trincomalee temple to halt the alleged demolition of part of the temple premises, adding a legal dimension to the already sensitive dispute. [Daily Mirror 6] [Daily Mirror 7]

On the same day, Namal rejected online allegations questioning his academic qualifications, saying a government-authorised investigation has produced no findings. He framed the claims as politically motivated attempts to undercut the SLPP ahead of the November 21 rally. He also resigned from the Committee on Parliamentary Business, with the Speaker appointing a replacement. [Daily Mirror 8] [Daily Mirror 9]

Meanwhile, Basil Rajapaksa—SLPP founder and former Finance Minister—faced renewed legal pressure. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake publicly urged him, on November 19, to "come and face the law" regarding allegations that he illegally acquired land using Rs. 50 million in unlawfully obtained funds. Basil, currently in the United States for medical treatment, is expected to appear before the Matara Magistrate's Court on November 21, the same day as the rally. Police indicated that an arrest warrant will be issued if he fails to appear. [Daily Mirror 10]

Sri Lanka: Budget defeats put local councils led by ruling alliance under pressure

(ss/lm) A series of budget defeats across several Pradeshiya Sabhas — Sri Lanka's rural and semi-urban local councils responsible for community-level services and development — has raised concerns about the stability of local bodies controlled by the National People's Power (NPP) alliance. The NPP, which won the 2025 Local Government Elections with more than 3.9 million votes, leads 266 councils nationwide, including in areas such as Yatiyanthota, Badulla, Naula and Kalutara, all of which saw their 2026 budgets voted down in recent days. [Daily Mirror 1]

A senior official at the Ministry of Public Administration clarified that councilors who vote against a budget must provide "valid and reasonable" explanations because the budget governs public expenditure. Under Sri Lankan local government law, a rejected budget can be re-submitted; even if defeated again, the council continues to function. If the chairman disagrees with amendments and the council still fails to pass the budget within two weeks of resubmission, the budget is automatically deemed adopted. A chairman is required to resign only if a budget is defeated in the council's third year in office.

Government representatives accuse the opposition of orchestrating political sabotage in NPP-led areas, while the NPP argues that development-oriented spending plans are being blocked for partisan advantage. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Opposition pushes for parliamentary probe into Judicial Service Commission

(ss) Opposition parties have formally asked the Speaker to establish a Select Committee to examine recent actions of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), arguing that a review is needed following allegations surrounding transfers and other personnel decisions in the judiciary.

In their written request, they call for scrutiny of all appointments, promotions and transfers made since January 2025 to determine whether these decisions adhered to constitutional requirements, established administrative standards and basic principles of

fairness. They also want the committee to assess whether affected judges were properly consulted and to evaluate any institutional impact, including whether legal reforms are required. [Daily Mirror]

The opposition's request follows several recent decisions by the JSC that have drawn scrutiny. Earlier this year, the JSC approved a large round of transfers affecting more than one hundred judicial officers, including judges and magistrates in key provincial courts. Among these was the transfer of a magistrate who had been presiding over a case involving a government minister, a move that prompted questions in Parliament about timing and procedure.

Sri Lanka: President faces mounting pressure as missing evidence hampers Easter Sunday attack probe

(lm) President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has acknowledged in Parliament that crucial evidence linked to the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings was destroyed or removed under previous administrations, intensifying pressure on the government as it struggles to fulfil its core election promise of identifying those who orchestrated the attacks. He said investigators are now rebuilding the case through phone records and technical data after finding that pages had been torn from key reports and that earlier files were suppressed or mishandled.

The Easter Sunday attacks were a series of coordinated suicide bombings on churches and hotels on April 21, 2019, killing more than 260 people. Initial investigations identified the local extremist group National Thowheed Jamath as responsible, but the wider inquiry has been plagued for years by allegations of intelligence failures, political interference and suppressed evidence. A presidential commission reported in 2021, and subsequent probes — including one launched in 2023 after new allegations surfaced — stalled amid transfers, arrests and travel bans imposed on senior Criminal Investigation Department officers.

The President's remarks come amid fresh claims that investigators have identified the main conspirator, though no details have been released publicly. While church representatives say the current inquiry is finally moving after years of stagnation, opposition MPs argue that the process remains incomplete, alleging that parts of earlier commission reports — including testimony by Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith — were never tabled in Parliament or have gone missing. The government maintains that the present investigative

team is working independently and will bring those responsible to justice despite the destruction of earlier evidence. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Inquiry into former president's case nearly finished

(lm) Sri Lanka's Attorney General informed a magistrate court that investigations into the case against former President Ranil Wickremesinghe — involving the alleged misuse of LKR 16.6 million (around USD 56,000) in state funds — are about 90 percent complete and expected to conclude within a month, after which proceedings will be filed before a higher court.

The case centers on allegations that public funds were used to cover travel, security and related expenses for a stopover in London during a 2023 overseas trip, where Wickremesinghe attended a private event linked to his wife's honorary degree, despite there being no official government program scheduled in the United Kingdom.

The update was provided during a motion hearing related to former Presidential Secretary Saman Ekanayake, who is subject to a foreign travel ban connected to the same investigation. His lawyers sought permission for him to visit his daughter overseas, citing a family emergency, but the Attorney General's representative objected, arguing that the restriction should remain in place until the inquiry is complete. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government summons all divisional secretaries for briefing on 2026 agenda

(lm) Sri Lanka's government summoned all divisional secretaries to Colombo on November 22 for a high-level meeting at the prime minister's official residence. Officials were briefed on the administration's development priorities for 2026 and the 'Praja Shakthi' program, a national initiative aimed at reducing rural poverty and strengthening local-level development. The session, chaired by the presidential secretary, appears intended to align provincial administrations early with next year's central policy agenda. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government advances plan to redevelop state oil refinery through private operator

(lm) Sri Lanka's Power and Energy Minister told Parliament that the redevelopment of the Sapugaskanda oil refinery — the country's main state-owned refining facility — will proceed under a build–operate–and-transfer (BOT) model, in which a private party finances, operates and later hands back the upgraded plant. He said the selection of the operator is now in its final stages and noted that LKR 171 million (about USD 580,000) has already been spent on the feasibility study, with work on the project expected to begin soon. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Doctors' unions escalate pressure over stalled health-sector reforms

(lm) Sri Lanka's health sector faced renewed turbulence this week as the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) issued a 48-hour ultimatum demanding a clear, time-bound plan to resolve long-standing structural problems. The union warned that if the government does not announce a credible schedule, it will decide on stronger professional action at its central committee meeting on November 26. The GMOA argues that the recently presented budget again failed to address core issues affecting doctors and the wider public health system, despite earlier proposals submitted directly to the president and relevant ministries. [Daily Mirror 1]

These tensions follow years of unresolved workforce shortages, deteriorating conditions, and pay-related grievances that had already pushed major medical unions into island-wide trade-union action earlier in November. While the current stance does not yet include hospital strikes, the GMOA says a sustained lack of engagement from authorities has left the future of the country's free health-care system uncertain. [AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]

Alongside this institutional strain, the Doctors' Trade Union Alliance for Medical and Civil Rights warned of a parallel public-safety risk: the widespread presence of unregistered individuals practicing as doctors across the country. These include untrained individuals, health assistants, unregistered Ayurvedic practitioners, medical students, and even non-medical spouses of doctors. Some operate private clinics and abortion centers in major cities. The union said that regulatory

enforcement has stalled, partly because inspections of private practice at state-sector doctors' clinics have not been carried out, making local health officials reluctant to act. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Taxpayer base expands as revenue hits historic highs amid stronger compliance

(lm) Sri Lanka's Inland Revenue Department (IRD) reports a significant expansion of the taxpayer base in 2025, alongside record-breaking revenue performance driven by strengthened tax administration and higher compliance.

According to senior officials, 200,000 new taxpayers have been registered so far this year, including 18,000 newly registered companies. The number of individual taxpayers now stands at 1.2 million, with 30,000 excise-duty registrants, indicating improved enforcement and broader coverage. [Daily Mirror 1]

Tax receipts have simultaneously reached unprecedented levels. By mid-November, the IRD had collected LKR 2,002,241 million (USD 6.8 billion) — already surpassing the previous year's total by LKR 60,079 million (USD 204 million) and marking the highest collection in the department's history. This continues a sustained recovery from the post-2019 fiscal collapse: revenue fell from LKR 1,025 billion (USD 3.5 billion) in 2019 to LKR 523 billion (USD 1.7 billion) in 2020, before rebounding to LKR 632 billion (USD 2.1 billion) in 2021, LKR 1,058 billion (USD 3.6 billion) in 2022, LKR 1,842 billion (USD 6.1 billion) in 2023, and LKR 2,620 billion (USD 8.7 billion) in 2024.

Officials note that VAT receipts are up 21 percent year-on-year, while income-tax revenue has increased by 14 percent, reflecting improved system coordination and tighter enforcement. The IRD has also raised the income-tax threshold from LKR 1.2 million (USD 4,000) to LKR 1.8 million (USD 6,000) for 2025. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Government plans to revive selected state enterprises with private-sector support

(lm) Sri Lanka will seek private-sector assistance to reactivate several underperforming state institutions, the Deputy Minister of Industries told Parliament. The entities earmarked for revival include Kahatagaha

Mines, a long-running state-owned graphite mining operation; Lanka Mineral Sands, the national producer and exporter of mineral sands such as ilmenite and rutile; and Laksala, the government-owned handicrafts and souvenir retail chain.

He said the initiative is part of a five-year industrial development plan aimed at restoring commercial viability in strategic state-owned enterprises and improving overall sector performance, though the structure of private-sector participation has not yet been disclosed. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government-led construction projects face severe delays amid funding and management gaps

(ss) Sri Lanka's construction sector is warning of major implementation failures across state infrastructure programs, with new data from the Sri Lanka Builders' Association showing that the government is far behind its 2025 delivery targets. Out of 79 major projects scheduled for completion this year, only five have been finished. 21 domestically funded projects, six grant-funded projects, and ten loan-financed projects are currently stalled mid-construction.

Progress also varies significantly by funding source: domestic projects have reached an estimated 72 percent completion, while foreign-funded schemes average only 26.5 percent, pointing to persistent coordination and financing hurdles. The government allocated roughly USD 4.28 billion in capital investment for 2025, but it remains unclear how much of this has actually been disbursed. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government prepares tri-forces restructuring as Defence Ministry budget clears Parliament

(lm) Sri Lanka's government signaled a shift in defense planning as the Deputy Defence Minister announced that a special committee will be appointed next year to guide the restructuring of the country's tri-forces. He said the review, directed by the President, will outline changes over the next five years to align the armed forces with national security requirements and economic realities. [Daily Mirror 1]

The announcement coincided with parliamentary approval of the Defence Ministry's expenditure head —

the annual budget allocation that sets out how the ministry may spend its funds for the coming year. It passed by a margin of 92 votes, with Tamil parties from the North and East opposing it and MPs from the main opposition groups absent during the vote. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Police leadership accelerates internal purge as commission approves wider transfers

(lm) Sri Lanka's police service is undergoing one of its most extensive internal shake-ups in recent years, with Inspector General of Police Priyantha Weerasooriya intensifying efforts to root out corruption, narcotics-linked misconduct, and structural vulnerabilities across the force. The National Police Commission (NPC) has now reinforced this process by approving the immediate transfer of 25 inspectors — including several station and division heads — following an administrative review that took effect on November 21. According to police, the transfers are officially classified as routine adjustments, but they align closely with the widening purge.

The latest list includes the former officer in charge of the Norochcholai Police Station, who had already come under investigation after leaked audio suggested possible communication with drug traffickers. He was reassigned to the Gampaha Division on November 19, reflecting growing scrutiny of station-level leadership suspected of criminal influence. [Daily Mirror 1]

These changes are part of a far broader overhaul. In mid-November, Senior DIG Sanjeewa Dharmaratne was appointed Senior DIG for Administration — the most influential role after the IGP — replacing Senior DIG Lalith Pathinayake, who was moved to the Central Province pending disciplinary proceedings. Senior DIG S.C. Medawatte took over the Western Province, while Senior DIG Buddhika Siriwardhana was assigned to the Northern Province. At the operational level, transfers have been rolling out in phases: 32 officers-in-charge were moved in October, followed by another set of 25 inspectors on November 21.

The Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) is facing a separate investigation after repeated leaks of confidential operational information to criminal networks. Five sub-inspectors have recently been transferred out of the unit, and former PNB head SSP Hemal Prashantha was removed earlier as part of the inquiry.

Disciplinary action has extended across the institution. The Bribery Commission has arrested dozens of officers this year on corruption-related charges, and nearly 400 personnel were expelled in 2024 for offences including drug trafficking, abuse of power, and general misconduct. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Government intensifies nationwide anti-drug drive as new figures reveal limited detention outcomes

(ss) Sri Lanka has expanded its nationwide anti-drug campaign with the launch of the Southern Provincial phase of 'A Nation United', a long-term initiative aimed at dismantling illegal drug networks and strengthening public safety. The event in Hambantota on November 20, held under the patronage of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, marks the second phase of the program, which Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala described as a core pillar of the government's strategy to eliminate narcotics-related crime.

Speaking at the launch, President Dissanayake said the drug trade has grown into a powerful illicit economy capable of bribing officials, influencing politics and recruiting armed youth gangs. He stressed that past administrations had protected criminals — even appointing some to security teams and government committees — a practice he said his government has now ended. He urged public officials to act boldly against drug networks, assuring them of full state backing, and highlighted increased funding for rehabilitation under a new science-based plan. [Ada Derena] [Daily Mirror 1]

The campaign expansion comes as the Public Security Ministry released data showing that of more than 5,000 individuals arrested for drug trafficking, only around 250 remain in custody, with the rest released on bail. Officials say police continue referring drug users to rehabilitation and prevention programs, while the Justice Ministry is examining reforms to ease chronic prison overcrowding. [Daily Mirror 2]

These broader trends coincide with intensified on-the-ground operations. On November 24, police conducted 1,038 raids in a single day under the national *Nation Together* campaign, arresting 1,038 people. They reported seizing 517 grams of heroin, 798 grams of crystal methamphetamine (ICE), almost 2 kilograms of cannabis, and more than 76,000 cannabis plants. Police said the expanded crackdown will continue as part of the government's effort to contain the island's growing drug economy. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Police to appoint dedicated cyber-crime chief

(lm) Sri Lanka's government plans to strengthen law-enforcement capacity in the digital domain by appointing a deputy inspector general to oversee cyber-crime investigations and by creating a specialized police division focused on cyber offences, the Public Security Minister told Parliament. [Daily Mirror]

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

Brunei: Culture ministry sets strategic priorities on social cohesion, youth and heritage

(dql) Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) outlined its main strategic priorities during a session with members of the Legislative Council, highlighting plans to strengthen social cohesion, empower youth, improve the national sports ecosystem, and advance cultural and historical preservation. Officials also emphasized the need for more efficient administrative systems. French Naval Visit French Naval Visit [The Star]

Cambodia: 2026 budget prioritizes defense, revenue pressures and fiscal

stability

(dql) Cambodia's proposed 2026 budget—valued at nearly USD 10.2 billion—prioritizes protecting territorial integrity, managing shrinking revenues, and rebuilding depleted national savings, according to Deputy Prime Minister Aun Pornmoniroth. The spending plan represents an almost 8 percent increase from 2025 and is designed to maintain stability, strengthen defence, and accelerate reforms aimed at achieving upper-middle-income status by 2050.

The budget is shaped by three pressures, including declining revenue growth, rising expenditure needs, and slow restoration of national savings. Major spending drivers include defence, pensions, social protection programs, investment incentives, and debt servicing. Policymakers argue that strengthening territorial integrity is necessary for investor confidence, tourism stability and long-term growth.

Economic projections anticipate 5.2 percent growth in 2025 and around 5.0 percent in 2026, supported by industry, services and agriculture, with fisheries and livestock expected to outperform within the agricultural sector. Human capital development—education, social protection and sectoral upgrading—remains a priority.

To support rising public investment demands, especially in infrastructure, Cambodia plans to borrow USD 3.1 billion in 2026, a 12.5 percent increase from the USD 2.6 billion borrowing ceiling of 2025. As of mid-2025, total public debt stood at USD 12.67 billion. Multilateral institutions still classify Cambodia's debt as "manageable" and "low risk," though analysts warn that the pace of borrowing has accelerated.

Infrastructure continues to dominate debt-financed investments: in Q2 2025, 87 percent of new loans went to infrastructure projects and 13 percent to non-infrastructure development.

The draft is awaiting legislative approval, after which it will move to the Senate and then to the King for enactment. [Cambodianess] [Cambodia Investment Review]

Indonesia: Revised Criminal Procedure Law approved, raising alarms over expanded police powers

(ms) Indonesia's revised Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) will come into force on January 2, 2026, after lawmakers pushed it through a unanimous vote on November 18. The reform is billed as a long-overdue modernization of the 44-year-old procedural framework, but its imminent enforcement is already triggering deep concern from legal experts, rights groups, and civil society organizations who argue that key provisions risk undermining due process rather than strengthening it.

Although Justice Minister Supratman Andi Agtas has emphasized that the law aligns with the new Criminal Code (KUHP) and incorporates human-rights protections, the text of the revised KUHAP tells a more complicated story. The most consequential feature of the overhaul is a sweeping expansion of police authority. Investigators are now permitted to carry out arrests, searches, seizures, surveillance operations, and electronic monitoring *without prior judicial approval* in so-called "urgent situations." The law does not meaningfully define what qualifies as urgent. For critics, this omission is not a minor drafting issue—it opens the door to arbitrary enforcement and reduces judicial scrutiny at the stage where abuses are most likely to occur.

The new code also empowers investigators, prosecutors, and judges to freeze bank accounts, digital wallets, and other electronic assets at the investigation stage. While framed as a tool to combat financial crimes, the provision lacks the independent safeguards typically seen in jurisdictions that allow such powers. Without clear oversight mechanisms, freezing orders risk becoming instruments of pressure rather than impartial tools of investigation.

To its credit, the KUHAP introduces modern procedural mechanisms—plea bargaining, deferred prosecution agreements, and clearer provisions for justice collaborators. These reforms could reduce court backlogs and increase efficiency in corporate crime enforcement. The law also nods toward restorative justice and includes an optional recommendation for CCTV installation in interrogation rooms. Yet even these ostensibly progressive components are diluted by their non-mandatory nature and by the dominance of expanded police discretion elsewhere in the law. Critics argue that the reform's protective elements appear more symbolic than structural.

Public resistance emerged immediately. On November 18, students and civil society groups gathered outside the DPR complex demanding that lawmakers halt the process and revise the bill. Protesters accused legislators of rushing deliberations, ignoring expert

submissions, and even misrepresenting civil groups as contributors to articles they were never consulted on. Their five demands centered on transparency, judicial oversight, and the elimination of vague clauses that they say pave the way for unchecked state intervention.

Parliamentary leaders insist the process was neither rushed nor opaque, pointing to two years of discussions and more than a hundred documented inputs. Yet the speed with which final revisions were approved—and the gaps between claims of consultation and civil groups' accounts—have only deepened skepticism.

Civil society organizations are now preparing to challenge the law before the Constitutional Court, arguing that several provisions violate constitutional guarantees of due process, equality before the law, and judicial independence. They are also urging President Prabowo Subianto to postpone enforcement to allow a fuller review of the law's most contentious elements. [Antara] [Bloomberg] [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Minister says active police in civilian posts need not retire, contradicting Constitutional Court ruling

(ms) Law Minister Supratman Andi Agtas has drawn scrutiny after stating that active police officers currently holding civilian government posts do not need to resign or retire, despite a clear Constitutional Court ruling that prohibits such dual roles. His remarks, delivered on 19 November, stand in direct contrast to the court's decision issued on 13 November, raising concerns about the government's commitment to implementing police reforms.

The Constitutional Court's seven-to-two ruling struck down an ambiguous clause in the 2002 National Police Law that had allowed active officers to take civilian positions with approval from the National Police chief. The court found the provision unconstitutional, affirming that any officer assuming a civilian role must first resign or retire from the force. The ruling was celebrated by pro-democracy advocates, who have been pushing for stronger separation between the police and civilian administration, especially after the nationwide protests in late August that sharpened public demands for accountability.

Today, thousands of active officers hold positions across ministries, state bodies and local

administrations. Reform groups argue that the ruling obliges the government to withdraw them without delay. However, Supratman, who also holds a senior position within the ruling Gerindra Party, has insisted that the decision applies only to future appointments. In his view, officers already occupying civilian roles are not required to leave their posts unless individually recalled by the police chief.

The statement has fueled suspicion that the administration is seeking to limit the ruling's effect. Legal analysts warn that treating the decision as non-retroactive undermines the court's intent and weakens efforts to prevent the concentration of police influence within civilian institutions. Legislators from the House of Representatives have urged President Prabowo Subianto to enforce full compliance, emphasizing that Constitutional Court rulings are final and binding.

The controversy has also prompted questions about broader institutional reform. The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) quickly clarified that its chair, a retired police general, is unaffected by the ruling—highlighting the sensitivity surrounding police roles in civilian governance. [The Jakarta Post] [Voice of Indonesia]

Indonesia: Lawmakers delay Asset Forfeiture Bill to 2026

(ms) Indonesia's House of Representatives has postponed deliberations on the long-awaited asset forfeiture bill, pushing the legislation into 2026 as lawmakers prioritize completing derivative regulations for the newly revised Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) (see article above). The delay comes despite earlier commitments to take up the bill immediately after the KUHAP overhaul was finalized.

According to Habiburokhman, chair of House Commission III, the remaining weeks of the current sitting period — ending December 10 — will be used to pass the criminal adjustment bill, a mandatory follow-up regulation aligning multiple laws with the new Criminal Code (KUHP), which will take effect on January 2, 2026. Lawmakers argue the KUHAP cannot function effectively without its companion regulations, making them the more urgent legislative priority.

The asset forfeiture bill, first introduced years ago, is designed to strengthen Indonesia's ability to confiscate illicit assets linked to corruption, organized crime, and money laundering. It aims to allow non-conviction-based asset recovery, improve cooperation with

international partners, and close gaps that have long hindered Indonesia's anti-corruption framework.

The postponement may slow Indonesia's efforts to modernize its asset recovery regime, a key issue for foreign investors and compliance professionals monitoring legal and political risk. It could also delay progress toward meeting international standards set by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which has encouraged Indonesia to strengthen its asset seizure mechanisms. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Travel ban on major conglomerate's CEO indicates shifting power dynamics

(ms) Indonesia has imposed a six-month overseas travel ban on Victor Rachmat Hartono, CEO of the Djarum Group and eldest son of billionaire Robert Budi Hartono, as part of a corruption investigation into alleged efforts to reduce corporate tax liabilities dating from 2016 to 2020. The move has not only intensified scrutiny on one of Indonesia's most powerful business dynasties, but also resurfaced questions about the evolving political relationship between President Prabowo Subianto and his predecessor Joko Widodo (Jokowi).

The Hartono family has long been regarded as close to Jokowi, with widespread assumptions of political alignment and financial backing for political parties associated with his circle. Against this backdrop, the travel ban imposed on Victor Hartono — a key figure in a family controlling major national institutions such as Bank Central Asia — carries symbolic weight. It comes at a moment when Prabowo, though publicly maintaining harmonious ties with Jokowi, has begun to assert greater independence by reshuffling figures appointed during the previous administration.

According to immigration records, Victor Hartono's travel ban is in effect from Nov 14, 2025 to May 14, 2026. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) requested the restriction as part of a preliminary investigation into suspected corruption involving attempts to reduce tax liabilities through collusion with former taxation officials. The alleged scheme centres on the underreporting of corporate taxes between 2016 and 2020, a period when Indonesia was intensifying efforts to streamline bureaucracy and boost investment—efforts that often benefited major business groups.

Hartono is one of five individuals barred from overseas travel. Others include former taxation director-general

Ken Dwijugiasteadi, South Jakarta tax auditor Karl Layman, tax consultant Heru Budijanto Prabowo, and Semarang tax office head Bernadette Ning Djah Prananingrum. Prosecutors say the ban ensures that all individuals remain available for questioning as raids and document seizures continue. No suspects have yet been formally named.

PT Djarum stated that it learned of Hartono's travel ban through media reports and has not received an official notification, but emphasized that the company will cooperate fully with authorities.

The Hartono family, best known for their tobacco empire and majority stake in Bank Central Asia, consistently ranks as Indonesia's wealthiest. Their influence spans decades, and their proximity to political power has often been a subject of speculation. For this reason, moves involving the family are closely watched—not only for legal implications but for what they may signal politically.

The investigation is expected to continue for months, but analysts note that its impact is already being felt in political circles. While Prabowo and Jokowi maintain an outwardly cordial relationship—reinforced by the presence of Jokowi's son Gibran as vice-president—their respective support bases have shown increasing friction. Actions touching prominent Jokowi-aligned figures can therefore be interpreted as part of a delicate recalibration of power rather than mere legal procedure.

Even so, experts believe that any disagreements between the two political camps are likely to remain contained. What the Hartono case demonstrates is how deeply intertwined Indonesia's elite networks are, and how legal investigations can reflect broader shifts in influence as the country navigates its post-Jokowi political landscape. [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post] [The Strait Times]

Indonesia: Anti-corruption commission transfers Google Cloud case to Attorney General's Office

(ms) Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) will transfer its investigation into the procurement of Google Cloud services to the Attorney General's Office (AGO), citing overlapping evidence and personnel with another major corruption probe at the Education Ministry. The cloud procurement, carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic under then–minister Nadiem Makarim, has been under KPK

scrutiny since July 2025 for indications that the tender process was manipulated. No suspects have been named, but investigators say the case is inseparable from the ministry's larger digital-procurement scandal.

The AGO is already handling the related Google Chromebook laptop case, in which it named Nadiem a suspect in September. Prosecutors allege he abused his authority to push through the nationwide purchase of Google laptops despite internal assessments advising against the plan. The AGO estimates the project caused state losses of IDR 1.98 trillion (about USD 118 million), making it one of Indonesia's most consequential education-sector corruption cases in recent years.

Because the Chromebook and cloud-service procurements involved the same teams, timelines and decision-making structure, investigators argue that handling them separately risks duplicating work and missing key links. Consolidating the two under the AGO is intended to streamline the investigation, though it also reflects the shifting balance of authority between Indonesia's two main anti-corruption bodies.

The KPK signaled it expects to receive another high-profile case from the AGO in exchange, highlighting how inter-agency negotiations increasingly shape the direction of major graft investigations at a time when public trust in both institutions is under pressure. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Government launches unlimited-stay permit for former citizens to counter talent outflow

(ms) Indonesia has opened applications for a new residency scheme that grants former citizens and individuals of Indonesian descent the right to live and work in the country indefinitely, offering an alternative to dual citizenship—which remains prohibited under Indonesian law for adults.

The policy, known as Global Citizenship of Indonesia (GCI), was announced on November 24 and is modeled after India's Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) program. According to Is Edy Eko Putranto, director of immigration residence permits, the GCI aims to strengthen ties with the Indonesian diaspora and turn growing concerns over "brain drain" into an opportunity for national development.

Eligible applicants include former Indonesian citizens, foreign nationals of Indonesian ancestry up to the

second degree, and children from mixed marriages. Dual citizenship advocates have long argued that Indonesia is losing skilled workers to countries offering better economic prospects. Immigration data show nearly 4,000 Indonesians became Singaporean citizens between 2019 and 2022.

Putranto said the GCI will help reverse this trend by allowing Indonesian talent overseas to “return or contribute remotely” without requiring them to renounce existing citizenships. The initiative is also expected to support investment and knowledge transfer from abroad.

Under current law, Indonesians who acquire a second nationality must choose one upon turning 18. The new GCI permit avoids changing the citizenship framework while creating a legal avenue for long-term residency.

A finance ministerial regulation to formalize the scheme’s implementation is expected soon, aligning with provisions under the 2026 State Budget Law. [Reuters]

Indonesia: Land seizures in Riau trigger mass protests and renewed tensions over community rights

(ms) Government seizures of land and smallholder plantations in Riau have intensified tensions over land governance, following a major operation inside Tesso Nilo National Park. On Nov 20, the government’s forestry task force took control of large areas that had been converted into palm oil plantations, claiming they were illegally established within forest zones. Some plantations were destroyed, while others were handed to the state-owned Agrinas Palma Nusantara for direct management or partnership with third parties.

The seizures form part of a nationwide campaign that, as of early November 2025, has confiscated around 3.7 million hectares of plantations across Indonesia. Nearly half of that land has been transferred to Agrinas, rapidly expanding it into one of the world’s largest palm oil companies by area. Officials say the measures aim to restore forests and curb unlicensed expansion, but they have raised alarms among communities who say they have cultivated the land for decades.

On Nov 20, thousands of farmers, residents, students and activists marched through the streets of Pekanbaru and rallied outside the Riau High Prosecutor’s Office. Protest groups rejected proposed

relocations of families living in and around Tesso Nilo and demanded the return of confiscated plantations. Many residents argue they were not given the opportunity to present historical evidence of land ownership and fear their livelihoods will be transferred to outside companies under state management.

Community coalitions called for a co-management arrangement between local residents and Agrinas, instead of unilateral takeover. Representatives of the forestry task force met protest leaders the same day and signalled willingness to discuss joint management, acknowledging that ecological restoration in Tesso Nilo must be balanced with the needs of roughly 7,000 families residing within the park's boundaries.

Environmental groups, however, warn that the campaign continues to disproportionately target smallholders rather than large financiers behind extensive plantation networks. Agrarian reform advocates argue that the conflict reflects long-standing structural issues, pointing out that many national parks were designated without prior consultation with the local communities who now face eviction or loss of land. [Reuters] [The Jakarta Post] [The Star]

Indonesia: Central Bank expected to hold rates as currency weakens

(ms) Bank Indonesia (BI) is widely expected to keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 4.75 percent on November 19, as policymakers balance currency stability with the need to support sluggish domestic demand. A Reuters poll conducted from November 10–17 shows that 24 of 30 economists expect a pause, with most projecting a rate cut in December.

The decision comes as the rupiah has fallen nearly 4 percent against the U.S. dollar this year, making it one of the weakest-performing emerging-market currencies in Asia. BI surprised markets last month when it halted its easing cycle, with Governor Perry Warjiyo emphasizing that the immediate priority is pushing commercial banks to lower lending rates, which have barely responded to earlier policy reductions. Despite BI cutting rates by 150 basis points since September 2024, banks have passed on only a fraction of that to borrowers.

Inflation remains contained — rising to 2.86 percent in October, still within BI's 1.5–3.5 percent target — giving the central bank room to resume easing. But analysts expect BI to stay cautious due to persistent pressure on the currency.

Economists largely anticipate a 25 basis point cut next month, followed by further easing into early 2026 as policymakers attempt to revive loan growth and stimulate household spending.

Bloomberg reporting also indicates BI is signaling openness to future cuts while maintaining a near-term focus on stabilizing the rupiah. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Indonesia: State-run firm plans purchase of 320,000 vehicles to support nationwide cooperative program

(ms) Indonesia's state-owned Agrinas Pangan Nusantara is preparing to buy 160,000 trucks and 160,000 motorbikes as part of a USD 12 billion government program to build a nationwide network of cooperatives aimed at strengthening local economies. The large-scale procurement marks one of the country's biggest vehicle purchase plans and provides a timely boost to Indonesia's auto industry, which has faced falling sales since mid-2025.

CEO Joao Mota told Reuters the company is close to signing a deal for 35,000 six-wheel trucks supplied through local partners of Mitsubishi Fuso Truck and Bus and Isuzu. Mitsubishi Fuso could deliver up to 20,000 units, while Isuzu could supply 15,000. Agrinas is also considering importing an additional 45,000 trucks from manufacturers such as China's Dongfeng and India's Tata Motors.

Negotiations are also underway with Isuzu, Tata Motors and Mahindra for 80,000 four-wheel-drive vehicles, alongside plans to source motorbike-pulled carts from Indian and Indonesian brands.

The cooperative program, launched by President Prabowo Subianto in July, aims to establish 80,000 cooperatives that provide market access, microloans, basic services and cold-chain capacity for farmers and small businesses. The government expects the initiative to help raise GDP growth to 8 percent by 2029.

Financing will come from loans issued by Indonesia's state banks and guaranteed by the government. The project also includes plans for an e-commerce and IT system, with discussions underway with SAP and Telkomsel. [Reuters]

Indonesia: Finance Ministry to introduce full legal framework for trusts

(ms) Indonesia is preparing a comprehensive legal framework to operationalize the country's newly established trust system, marking a significant step toward modernizing its financial architecture and attracting global investment. The Ministry of Finance said on November 21 that it is drafting detailed regulations for trust fund managers and special purpose vehicles (SPVs) used for asset securitisation—structures that until recently had no legal basis under Indonesia's civil law system.

The regulation will implement the 2023 Trust Law, which introduced trust arrangements into Indonesian legislation for the first time. According to the ministry, the upcoming rules will incorporate key principles commonly used in common-law jurisdictions, including the separation of legal and beneficial ownership and bankruptcy remoteness, ensuring assets held in a trust remain insulated from the insolvency risks of the depositor. [Reuters]

Indonesia: Price-linked export duty formula for gold, coal and minerals finalized

(ms) Indonesia has finalized a new export duty formula for key commodities—most notably gold—as part of a push to increase state revenue and reinforce its long-standing downstreaming agenda. The policy, announced on November 24 by Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) Minister Bahlil Lahadalia, will tie export duties for coal, gold and other minerals to global market prices, allowing the government to raise charges when prices surge and reduce or suspend them during downturns.

According to Lahadalia, the mechanism is designed to give the state greater fiscal flexibility while ensuring that export duties do not place undue pressure on producers when international prices soften. Gold, however, will be subject to duties regardless of price levels due to what officials describe as persistently high global prices. Gold prices climbed above USD 4,000 per troy ounce in the fourth quarter of 2025, prompting the government to prioritize immediate implementation.

The Ministry of Finance has agreed on a 7.5 to 15 percent duty for processed gold products, including dore, granules, cast bars and minted bars. A ministerial

regulation is expected to be issued soon under the 2026 State Budget Law. Officials say the measure aligns with broader efforts to encourage more value-added processing within Indonesia rather than exporting partially refined materials.

Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa estimated that the gold duty alone could generate up to IDR 6 trillion (about USD 360 million) in additional annual revenue once implemented. Demand for gold remains strong domestically—particularly through state-owned Pegadaian and Bank Syariah Indonesia—while exports have expanded due to rising global prices. [Antara]

Indonesia: Government reaffirms zero-import rice policy as production projections exceed targets

(ms) Indonesia has reinforced its "zero rice-import" policy for 2025, with Agriculture Minister Andi Amran Sulaiman stating that not a single liter of imported rice will be allowed into the country despite falling global prices. The remarks followed a November 24 parliamentary hearing and came amid the seizure of an illegal 250-ton Thai rice shipment in Sabang, Aceh, where authorities sealed a warehouse belonging to PT MSG.

Amran said the attempted import—facilitated through Sabang's free-trade status—violated national directives and risked creating public "misperceptions" about food security. He stressed that President Prabowo Subianto has been clear: Indonesia will not import rice this year, as domestic production is more than adequate to maintain national stocks.

Government data show rice output for January–December 2025 is projected at 34.7 million tons, well above the 32-million-ton target. Stocks have reached 4.2 million tons, while USDA and FAO projections—34.6 to 35.6 million tons—further support the government's self-sufficiency claim.

Corn production is also strong, forecast at 16.55 million tons for 2025, nearly 10 percent higher year-on-year and sufficient to meet feed demand without imports. Other strategic crops have achieved more than 85 percent of production targets, and livestock output remains stable.

Amran linked the Sabang shipment to a sharp global price drop—from about USD 650 per ton to USD 340 after Indonesia stopped importing—prompting exporters to push Jakarta to resume purchases. He

said Indonesia "will not compromise self-sufficiency for short-term business gains."

Parliament's Commission IV chair Siti Hediati Hariyadi (Titiek Soeharto) called for strict legal action, saying firm enforcement is necessary to uphold the government's no-import stance. [Antara 1] [Antara 2]

Indonesia: Five arrested for allegedly recruiting minors into extremist networks

(ms) Indonesia's counterterrorism unit, Densus 88, has arrested five individuals accused of recruiting minors and students into extremist networks, including one suspect described as a former Islamic State–linked operative. The arrests were made in three coordinated operations carried out from late December until 17 November.

The suspects, identified only by their initials, come from North Sumatra, Central Sulawesi, Yogyakarta, Central Java and West Sumatra. According to Densus 88, one of the men had previously served a prison sentence for terrorism offenses but resumed attempts to recruit children after his release. His arrest led investigators to uncover a wider network and identify the remaining suspects.

Authorities also revealed that one of the five detainees had planned an attack targeting the House of Representatives building in Jakarta, though no further details were disclosed for security reasons. Investigators say the case highlights ongoing efforts by extremist groups to target vulnerable youth for indoctrination and recruitment. [The Jakarta Post]

Laos: Government launches sweeping administrative overhaul with creation of 640 new sub-districts

(ms) Laos has initiated one of its most significant governance restructurings in decades, approving the establishment of 640 new sub-districts (taseng) that will replace villages as the country's primary administrative units. The decree, signed by the prime minister on November 18 following National Assembly endorsement, marks a fundamental shift in how the state manages public services, local planning, and policy implementation across the country.

Under the reform, taseng committees will assume full administrative authority previously held by villages, including responsibility for service delivery, development planning, social programs, and implementation of central directives. Villages, in turn, will transition into community-level bodies focusing on cultural preservation, social affairs, and local security. The reorganization varies across provinces, with Savannakhet receiving the largest number of new sub-districts (67), followed by Huaphan (53) and Vientiane Province (46). Provincial and district authorities have been instructed to begin formal rollout and staffing.

The reform aligns with ongoing efforts by the Lao government to address long-standing weaknesses in state capacity, particularly inconsistent service delivery and limited administrative oversight at the village level. By consolidating governance into larger units, officials aim to standardize local administration, strengthen financial management, and reduce the gap between central policymaking and implementation on the ground. The Central Party Organisation Committee and relevant ministries will supervise the transition, while the Ministry of Finance evaluates funding needs to ensure operational sustainability.

However, lawmakers have voiced caution. Members of the National Assembly highlighted risks regarding staffing shortages, budgetary strain, and unclear oversight mechanisms. Particular concern centers on a provision granting taseng independent budget authority; several provinces already struggle with deficits and limited personnel, raising questions about the new units' capacity to manage funds transparently and effectively. Lawmakers also warned that without robust preparation and training, the reform could inadvertently expand administrative burdens rather than streamline them.

The reform also represents a measurable expansion of the state's administrative footprint. While some functions and staff will be reassigned from villages to the new sub-districts, the creation of 640 formal administrative bodies increases the number of governance units with defined budgets, leadership structures, and reporting lines. This effectively enlarges the state's presence at the local level, centralizes oversight, and adds a more hierarchical and standardized layer of administration, even if total personnel numbers do not increase proportionally.

Despite these concerns, proponents argue the restructuring could ultimately strengthen grassroots development, improve coordination across districts, and enhance the delivery of public services. The experience of neighboring countries—many of which

shifted from village-based to sub-district-based administration in earlier decades—suggests benefits are possible but only with strong fiscal discipline, adequate staffing, and clear accountability systems. [Constitution.net] [Epoch Times] [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Government launches USD 10 million electricity subsidy to ease household costs

(ms) Laos has begun implementing a government-approved electricity subsidy worth USD 8–10 million aimed at reducing household power bills for low-consumption users. Effective from September, the measure lowers the transmission fee for households using up to 300 kWh per month from LAK 260 per kWh to LAK 109, cutting total tariffs for the lowest band to roughly LAK 521–1,063 (equivalent to USD 0.024–0.049) per kWh.

Industry and Commerce Minister Malaythong Kommasith told the National Assembly that the adjustment responds to rising living costs and lawmakers' recommendations. He noted that the revised tariffs place Laos below neighboring countries in household electricity pricing.

The subsidy comes amid public backlash against a proposed 2025–2029 electricity tariff roadmap that would gradually raise rates to stabilise Électricité du Laos' finances. Malaythong stressed any future increases will be phased in cautiously to avoid burdening families.

Under the planned tariff structure, electricity pricing will be divided into three groups—households, agriculture, and industry. Irrigation systems and small farms will receive the cheapest non-residential rate at USD 0.0609 per kWh, while large commercial farms will pay USD 0.0791. Industrial users, including processing plants, SEZs, and mining firms, will see differentiated rates, with processing facilities set at USD 0.0794 per kWh.

The government is also exploring additional support measures for farmers and select industries, along with incentives for rooftop solar, biomass, and partial self-generation in industrial zones. Despite major expansion—Laos now operates 109 power sources with 12,235 MW of capacity—the sector continues to face high costs, debt, and pricing imbalances between export and domestic markets. [The Laotian Times]

Laos and FAO sign ADB-funded agreement to upgrade national agro-climate services

(ms) Laos has signed a new consultancy agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to upgrade the Laos Climate Services for Agriculture (LaCSA) platform, aiming to strengthen farmers' resilience amid increasingly volatile weather. The deal is funded through the Asian Development Bank's Sustainable Rural Infrastructure and Watershed Management Sector Project.

The agriculture sector remains highly vulnerable to flooding, drought and erratic rainfall. The upgraded LaCSA system will provide more detailed and actionable climate information, adding forecasts for 10 additional crop types, integrating nutrition data for food-security planning and deploying a new flood early-warning tool developed with the University of California, Irvine.

FAO Representative Kyung-Mee Kim said the improved platform will deliver timely advisories that help farmers protect yields and adapt to climate risks. Department of Irrigation Director General Khamphachanh Vongsana said expanded early-warning coverage will support communities in target provinces and safeguard harvests.

The project also includes training for provincial and district agriculture offices across 10 districts to ensure effective use of the system. The upgrade is part of broader ADB efforts to modernize rural infrastructure, improve land-use management and bolster climate resilience in Laos. [Lao News Agency] [The Laotian Times]

Malaysia: Government has no plans to amend 'anti-party hopping' law

(ea) The government has indicated that it does not intend to revise the Federal Constitution's 'anti-party hopping' provision, stating that Article 49A remains a balanced mechanism to discourage Members of Parliament (MPs) from switching political parties while protecting their constitutional right to freedom of association.

Under Article 49A, introduced in 2022, a parliamentary seat becomes vacant if an MP resigns from or ceases to be a member of the party under which they were elected. However, exceptions, such as cases of

expulsion, have prompted debate over whether the law fully closes avenues for defections.

The absence of a clear legal interpretation has become significant after six Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu) lawmakers backed Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim while staying in the opposition party. The Speaker ruled that their seats were not vacated, prompting criticism that the current framework allows MPs to keep their party membership while effectively siding with another camp. [Fulcrum]

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Azalina Othman Said explained that the 2022 amendment was designed to promote political stability without imposing disproportionate limits on MPs.

Azalina's remarks were issued in response to a question by lawmaker Ronald Kiandee of the opposition Perikatan Nasional coalition, who asked the government to explain why the 'Anti-Party Hopping Act' has not prevented certain MPs from shifting political allegiance.

While affirming that the government sees no immediate need for constitutional changes, she added that it remains open to examining the provision further in consultation with both government and opposition lawmakers. [New Straits Times]

Malaysia: Government to ban social media for children under 16

(tl) Malaysia will implement a nationwide ban prohibiting individuals under 16 from opening social media accounts starting next year, as part of a broader effort to strengthen online safety for minors. Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said the measure will be enforced through mandatory electronic Know Your Customer (eKYC) age verification, requiring platforms to authenticate users using official identification such as MyKad, passports, or MyDigital ID.

The initiative is introduced under the new Online Safety Act, which takes effect on 1 January. Fahmi noted that Malaysia is closely monitoring Australia's implementation of similar policies as a reference point. He also urged parents to limit children's screen time, encourage outdoor activities, and ensure safe digital engagement.

The government has clarified that parents will not face penalties once the ban is in force. Deputy Communications Minister Teo Nie Ching said no such proposal has been considered at the ministerial or Cabinet level, stressing instead the need for cooperation with platform providers to enforce the policy. She added that parents remain responsible for supervising their children's online activities and cultivating safe digital habits. [Free Malaysia Today]

Social media platforms have come under heightened scrutiny in Malaysia, a country with approximately 8 million children under the age of 16. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim recently suggested—without providing further details—that digital platforms played a contributing role in the killing of a 16-year-old girl, who was stabbed more than 200 times by a 14-year-old schoolmate.

In January, the government announced that social media and online messaging services would no longer be exempt from licensing requirements in Malaysia. Authorities said the policy aims to curb online scams, cyberbullying, and sexual offences against children. [The New York Times]

Regulators worldwide are tightening controls on youth access to social media, with Australia set to deactivate accounts belonging to users under 16 next month. Several European countries — including France, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Greece — are jointly piloting an age-verification app, while Indonesia has backed away from an outright age ban and instead requires platforms to strengthen content filtering and age-verification systems. [Al Jazeera]

Malaysia: Government to present AI legislative framework in 2026

(ea) Malaysia will present its new artificial intelligence (AI) legislative framework to the Cabinet in June 2026, Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo told Parliament. The draft is built around four components, including non-legislative matters, standards-based approaches, regulatory elements, and specific legislation requirements. The government is also seeking industry input to ensure that new rules do not unnecessarily constrain technological innovation.

Gobind said the initiative is part of a broader effort to update Malaysia's legal architecture for emerging technologies and to introduce stronger security standards to mitigate risks associated with AI misuse. He added that public AI literacy is being strengthened

through CyberSecurity Malaysia's awareness programmes to encourage more cautious digital behavior and reduce susceptibility to security risks and misleading AI-generated content.

The government is also reviewing key legislation, including the Evidence Act 1950 and Contracts Act 1950, to reinforce the existing legal framework so it can better address AI-related risks across all sectors, complementing work on the AI Governance Bill. This wider strengthening effort includes the implementation of the Cyber Security Act 2024, amendments to the Personal Data Protection Act, and the Online Safety Act.

An AI Act Development Committee has also been established to prepare targeted legislation addressing technology misuse, particularly the risks posed by deepfakes and information manipulation, ahead of the next general election. Additionally, authorities are collaborating with universities and expanding public awareness programs to improve the detection of false or synthetic image and video content. [The Sun] [The Malaysian Reserve]

Malaysia: Uncertain race as Sabah heads toward pivotal state election

(dql) The 17th Sabah state election, featuring 596 candidates contesting 73 seats, with early voting on November 25 and polling on November 29. Despite a week of campaigning, the race remains wide open, with no party or coalition emerging as a clear favorite. A large share of the 1.78 million eligible voters — particularly those under 40, including over 120,000 first-time voters — remains undecided and is expected to determine the final outcome.

Analysts note that Sabah's electorate traditionally evaluates individual candidates more than party labels or national issues, giving independents and smaller parties an unusual level playing field. As campaigning enters its final stretch, candidates are shifting from large rallies to targeted, door-to-door outreach and intensified use of social media to sway fence-sitters in key constituencies. [The Malaysian Reserve]

The fragmentation of Sabah's political landscape, multi-cornered races, and internal tensions within alliances have created a highly competitive environment with no clear frontrunner. Key seats will determine whether the incumbent Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS), a coalition of six local parties led by Chief Minister Hajiji Noor, can retain power in partnership

with Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition led by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Analysts point in particular to the east coast constituencies traditionally held by the opposition Warisan, where split votes, defections, and candidate substitutions have created volatile contests.

Alliance dynamics are equally fraught. Although GRS, PH, and Barisan Nasional (BN) coaltion are partners at different levels of government, “friendly fights” remain widespread due to unresolved seat negotiations, potentially splitting their support to the advantage of the opposition. Warisan is the only party contesting all 73 seats, positioning itself to form a coalition government if it performs strongly in both Muslim-majority and Chinese-majority seats.

The record number of 74 independent candidates underscores perceptions that GRS is vulnerable. Many independents argue they can serve as a more effective check-and-balance force, capitalizing on Sabah’s candidate-centric political culture.

Despite these challenges, observers say GRS and PH still believe they can form the next government, especially as both coalitions deploy significant resources and reposition themselves after sidelining candidates implicated in corruption scandals. Yet with intense multi-corner fights and shifting alliances, the final outcome remains wide open. [Channel News Asia]

Malaysia: Selangor to launch vape ban campaign amid drafting policy

(tl) The Selangor government is developing a comprehensive policy to regulate vape products, including a state-wide campaign to ban their use. According to State Public Health and Environment Exco Jamaliah Jamaluddin, the policy will correspond to the federal Public Health Control of Smoking Products Act 2023 (Act 852) and take into account market conditions, health risks, and enforcement needs.

Authorities have started removing vape-related advertisements across the state, while plans are underway for targeted youth programs. Upcoming programs will engage secondary school and university students through awareness events and educational activities highlighting the dangers of vaping and promoting healthy lifestyles.

The campaign will also provide support services such as access to clinics, assistance to quit vaping, and nicotine addiction screenings. The state aims to strengthen community-level prevention efforts and

address vaping more holistically across Selangor state. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Disability groups voice concerns over fitness test for civil service jobs

(tl) Disability rights groups are urging the federal government to consult them before rolling out a new national fitness test program for persons with disabilities (PwDs) applying for civil service jobs. They warn that without proper input, the system could become exclusionary and violate disability rights.

Senator Ras Adiba Radzi said NGOs must be involved to ensure the initiative is fair and genuinely inclusive. Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi recently announced that the test would serve as a standard assessment tool for PwD applicants. [Free Malaysia Today 1]

Wong Yoon Long of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD) stressed that fitness assessments cannot be uniform, as different disability groups have different needs. Shia Siew Chin of the Malaysia Independent Living Association for the Disabled argued the proposal risks breaching Malaysia's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Shia noted that most civil service jobs are not physically demanding and said a fitness requirement could wrongly imply that physical ability outweighs skills or qualifications. She urged the government to prioritize skill-based job matching, reasonable accommodations, equal employment opportunities, and inclusive recruitment processes instead of imposing a universal test. [Free Malaysia Today 2]

Malaysia: Government to launch committee for potential Bitcoin mining ban

(tl) Malaysia will establish a multi-agency committee to explore long-term strategies to address widespread electricity theft associated with Bitcoin mining, Deputy Minister for Energy Transition and Water Transformation Akmal Nasrullah Mohd Nasir told Parliament.

The committee, set to convene its first meeting by the end of the year, will bring together representatives

from key ministries and enforcement bodies, including the Finance Ministry, Digital Ministry, Home Ministry, Bank Negara Malaysia, the police, the Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission, the Energy Commission, and other related agencies. It is tasked with assessing potential policy responses, which may include tightening existing laws, Act 447, or even considering a ban on Bitcoin mining.

Akmal noted that Malaysia currently has no specific law regulating cryptocurrency mining, and enforcement is carried out under the Electricity Supply Act which penalizes dishonest electricity consumption. Penalties range from fines to prison terms, with heavier punishments for non-domestic offenders.

Authorities identified around 13,827 premises using electricity illegally for crypto mining between 2020 and August 2025, resulting in an estimated USD 960 million (MYR 4.57 billion) losses.

Bank Negara Malaysia also reiterated that Bitcoin is not recognized as legal tender and remains outside the central bank's regulatory scope. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Government sets conditions for foreign investment in rare earth mining

(ea) Acting natural resources and environmental sustainability minister Johari Ghani said that foreign firms seeking to mine rare earth elements (REE) in Malaysia must commit to creating local jobs and work closely with state governments, which share responsibility for REE development with the federal government. He added that states must first identify suitable mining locations and assess the scale of deposits before any investment proposal can proceed, and that firms must also outline expected tax revenue for state governments and the corporate taxes they will pay.

Johari made the remarks in response to questions in Parliament, including concern over whether recent trade arrangements with the US could allow foreign actors to exploit Malaysia's mineral resources. He said that Malaysia continues to face structural challenges in developing its REE sector, citing limited domestic expertise, a shortage of processing facilities, and legal restrictions on mining in permanent forest reserves, where most deposits are located. Citing Perak as an example, he noted that Malaysian REE output is currently sent to China for processing due to the lack of domestic industrial capability.

He reiterated that state governments ultimately determine whether REE projects can move forward, while the federal government's role focuses on enforcing environmental regulations and preventing the export of unprocessed REEs as Malaysia seeks to build downstream and midstream capacity. [Free Malaysia Today]

Myanmar: Ruling party presents election manifesto

(su/anl) The military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) unveiled its election manifesto on November 19 during a presentation in Yangon's Thuwunna Township. The event drew party officials, allied political groups, supporters, artists, and representatives from social organizations. Entertainment programs were performed by several artists, including well-known actor Nay Aung, before USDP Chairman U Khin Yi outlined the party's policy platform for the December polls.

Outlined by USDP Chairman U Khin Yi, the manifesto includes plans to reform law enforcement through the establishment of a police academy and expansion of the police force; introduce elections for township administrators to strengthen "people-centered governance"; lower taxes on essential imported medicines; raise duties on alcohol, beer, cigarettes, and cosmetics; digitize administrative procedures to reduce travel and overtime burdens on civil servants; and enhance cooperation with foreign governments on migrant worker issues. The party also pledges to expand extracurricular education to improve children's learning outcomes.[Eleven Myanmar 1]

Meanwhile, factory workers in Yangon say they are being mobilized to support the USDP ahead of the junta's planned election. A worker in Shwepyithar Industrial Zone said employers are driving the push themselves on behalf of the party. Many reported being asked to fill out extra voter application forms despite already being registered, while factory owners are under pressure to allow election-related activities on their premises. [The Irrawaddy]

In a separate development, the Union Election Commission (UEC) announced that 28,339 university and college students cast advance ballots between November 17 and 21 under a special provision intended to prevent disenfranchisement of those studying outside their home constituencies. [Eleven Myanmar 2]

Myanmar: Man sentenced to 17 years for damaging election materials

(su) A court has sentenced a 65-year-old man to 17 years in prison for tearing down election candidate lists posted at an administration office ahead of the December general election, according to family members and local sources.

The case is among nearly 100 prosecutions reported by the Ministry of Information in recent weeks under the recent election protection law enacted in July. The first known conviction under the statute occurred in September in Shan State, where a man received seven years' imprisonment for damaging election materials (see AiR No. 37, September/2025, 3).

Rights groups have criticized such prosecutions as part of the junta's broader strategy to suppress dissent and enforce compliance ahead of the December 28 polls. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Karen National Union expels former chairman for engaging with junta

(su) The Karen National Union (KNU) has expelled former chairman Saw Mutu Say Poe and former Dooplaya District chair Saw Shwe Moung for violating party policy by attending events organized by the military regime. The group's central executive committee decided in late October to remove both men after they joined the junta's ceremony in Naypyitaw marking the 10th anniversary of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

The KNU — Myanmar's oldest ethnic armed organization and a key opponent of the military — formally withdrew from the NCA following the 2021 coup and boycotted the anniversary event. Saw Mutu Say Poe, who chaired the KNU from 2012 until stepping down in March 2023, had already faced internal criticism for maintaining links with the junta, including receiving an honorary title from Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and meeting him privately in Naypyitaw last year. He also drew backlash in May 2021 for calling the military takeover a "political problem" that should not be met with armed resistance.

KNU leaders said the pair's participation in junta ceremonies undermined the organization's stance that

the military's seizure of power destroyed the peace process and rendered the NCA void. Ethnic Karen observers note that some former KNU figures continue to maintain ties with the junta and have alleged involvement in cyber-scam networks along the Thai Myanmar border. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Human rights organization accuses regime of unlawful airstrikes on civilians ahead of planned elections

(su) Human rights organization Fortify Rights released a report on November 19 documenting what it describes as unlawful and deadly airstrikes by Myanmar's military in Karenni State and along the Karenni–Shan border between June and September 2025. According to the organization, the strikes destroyed schools, churches, medical clinics, displacement sites, and homes as the junta prepares for phased elections scheduled for late December and mid-January.

The 24-page report details 12 attacks that killed at least 55 civilians and injured more than 40. The group's findings are based on interviews with survivors and first responders as well as analysis of photos, videos, and casualty lists. [Fortify Rights]

Fortify Rights argues that these attacks likely amount to war crimes, noting that protected civilian sites were repeatedly hit despite the absence of military presence nearby. The organization urged the UN Security Council and individual member states to impose an arms and aviation-fuel embargo on the junta and to reject recognition of the forthcoming polls, which it characterized as an attempt to legitimize military rule amid widespread repression.

The report follows an earlier 86-page publication in September identifying 22 junta officials, commands, and units for potential investigation. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has likewise called for a global arms embargo, citing a rise in civilian deaths from airstrikes and expanding use of drones and paramotors. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Border trade closure drives price hikes and medicine Shortages in AA-Controlled Rakhine

(anl) Local sources report that the temporary closure of the India–Paletwa border trade route—the main channel for goods entering Rakhine State—has triggered steep price increases and growing medicine shortages in areas controlled by the Arakan Army (AA).

Residents stated that costs are rising across the board. Fuel and medicine prices have increased in nearly every town, and many communities are now facing significant shortages of essential medicines. Although food supplies have not yet run out, locals fear they soon could.

The key trade route linking India's Mizoram State and Paletwa Township in Chin State has been closed since 13 November due to a severe diarrhoea outbreak that has caused multiple fatalities. With cases continuing to spread, authorities on both sides have kept the border shut.

Rakhine traders rely heavily on this corridor to transport goods to and from Mizoram, especially amid tighter restrictions imposed by the Myanmar military following renewed fighting in the state. People familiar with the situation report that some traders are stranded along the route, and perishable goods are spoiling. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta expands cross-border crackdown on online scam hubs

(su/anl) Myanmar's military authorities have announced a series of intensified "control and clearance" operations targeting online scam hubs along the Thai–Myanmar border, including large-scale raids in Myawady Township's KK Park and Shwe Kokko complexes. The junta said security forces have re-entered areas previously outside effective state control, demolishing illegal buildings, detaining foreign nationals, and seizing equipment allegedly used for cyber-fraud and online gambling networks.

Authorities claimed the complex was operated by Yatai, a firm linked to Chinese-Cambodian businessman She Zhijiang, who was extradited from Thailand to China earlier this month to face charges related to online gambling and fraud. Yatai and She have previously been sanctioned by the United States and the United Kingdom.

The junta also said more than 600 buildings are being demolished at nearby KK Park as part of the broader campaign, which earlier this year resulted in the repatriation of around 7,000 people suspected of

involvement in cyber scams. Officials asserted that most foreign workers had entered Myanmar from Thailand and accused ethnic armed groups and local militias of enabling scam operations in recently contested areas.

The military stated it is coordinating with China and Thailand through joint task forces and regional ministerial meetings, framing the crackdown as a national priority ordered by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. [Eleven Myanmar] [Mizzima 1]

On November 24, the military announced that it arrested nearly 1,600 foreign nationals during the five-day crackdown (November 18-22) on the Shwe Kokko online scam hub. The report also stated that authorities seized 2,893 computers, 21,750 mobile phones, 101 Starlink satellite receivers, 21 routers, and large quantities of equipment allegedly used for online fraud and gambling operations. [Mizzima 2]

Myanmar: TNLA criticized for agreeing to hand over Mogoke and Mongmit to junta

(su) The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) is facing growing criticism from allied resistance forces and local residents after agreeing to withdraw from Mogoke in Mandalay Region and Mongmit in northern Shan State as part of a China-mediated ceasefire arrangement. The two towns were captured during Operation 1027 in late 2023 through coordinated action with People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and allied groups.

According to resistance sources, TNLA leaders informed partner organizations that junta troops would return to both towns at the end of November and urged them not to disrupt the handover. TNLA representatives reportedly said they were under "multiple pressures" and described the withdrawal as a temporary pause in fighting.

Local units aligned with the National Unity Government have since formed an emergency command structure to coordinate continued resistance efforts, and other armed groups active in the area—including Kachin Independence Army Battalion 34—have indicated they will support defensive operations by allied forces.

Residents in Mogoke staged protests on November 6 by banging pots and pans to signal opposition to the military's return, and an estimated 80 percent of the town's population has fled in anticipation of renewed

junta presence. Community members have accused the TNLA of betrayal, saying their trust in the group has been undermined by the agreement. the agreement has undermined their trust in the group [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Four police officers killed in resistance attack

(su) Resistance forces carried out a coordinated assault on Tharsi Police Station in Monywa Township, Sagaing Region, on November 17, killing four police officers, according to the People's Defence Force (PDF) unit "Rocket Fighter."

The joint force launched a surprise attack and withdrew after junta reinforcements, including snipers and machine gunners, arrived from the nearby prison. The resistance groups reported no casualties on their side, while Mizzima was unable to independently verify the reported police fatalities.

The Chindwin Spring Revolution Force (CSRAF) confirmed its participation in the operation, which involved several groups: Rocket Fighter PDF, CSRAF, Nyaung-U District Battalion 3, the Bo Kyar Gyi (Debayin PZero) group, Butalin Army/Urban Guerrilla, and other local defence forces. The assault was part of wider coordinated efforts by the PDFs under the National Unity Government and local resistance units to challenge junta positions in Sagaing, one of the regions experiencing the most intense anti-regime activity.

Local defense forces said ammunition shortages remain a significant operational challenge following recent clashes, and Rocket Fighter has publicly appealed for support to sustain future operations. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Heavy casualties reported as junta counteroffensive escalates in Rakhine's Kyaukphyu Township

(su/anl) Clashes have intensified across Kyaukphyu Township in Rakhine State following the junta's decision to include the strategic Chinese-backed investment hub in its upcoming phased election. Residents report that battle zones near Kyaukphyu town and the adjacent Danyawaddy naval base have expanded significantly, with the military deploying reinforcements and launching sustained air and

artillery strikes that have displaced tens of thousands of civilians.

According to a source close to the Arakan Army (AA), fighting around Minpyin and Thaing Chaung villages has escalated sharply after junta troops seized the AA's Thaing Chaung Taung hilltop camp on November 15. The AA has since counterattacked, retaking Minpyin and striking junta positions along the road leading to Kyaukphyu and the naval headquarters. The source said the military "suffered heavy losses" and had begun retreating toward earlier staging points.

Residents say the junta has deployed more than 1,000 reinforcements, including armored vehicles, to Kyaukphyu, which hosts multiple infantry units and three naval installations. Local sources also claim China is providing drones and technical support to junta forces, though this has not been independently verified. Kyaukphyu's port and special economic zone form a key node of China's Belt and Road Initiative, offering Beijing a direct access corridor to the Indian Ocean.

Civilian casualties are reportedly rising amid intensified bombardment. On November 17, junta aircraft bombed Taungngu village, killing three women and injuring at least five people, including two children. Airstrikes the same day destroyed a school in Leiktin village; children avoided injury only because they had been evacuated earlier, according to the AA. Residents report daily naval shelling along coastal villages, crippling local livelihoods and halting fishing activities.

Aid groups estimate that roughly 20 villages have emptied in recent days, with as many as 10,000 newly displaced people joining the tens of thousands already sheltering in Kyaukphyu Township. Humanitarian needs are acute, with shortages of food, medicine, and shelter compounded by rising prices and a military lockdown that restricts the transport of essential goods. Local organizations now estimate the displacement figure in Kyaukphyu at around 50,000. [Irrawaddy]

Junta airstrike on Myaing Township Village

Meanwhile, on November 20, a junta airstrike on Kangyi village in Myaing Township, Magway Region, killed five civilians, including three children, in a midnight. More than 20 others were also injured.

A member of the resistance forces reported that there had been no clashes in the area at the time, accusing the junta of deliberately bombing during sleeping hours. Myay Tat Paung Su (Allied Forces of Central

Myanmar) released a statement citing the junta intentionally targeted the village center while residents were asleep. [Mizzima 1]

On 21 November, local sources reported that at least five tin miners were killed in an airstrike on Mawchi in Hpasawng Township, Karenni State.

Mawchi, one of Myanmar's major tin and tungsten-producing regions, has been under the control of Karenni revolutionary forces since January 2024. [Mizzima 2]

Over 10,000 residents flee as junta troops advance into Pauk Township, Magway

Earlier on November 17, local sources reported that more than 10,000 residents had fled their homes as Myanmar junta troops advanced into Pauk Township in Magway Region.

According to the sources, military units began pushing into the southern part of Pauk Township in late October, while another column moved into the northern part of the township on November 17. [Mizzima 3]

Myanmar: Chin Brotherhood Alliance retakes strategic Kanedi Mountain base in Chin State

(su/anl) Chin Brotherhood Alliance forces have recaptured the Kanedi Mountain base in Tedim Township, a strategic peak serving as a communications link between Tedim and Kale, according to the People's Defence Force–Zoland (PDF–Zoland). The 8,000-foot mountaintop, also known as Kennedy Peak, was seized on November 18 after resistance forces temporarily withdrew to avoid a major junta advance.

The base had first fallen to Chin resistance groups in November 2023 but was retaken by the military on 5 November following an assault launched on 29 October by more than 200 troops from Infantry Battalion 269. Resistance footage released this week showed clearance operations and captured weapons.

The Chinland government's Ministry of Defence reported joint operations between the Chin National Defence Force (CNDF) and PDF–Zoland along the Tedim–Khaikam and Falam–Webula routes, amid sustained clashes on the Kale–Thaing Ngin–Tedim and Hakha Lay–Webula–Falam roads. It said around 100

junta soldiers, including a major and a captain, were killed between 6 and 18 November, with additional prisoners of war taken.

The renewed offensive comes as the junta seeks to secure parts of Chin State ahead of the first phase of voting scheduled for December 28. Hakha and Tedim are among the targeted townships, and local resistance groups say military operations aim to reassert control in areas where state authority has eroded. The junta currently retains firm control only over Hakha and Tedim, while resistance forces hold Tunzan, Falam, Mindat, Kanpetlet, Matupi and Paletwa, with Thantlang split between both sides. [Mizzima]

Days later, on November 21 sources on the ground reported that the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) seized a large scam compound located in territory controlled by the junta-aligned Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) in Myawaddy Township, Karen State.

According to the sources, DKBA troops based in Min Let Pan coordinated with regime forces to attack the KNLA during the clash. Despite the joint assault, the KNLA broke through DKBA defenses and captured the compound, where dozens of militia members reportedly surrendered.

Upon securing the site, KNLA forces discovered that the DKBA-controlled compound operated as a major scam hub employing more than 5,000 foreign workers from at least eight countries.

The Karen National Union (KNU), the KNLA's political wing, is now working to identify the workers and arrange their repatriation. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: Flood control scandal deepens as charges are filed and executive rift widens

(ghd) The Office of the Ombudsman has filed the first batch of cases before the Sandiganbayan, the anti-graft court, in connection with an allegedly anomalous flood-control project in Oriental Mindoro costing approximately USD 5 million. The charges target former Representative Zaldy Co, former public works and highways officials and private contractors. They face violations of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act and related offenses.

Following the charges, the Sandiganbayan issued arrest warrants and Hold Departure Orders against

multiple accused individuals. Law enforcement has launched operations to serve the warrants, but initial attempts to locate Co at his residence were unsuccessful. Authorities have moved to cancel Co's passport and are coordinating for an Interpol Red Notice to aid international enforcement. [Bloomberg] [Inquirer1] [Inquirer2] [Inquirer3] [Inquirer4] [Inquirer5] [Inquirer6] [Inquirer7] [Inquirer8] [Straits Times]

Parallel to the criminal charges, the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) has widened the scope of its fact-finding investigation to include the highest echelons of the legislature. The ICI is moving to use affidavits from a former public works official to substantiate referral cases against three former senators. It is also currently reviewing claims that could implicate three current senators. In a major development, the ICI and the DPWH have formally requested the Ombudsman to investigate Representative Martin Romualdez, the former Speaker of the House and cousin of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., alongside Co for their alleged roles in the infrastructure mess. To ensure public trust during these high-profile inquiries, the ICI announced it will begin livestreaming its hearings. [Inquirer9] [Inquirer10] [Inquirer11] [Manila Bulletin1]

The scandal has reached the executive branch, with Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin facing intense scrutiny over alleged budget insertions. After the Palace issued a statement implying his departure from the Cabinet, Bersamin publicly rejected that account, asserting he had not resigned and denying any wrongdoing. [Inquirer12] [Inquirer13] [Inquirer14] [Inquirer15] [Inquirer16]

As part of the government's crackdown on corruption, authorities auctioned seized luxury vehicles owned by the Discaya spouses, former contractors who are implicated in the scandal. Three of seven vehicles were sold, generating approximately USD 1.78 million, which will be remitted to the National Treasury. [Inquirer17]

These cascading exposures of systemic corruption have ignited widespread public anger, coalescing into a movement dubbed "Baha sa Luneta 2.0" (Flood in Luneta 2.0). A massive anti-corruption rally is scheduled on November 30, with the "Trillion Peso March" expected to draw significant crowds. In preparation for the November 30 protests, the Philippine National Police has placed Metro Manila forces on full alert, assuring the public of maximum tolerance for peaceful protesters while vowing "zero tolerance" for any violence. [Inquirer18] [Inquirer19] [Inquirer20] [Manila Bulletin2]

Philippines: ICC set to rule on interim release petition

(ghd) On November 18, the Supreme Court denied a motion filed by Senator Ronald dela Rosa and former President Rodrigo Duterte, which sought to force Ombudsman Jesus Crispin Remulla to release an alleged ICC arrest warrant that Remulla previously claimed to have seen. The Court ruled the petition "not actionable," but instructed government agencies to verify within ten days whether any such ICC warrant or communication formally exists. [Inquirer]

In The Hague, the ICC Appeals Chamber is scheduled to deliver its judgment on Duterte's appeal for interim release on November 28. Duterte, who has been detained since March, is challenging a Pre-Trial Chamber ruling that denied his request for temporary freedom. Judges previously cited risks of flight and potential witness intimidation, while prosecutors pointed to Duterte's past rhetoric and refusal to recognize the court's authority as grounds for continued detention. [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

Ahead of the Appeals Chamber ruling, social media posts circulated alleging that the 80-year-old former president had been found unconscious in his detention cell. His lead counsel, Nicholas Kaufman, dismissed the claims as untrue, saying Duterte remains "stoically awaiting" the judgment. A panel of medical experts is expected to submit a report on Duterte's health and cognitive fitness by December 5 as part of ongoing procedural assessments. [Manila Bulletin3]

In a move to reinforce transparency, ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I released a redacted five-page summary of orders and decisions issued between August and October 2025 in the Duterte case. The document outlines the procedural history leading into the current appeal phase while redacting sensitive details for security reasons, consistent with the court's principle of publicity. [Manila Bulletin4]

Philippines: Mayor, with alleged Chinese nationality sentenced to life imprisonment for human trafficking

(ghd) Alice Guo, the dismissed mayor of Bamban, Tarlac, has been convicted of qualified human trafficking and sentenced to reclusion perpetua (life

imprisonment). Guo was also ordered to pay a fine amounting to approximately USD 33 thousand. Guo was found guilty alongside seven co-accused in connection with the trafficking operations uncovered inside a Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator (POGO)–linked compound in her municipality which, according to authorities, was partly owned or controlled by entities linked to Guo. Guo, who is also known by the Chinese name Guo Hua Ping, reportedly assumed a fraudulent Filipino identity, which brings to light vulnerabilities in the spheres of local politics, national security, and foreign interference.

The case stemmed from the March 2024 raid on the Baofu compound in Bamban, where authorities rescued hundreds of Filipino and foreign workers allegedly coerced into online scamming and other illicit activities. In its ruling, the trial court also ordered the forfeiture of the entire compound to the government and the revocation of corporate registrations of businesses tied to the operation.

Government agencies and solons hailed the verdict as a major step forward in prosecuting human trafficking and dismantling criminal networks connected to POGO hubs. [Al-Jazeera] [Inquirer1] [SCMP]

The government is also pursuing former presidential spokesperson Harry Roque, who was hired by Ong to assist in the renewal of Lucky South 99's operating license. Roque has gone into hiding and is seeking asylum in the Netherlands. As investigations deepened, a Pasig City Regional Trial Court ordered the cancellation of the passports of Roque and Ong, along with those of Dennis Cunanan and Roselyn Baterna, who face similar charges. The DOJ said no Interpol Red Notice has been issued yet but emphasized that passport cancellation is a key procedural step toward such an alert.

The DOJ urged Roque to return to Manila to face the charges. These developments underscore the widening scope of the government's campaign against POGO-linked criminal activities, which continue to raise major national security and governance concerns. [Inquirer2] [Inquirer3] [Inquirer4]

Philippines: Supreme Court upholds forfeiture of ex-general's assets, affirms presumption of ill-gotten wealth

(ghd/ms)The Supreme Court has upheld a Sandiganbayan ruling ordering the forfeiture of real estate, bank deposits, and investment accounts linked

to retired Lieutenant General Jacinto Ligot, affirming that wealth manifestly disproportionate to a public official's lawful income is presumed ill-gotten under Philippine law.

In a decision released November 21, the Court ruled that more than USD 1.7 million in assets—some registered under the names of Ligot's wife, children, sister, and brother-in-law—were unlawfully acquired, as they far exceeded the former Armed Forces comptroller's legitimate earnings from 1970 to 2004. A lifestyle check by the Office of the Ombudsman earlier revealed large discrepancies between Ligot's declared Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALNs) and the properties held by him and close relatives.

The Court found that several condominium units traced to Ligot were titled under family members but paid for by the general or his spouse, who had no independent income. Likewise, bank accounts and investment funds registered under relatives' names were deemed beneficially owned by Ligot.

Citing Republic Act 1379, the justices stressed that the legal presumption of ill-gotten wealth applies not only to assets in a public official's name but also to those parked under third parties if true ownership can be established. Allowing officials to evade scrutiny by placing property under relatives' names, the ruling said, would "render the law ineffectual."

The Court also reaffirmed that bank secrecy laws do not apply in unexplained-wealth forfeiture cases, enabling authorities to access financial records when investigating potential corruption.

The ruling strengthens the government's ability to pursue recovery of unlawfully acquired assets and reinforces long-standing jurisprudence shifting the burden to officials to justify wealth beyond their lawful income. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Teachers set nationwide protest for November 28

(ghd) Declaring November 28 as a "Day of Resistance," public-school teachers across the nation on that day will stage a coordinated sit-down strike where, instead of conducting regular classes, they will lead discussions on accountability, justice, and genuine change.

According to the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), the protests will serve as a strong rebuke of the

government's "neglect" of public-school teachers amidst rising inflation and stagnant wages. ACT added that this is part of a broader call for the “end of the plunder of public funds” and to instead redirect resources towards essential services, namely education. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government expands campaign against hunger

(ghd) The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has begun enrolling an additional 300,000 food-poor households into its flagship "Walang Gutom (No Hunger) 2027: Food Stamp Program." This significant expansion aims to widen the safety net for the country's most vulnerable families, providing them with electronic benefit transfers to purchase nutritious food.

The ramp-up in beneficiaries is part of the administration's aggressive push to combat involuntary hunger and malnutrition. By scaling up the program, the DSWD is moving closer to its ultimate target of supporting one million food-poor households by 2027, ensuring that food credits reach those in the bottom tier of the poverty threshold. [Inquirer]

Philippines: October dollar surplus hits eight-month high but external deficit persists

(ghd) The Philippines posted a significant Balance of Payments (BOP) surplus in October, reaching an eight-month high of USD 706 million, according to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) (Central Bank of the Philippines).

Despite this strong monthly rebound, the country’s cumulative financial position remains in the red. The year-to-date (January to October) BOP deficit remains wider at USD 4.61 billion compared to USD 4.39 billion from the same period last year, indicating that persistent outflows earlier in the year continue to outweigh recent gains. The data reflects the ongoing challenge of balancing strong external headwinds against domestic resilience. Nevertheless, the BSP assured that the current level of reserves are enough to protect the country’s external liquidity and to cover short-term external debt. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Infrastructure spending slows down amidst corruption controversy

(ghd) A recent surge in scrutiny following the current flood-control scandal has significantly impacted the Philippines' infrastructure disbursement, causing a steep drop in spending for the third quarter of 2025.

According to data released by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), spending on hard infrastructure plummeted by nearly 30.7 percent between July and September. The total outlay fell to USD 4.37 billion, a stark contrast to the USD 6.31 billion recorded during the same period last year. The actual spending also missed the government's quarterly target of USD 7.29 billion, achieving only 76.2 percent of the planned disbursement. The slowdown in September was particularly acute, with spending dropping by 42.6 percent year-on-year. The contraction is largely attributed to stricter oversight and delayed billings as government agencies tighten control measures.

Despite the dip in infrastructure specifics, total national government disbursements managed a modest 5.2 percent growth, though this still fell short of the overall target. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government probes foreign funding links and coordinated disinformation as flood-control scandal expands

The Philippine government is widening its investigation into alleged foreign involvement in recent anti-government protests and disinformation campaigns, as the fallout from the multibillion-peso flood-control corruption scandal continues to intensify. Authorities warn that the convergence of mass public anger, foreign-funding suspicions, and attempts by retired military officers to sow political instability has created one of the most volatile domestic environments since the pandemic.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) confirmed that it is examining intelligence reports suggesting that recent anti-corruption demonstrations — including the large United People’s Initiative (UPI) rally at the EDSA People Power Monument — may have received financial support from foreign actors, particularly from China. Senior military officials told local media that the inquiry covers both direct funding channels and “proxy

organizations" that may have subsidized mobilizations. Organizers of the UPI rally deny these allegations.

In parallel, AFP cyber-units have detected a marked increase in coordinated online disinformation targeting state institutions and amplifying public distrust as the flood-control scandal widens. Security officials caution that the scale and speed of these campaigns resemble foreign-linked operations seen in earlier regional political crises, raising concerns that external entities may be exploiting domestic turmoil to weaken Philippine governance. Local analysts note that the scandal, which involves hundreds of billions of pesos in irregular public works spending, has created fertile ground for such influence operations. [Inquirer1] [Inquirer2]

Adding to the tension, Senate President Pro Tempore Panfilo Lacson disclosed that he was approached by a group of retired military officers proposing the formation of a "civil–military junta" or transition council. Lacson said he immediately rejected the overture, emphasizing that political change must occur strictly within constitutional processes. AFP Chief of Staff General Romeo Brawner Jr. later confirmed that he, too, had been courted by retired officers urging him to withdraw support from the President — an overture he rebuffed. Following his disclosure, six regional military commanders publicly reaffirmed their non-partisan posture and loyalty to civilian authority.

These developments come amid escalating public anger over findings from congressional hearings and audit investigations that suggest systemic overpricing, subcontracting abuses and political patronage networks tied to flood-control projects nationwide. The scandal has already prompted mass protests in Manila and other cities, the suspension of several officials, and fresh calls from civil society for an independent probe. International outlets, including AP and *The Guardian*, report that hundreds of thousands have joined demonstrations demanding accountability.

Security officials say the combination of widespread public outrage, alleged foreign-funding trails and the involvement — even on the margins — of retired military figures creates a "high-risk environment for political destabilization." Analysts caution that the Philippines, historically vulnerable to elite rivalries and external influence, now faces a complex crisis in which governance failures intersect with foreign information operations and internal factionalism.

While the government insists that institutions remain stable and the chain of command intact, the AFP is expected to release preliminary findings on both the

foreign-funding investigation and the digital interference analysis in the coming weeks. Lawmakers continue to pressure the administration to pursue full transparency, warning that the credibility of the country's anti-corruption efforts — and the resilience of its democratic institutions — are now at stake. [Inquirer3] [Inquirer4]

Philippines: 116 former communist rebels seek amnesty

(ghd) A total of 116 former communist rebels in a town in Samar have officially applied for amnesty, signaling a significant step towards their reintegration into mainstream society. The former combatants filed their applications during an orientation and intake activity organized by the Local Amnesty Board, in partnership with the Philippine Army and the local government.

Aran Boller, the local mayor, highlighted the importance of reintegration initiatives for sustained peace, particularly in historic hotspots for insurgency such as Samar. Boller also confirmed the local government's continued commitment to ending insurgency through the reintegration of former rebels into mainstream society. [Inquirer]

Singapore: GasCo to seek long-term LNG supply offers in early 2026

(st) Singapore's state-owned gas aggregator GasCo will launch a request for offers in Q1 2026 for long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply beginning in 2028, as the country faces a projected gas shortfall. Singapore relies on natural gas for about 95 percent of its electricity generation, and current contracts are expected to leave a supply gap of around 3 million metric tons in 2028–2029, widening to about 6 million tons by 2035. Existing piped-gas contracts mostly expire by 2028, while LNG contracts run through 2028–2032.

GasCo will prioritize price competitiveness, supply reliability and contractual flexibility, including options to vary cargo volumes or divert shipments. The firm expects both Henry Hub-indexed U.S. LNG and Brent-linked contracts to feature in future procurement and is seeking to renew piped-gas deals with Malaysia and Indonesia, although volumes are expected to decline as those countries reserve more gas for domestic needs. GasCo also plans to almost double its

headcount from 25 staff by next year. Officials say a wave of new LNG supply coming to market by the end of the decade makes this an advantageous time for contracting. [Reuters]

Singapore: Inflation edges up, growth accelerates, and high-value tourism reshapes post-pandemic recovery

(ms/st) Singapore's macroeconomic landscape showed mixed but broadly resilient dynamics heading into the final months of 2025, as the economy absorbed rising price pressures, stronger-than-expected growth, and shifting consumer patterns in tourism.

Core inflation — the key gauge watched by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) — rose to 1.2 percent year-on-year in October, up from 0.4 percent in September and marking the highest level in 2025. The increase was driven by higher prices in food, services, and retail goods, while electricity and gas prices declined at a slower pace. Headline inflation also picked up to 1.2 percent from 0.7 percent on the back of higher private transport costs.

MTI and MAS expect imported inflation to continue easing but warn that rising unit labor costs will exert upward pressure domestically. Core inflation is projected to average 0.5 percent in 2025, rising to 0.5–1.5 percent in 2026, though geopolitical tensions and weak global demand remain key uncertainties. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore's economy expanded 4.2 percent year-on-year in Q3 2025 — surpassing both the government's advance estimate of 2.9 percent and market forecasts. Quarter-on-quarter growth reached 2.4 percent. With global conditions more resilient than anticipated, MTI upgraded its 2025 GDP forecast to around 4 percent, and expects 1–3 percent growth in 2026.

Exports also improved. Enterprise Singapore revised its 2025 NODX outlook to about 2.5 percent growth, supported by demand for AI-related electronics and high gold prices. MAS kept monetary policy unchanged in October despite U.S. tariff changes affecting Singaporean exports, noting that the planned 100 percent tariff on branded pharmaceuticals has been delayed. [Reuters]

Tourist arrivals remain below pre-pandemic levels, yet visitor spending has surpassed 2019, rising from SGD 27.7 billion (USD 21.2 billion) to SGD 29.8 billion (USD 22.8 billion) in 2024. Average spending per visitor

climbed 24.4 percent, driven by dining, entertainment, gaming, and event-based tourism. Food and beverage spending soared 71 percent, while retail and accommodation slipped.

Analysts attribute the shift to higher prices, experience-driven travel, and a strong Singapore dollar. Singapore's strategy now prioritizes longer stays, business travelers, and high-yield segments, with MICE visitors spending about twice as much as leisure tourists. [Channel NewsAsia 2]

Singapore enters 2026 with firm economic momentum but rising inflationary pressures, supported by strong services demand and high-value tourism while navigating external risks from global trade tensions and geopolitical uncertainty.

Singapore: SGX and Nasdaq to establish dual-listing bridge to boost equities market

(st) Singapore will introduce a cross-border listing framework with Nasdaq to allow companies to conduct concurrent IPOs using a single set of prospectus documents, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) announced. Subject to regulatory approvals, the bridge will be open to firms with market capitalization of at least SGD 2 billion (USD 1.48 billion) and enable shares listed in the United States to be settled on SGX, and vice versa. MAS expects the framework to launch around mid-2026 and says it will deepen liquidity, attract large Asian issuers and strengthen access to both U.S. and Singapore investor bases.

Market reaction has been positive, with SGX shares and index levels rising after the announcement. The initiative is part of a wider package recommended by the Equities Market Review Group, which MAS convened after a weak listing year in 2023. MAS also announced a SGD 30 million (USD 22.2 million) "value unlock" program to improve companies' corporate strategy and investor relations; new grants to support market making for small and mid-cap stocks; and the allocation of SGD 2.85 billion (USD 2.11 billion) to a second batch of fund managers under the SGD 5 billion (USD 3.7 billion) Equity Market Development Program.

SGX will also reduce board-lot sizes for higher-priced securities and expand support for broker-custody accounts. Officials noted that Singapore's listings and liquidity have started to recover, with IPOs in Q3 2025 exceeding the total for 2024 and the Straits Times

Index reaching record highs. Stakeholders say the Nasdaq bridge, combined with funding and liquidity measures, could significantly enhance Singapore's competitiveness as a listing venue. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Legal changes heighten compliance risks for companies planning global restructures

(ms) Companies conducting global restructures involving Singapore-based staff face a more complex regulatory environment following significant recent changes to the country's employment and immigration laws. Legal specialists warn that organizations relocating, consolidating or downsizing roles must now navigate stricter procedural rules, expanded employee protections and additional obligations relating to foreign workers.

One major shift is the introduction of a three-tiered workplace dispute resolution framework, which will take effect in 2027. The mechanism is expected to lengthen dispute timelines and raise expectations for employers to demonstrate fair process before terminations or redeployments. Singapore has also removed the cap on the number of years a work permit holder may be employed, and updated statutory retirement and re-employment ages, all of which affect long-term workforce planning.

For businesses with collective agreements or memoranda of understanding with Singapore trade unions, restructures trigger mandatory consultation requirements and additional payment obligations. Redundancy assessments remain tightly regulated: the law presumes a role is redundant if the employer does not intend to replace it, and severance packages must align not only with statutory rules but also with guidelines issued by bodies such as the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices. Non-compliance may lead to enforcement action.

Foreign employees add further complexity. Transfers or layoffs often require work pass amendments, cancellations or reissuance, alongside strict visa notification rules. Employers are also required to withhold final salaries until tax clearance is granted by the authorities, potentially delaying payouts. Some work pass categories require employers to arrange employee repatriation after termination. [Pinset Mansion]

Singapore: Court allows USD 2.7 billion lawsuit against Standard Chartered to proceed in 1MDB case

(ms) A Singapore High Court ruling has cleared the way for a USD 2.7 billion lawsuit against Standard Chartered Bank over its alleged role in the multibillion-dollar 1MDB fraud, liquidators for the collapsed Malaysian sovereign fund said on November 24. The court dismissed the bank's attempt to strike out the case, allowing proceedings to move forward in what liquidators described as a "significant legal victory."

The liquidators, tasked with recovering assets misappropriated from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), filed the suit in June, alleging Standard Chartered enabled fraudulent transactions that produced over USD 2.7 billion in losses more than a decade ago. They claim the bank permitted more than 100 intrabank transfers between 2009 and 2013 that helped conceal the movement of stolen funds, including transfers that ultimately reached the personal account of former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is serving a six-year sentence for graft linked to the scandal.

Standard Chartered said it disagrees with the ruling and will appeal, reiterating its rejection of the allegations.

The decision marks the latest step in global efforts to recover assets tied to the fraud, from which U.S. investigators say USD 4.5 billion was siphoned between 2009 and 2014. Multiple jurisdictions, including Singapore and Switzerland, have conducted investigations, and Malaysia has recovered USD 7.01 billion in assets as of early 2024. Singapore previously fined Standard Chartered SGD 5.2 million in 2016 for money-laundering breaches related to 1MDB. [Reuters]

Singapore: Police widen probe into alleged Prince scam syndicate with November 2025 raid and arrest

(ms) Singapore's investigation into an alleged transnational scam network linked to Prince Holding Group chairman Chen Zhi expanded after police conducted a raid on November 21, 2025, targeting a local car loan company tied to the network.

Authorities raided the premises of SRS Auto Holdings, a Singapore-registered vehicle rental and motor-

financing firm. Its sole proprietor, Singaporean national Tan Yew Kiat, was arrested on suspicion of involvement in money-laundering offenses. In a statement on November 23, the Singapore Police Force confirmed that it is investigating Chen and companies associated with him, but did not name SRS or Tan due to the ongoing probe.

The raid is part of a widening multinational effort triggered after the United States indicted China-born Chen in October 2025 for allegedly leading a vast global scam syndicate accused of operating fraud centers, trafficking workers, and laundering billions of dollars. The U.S. and U.K. subsequently imposed sanctions on Chen, his associates, and dozens of linked companies.

SRS had an "uncommitted revolving loan facility" with Skyline Investment Management, a Singapore-based firm sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury for allegedly being controlled by Chen. Corporate filings show SRS maintained accounts with United Overseas Bank and Maybank. Both banks declined to comment.

Singapore authorities have already seized more than SGD 150 million (USD 115 million) in assets linked to Chen and Prince Group, including real estate, vehicles, and bank accounts. Several sanctioned firms are now seeking access to frozen funds, arguing the freeze has caused hardship for employees.

Prince Group continues to deny all wrongdoing. Investigations remain active across Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. [Bloomberg]

Thailand: Constitutional Court rejects petition against political agreement that led to prime minister's appointment

(msz) The Constitutional Court has unanimously rejected a petition against the memorandum of agreement between the ruling Bhumjaithai Party, which leads Thailand's current minority government, and the opposition People's Party, the largest single party in the House of Representatives.

The petitioner had argued that the deal—under which People's Party lawmakers backed Bhumjaithai leader Anutin Charnvirakul in the parliamentary vote for prime minister while the People's Party formally stayed in opposition to push constitutional amendments—amounted to using political rights and freedoms to overthrow the democratic regime with the King as head of state.

The judges ruled that the memorandum is a form of political negotiation and joint declaration of intent and said there was no clear or sufficient evidence that either party used the agreement to undermine the constitutional monarchy, thereby allowing the power-sharing arrangement that brought Anutin to office to stand. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Opposition weighs no-confidence timing as PM signals early dissolution, exposing a three-way struggle ahead of 2026 elections

(lm) Thailand's political arena has entered a heightened phase of volatility as opposition parties coordinate the timing of a no-confidence motion while Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul signals he may dissolve parliament as early as December 12, the day the new parliamentary session opens. The move would effectively short-circuit the opposition's censure drive and reshape the timeline leading into the 2026 elections, revealing an increasingly open power struggle among Anutin's ruling Bhumjaithai Party, the main opposition People's Party, and the Pheu Thai Party, the second-largest bloc in the lower house.

This confrontation reflects the deeper structural reality that the prime minister governs without a majority. The combined strength of the People's Party—the single-largest party in the lower house—and Pheu Thai is likely sufficient to remove the government in a no-confidence vote. This arithmetic frames every strategic calculation, reinforcing the pivotal role of the People's Party as the decisive actor in the current power balance.

Against this backdrop, Anutin argued at a public policy forum that his minority government "cannot go on," saying it would lose a censure debate and that early dissolution would prevent prolonged political deadlock. While acknowledging that dissolution on December 12 would leave government business unfinished, he maintained that extending the term of a non-functional government would not benefit the public. [The Nation]

Pheu Thai immediately accused the prime minister of attempting to evade parliamentary scrutiny. Its senior figures argued that dissolving the House before a censure debate would allow the Bhumjaithai-led government to retain control over budgetary and administrative mechanisms during the election period. They linked this concern to a series of extensive civil-

service reshuffles: 122 senior officials have been transferred since the government took office, including 49 positions inside the Interior Ministry and others linked to sensitive legal or administrative matters. Pheu Thai questioned whether these moves were politically motivated as preparation for early elections. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The leader of the People's Party, meanwhile, confirmed he had exchanged views with Pheu Thai on whether it would be in the national interest to delay submitting the no-confidence motion until after the charter-amendment bill clears its third reading. He stressed that the discussion did not involve bargaining over portfolios or future coalitions, but acknowledged that the timing of the censure debate now intersects directly with the constitutional reform process. [Bangkok Post 3]

A parallel constitutional disagreement has emerged over whether the prime minister is permitted to dissolve parliament once the opposition files a no-confidence motion. Deputy Prime Minister Borwornsak Uwanno argued that the prime minister retains full authority to dissolve the House because a motion only becomes valid after the House Speaker verifies its completeness, places it on the agenda as an urgent item, and formally notifies the prime minister. According to this interpretation, dissolution is prohibited only after a valid motion has formally entered the agenda, unless it is withdrawn or the government survives the subsequent vote. [Bangkok Post 4]

The People's Party, however, warned that dissolving parliament on December 12 —if a motion has already been lodged—would amount to avoiding scrutiny and contradict the spirit of constitutional accountability. The party stated that it intends to file a no-confidence motion if the House is not dissolved by January 31, 2026 – as outlined in its memorandum of agreement with the governing Bhumjaithai that allowed Anutin to be elected prime minister – if constitutional amendments are not completed by the end of the year, or if government policies cause serious harm. [Bangkok Post 5]

The pre-election landscape is further shaped by new data from the National Institute of Development Administration, whose latest regional survey found exceptionally high voter indecision in Thailand's eastern provinces. Nearly 40 percent of respondents said they had not yet identified a preferred prime ministerial candidate, while more than a third were undecided on party choice. Among declared preferences, Natthapong Rueangpanyawut of the

People's Party led the named candidates, followed closely by Anutin, while the People's Party also topped party preference in the region. Bhumjaithai placed third among those who had decided. Similar patterns of high indecision have appeared in earlier polls across the Central, Northeast, and Northern regions. [Bangkok Post 6]

Thailand: Charter-amendment process tightens as lawmakers debate approval rules, drafting procedures, and a new '20-to-1' selection formula

(lm) Thailand's constitutional rewrite has entered a more structured phase as parliament works toward the end-of-January 2026 deadline set in the governing agreement between the ruling Bhumjaithai Party and the opposition People's Party (PP). Lawmakers are now refining both the amendment bill and the design of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), following a September Constitutional Court ruling that blocked any directly elected drafting body unless preceded by nationwide referenda. This forced the removal of the PP's preferred 100-member directly elected advisory council and shifted the process toward an appointment-based model. [AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]

A key proposal gaining traction is the joint Bhumjaithai–PP "20-to-1" formula, under which every group of twenty MPs would jointly nominate one drafter. Former Constitutional Court judge Jaran Pakditanakul publicly endorsed the idea, arguing that it complies with the court's restrictions while ensuring proportional representation across parties and the Senate. He said the model could increase acceptance among both majority and minority factions, noting that Thailand needs what he called a "triple-win solution" that benefits the governing coalition, the opposition, and the public. He also warned that the drafting process must avoid altering Chapters 1 and 2 of the current constitution—covering national principles and the monarchy—as well as Section 255 on royal prerogatives, cautioning that changes in these areas could provoke severe political unrest. [Bangkok Post 1]

Inside parliament, the committee responsible for vetting the constitutional-amendment bill is finalizing procedures and resolving remaining disagreements. One issue concerns whether members of the future CDC and those involved in gathering public input should be required to take a political hiatus before serving, with the draft currently proposing a two-year

break and some lawmakers arguing for a longer period. Another debate centers on how parliament should handle the completed draft charter—whether lawmakers should vote immediately to approve or reject it or first return comments for revision.

Lawmakers also remain divided over the approval threshold for the final charter. While the draft foresees a simple majority vote, some members argue that senators should also be required to endorse the new constitution, reflecting deeper disputes over the upper house's role in the process.

Despite these unresolved questions, committee members express confidence that the draft can be completed imminently and submitted to the parliament president so it can be placed on the agenda. An extraordinary parliamentary session on December 10–11 is planned for the second reading of the amendment bill, with the third reading expected next month.

All timelines remain tied to the politically sensitive deadline for dissolving the House on January 31, 2026, under the Bhumjaithai–PP agreement. As coalition tensions and no-confidence threats continue, the spokesman for the amendment committee urged political parties not to use charter reform as a bargaining tool, warning that any disruption would be seen by the public as undermining demands for a new constitution. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Senate-selection disputes widen as reserve senators appeal Supreme Court dismissal and Constitutional Court schedules hearing in interference case

(msz/lm) Challenges surrounding the 2024 Senate selection have expanded, with one group of reserve senators seeking a review of a Supreme Court ruling and the Constitutional Court setting a December hearing in a related ministerial-interference case.

A group of reserve senators, led by Surachai Pornjindachote, has appealed the November 3 ruling by the Supreme Court's Election Case Division that dismissed their earlier petition to suspend 136 sitting senators allegedly linked to irregularities in the 2024 Senate selection. The Court had thrown out the petition on the grounds that it could not be considered once the Election Commission (EC) endorsed the election results on 10 July 2024.

In their appeal, the group argues that the Senate-selection process "has not yet been completed" because the EC has not concluded its investigation into alleged misconduct. They say they submitted evidence of irregularities on October 30, 2024, but the EC has not finalized its inquiries more than a year later. They also note that the EC endorsed the results despite 47 unresolved complaints, which they argue violated Section 42 of the organic law requiring endorsement only when the EC is satisfied that the election was conducted "honestly and fairly." The group further states that the 136 senators voted to approve nominees to several independent agencies while the allegations remained unresolved. They are asking the Court to direct the EC to complete its investigation within seven days. [Bangkok Post]

Separately, the Constitutional Court has scheduled a December 24 witness hearing in a case filed by senators against former Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai and former Justice Minister Pol Col Tawee Sodsong, both political heavyweights from the now-opposition Pheu Thai Party. The petition alleges that the two former ministers interfered in the EC's Senate-selection investigation by directing that certain offences be classified as "special cases" under the Special Case Investigation Act (2004), Section 21(1)(2). The petition claims this amounted to interference, intimidation, or domination of the EC in violation of Section 170(3) in conjunction with Section 42 of the Constitution, and that the actions failed to meet the ethical standards required under Sections 160(4) and 160(5), which could lead to termination of ministerial status under Section 170(1)(4).

Before accepting the case, Constitutional Court judge Sarawut Songsivilai requested to recuse himself on the grounds that the Senate had recently approved him for a new term. The panel rejected the request, finding that the matter had no bearing on the case, citing Sections 33 and 34 of the 2018 Organic Act on Constitutional Court Procedures. [The Nation]

Thailand: Border tensions with Cambodia fuel nationalist protests and intensify political pressure on the government

(lm) Ongoing tensions along Thailand's border with Cambodia continue to trigger a convergence of nationalist activism and cross-faction political mobilization in Bangkok, placing increasing pressure on what is perceived by some as Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's diplomacy-focused handling of the

dispute. The current friction—centered on land-demarcation disagreements, demining operations, and recurring allegations of incursions—has become a political flashpoint ahead of elections expected next year.

A protest in front of the Malaysian Embassy, with demonstrators also preparing to move toward the US Embassy, signaled the widening domestic fallout. The rally was organized by the United Power of the Land to Protect Sovereignty, a nationalist movement whose leadership unusually includes figures from Thailand's historically opposing political currents: individuals identified with the country's royalist "yellow-shirt" tradition as well as former members of the "red-shirt" movement linked to supporters of ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Speakers accused Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim—in his role as ASEAN chair—of intervening in Thailand's border management and of urging Bangkok to halt certain operations, including landmine-clearance efforts. They also expressed concern that the United States might tie trade negotiations to Thailand's territorial posture. [Bangkok Post 1]

These protests coincide with rising criticism of Anutin's approach, which prioritizes regional stability, procedural channels, and technical cooperation with Cambodia. Hardline groups view this stance as insufficiently assertive, while opposition parties and some coalition partners have begun to frame the government's tone as overly cautious at a time of increased nationalist sensitivity. Analysts note that these dynamics could influence voter sentiment in provinces neighboring Cambodia, where communities depend heavily on cross-border trade and are exposed to fluctuations in local security conditions. [Bangkok Post 2]

The domestic debate is also tied to an ongoing parliamentary review of two longstanding Thai–Cambodian memoranda of understanding (MoU 43 and MoU 44) from 2000 and 2001, which outline frameworks for land and maritime boundary management. A House committee evaluating whether these MoUs should be cancelled has asked for a 30-day extension due to the amount and complexity of documentation submitted by multiple agencies. The committee is split between those who argue that cancelling the MoUs would weaken Thailand's legal position in any future boundary dispute and those who claim that alleged Cambodian violations justify termination.

Prime Minister Anutin has said he supports a national referendum on the future of the MoUs, but experts warn that conducting such a vote during a period of heightened nationalist sentiment would be challenging. Highly technical issues—such as whether highland boundaries should be defined by cliff edges or watershed lines—remain unresolved and continue to shape competing interpretations within the committee. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Former judicial official selected to helm Election Commission

(msz) Thailand's Election Commission has selected former judge Narong Klunwarin as its new chairman, following an internal vote on November 18 that ended with a narrow 4–3 majority. The commission held the ballot after former chair Ittiporn Boonpracong completed his term in August, a period that also saw two vacant seats later filled through Senate confirmation.

The close vote reflected a visible divide within the seven-member commission. According to internal accounts, longer-serving commissioners—whose terms expire next year—backed one candidate, while newly appointed members supported the other. The contest was further complicated by the fact that both contenders shared the same first name. Narong Klunwarin, who ultimately secured the chairmanship, previously served as a Supreme Court judge and as chief justice of the Central Bankruptcy Court. His rival, Narong Rakroi, has an administrative background and previously served as governor of Uthai Thani. He is regarded as having longstanding ties to political networks linked to the governing Bhumjaithai Party. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Mounting legal pressure on jailed ex-prime minister deepens Pheu Thai's political decline

(msz/lm) Former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the longstanding power center behind the Pheu Thai Party, faces a rapidly expanding set of legal and administrative pressures that—taken together—are severely constraining the party at a moment when it has already been pushed into the opposition and is now preparing for elections in early 2026. Pheu Thai lost the premiership earlier this year when its leader, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, was removed by the

Constitutional Court, allowing Bhumjaithai Party leader Anutin Charnvirakul to form a minority government with external support.

Thaksin is currently serving a one-year sentence in Klongprem Central Prison after the Supreme Court ruled in September that his extended stay in a private hospital ward in 2023–2024 could not be counted as imprisonment. His daughter Paetongtarn, who visited him recently, described him as physically stable but mentally strained, adding that parole would help ease that pressure.

The options for parole have, however, become markedly more uncertain after Justice Minister Rutthapon Naowarat ordered a comprehensive review of the rules governing parole, temporary sentence suspension and external medical transfers. This followed an anti-corruption inquiry that criticized inconsistencies and undue discretion in how these rules have been applied in past high-profile cases. Although the ministry insisted the review applies system-wide, the timing has raised concern that Thaksin's chances of early release are diminishing. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

At the same time, prosecutors have revived the royal defamation case in which Thaksin was acquitted in August. The Criminal Court has approved a third extension, now allowing prosecutors until December 19 to file their appeal. The Attorney-General, exercising his authority in cases involving alleged offences abroad, personally overrode a recommendation by the Office of the Attorney-General's own Section 112 Review Committee, which had advised against pursuing the appeal. [Bangkok Post 4]

In parallel, the Supreme Court has reinstated a THB 17.6 billion (USD 528 million) tax liability arising from Thaksin's concealed beneficial ownership in the 2006 sale of Shin Corp to Singapore's Temasek Holdings. The ruling affirmed that Thaksin had used nominee arrangements and offshore structures to transfer shares at below-market prices through his children, creating taxable income that was incorrectly assessed on the wrong parties in earlier stages of litigation. With the liability now finalized, the Revenue Department has intensified asset-tracing operations to determine whether Thaksin has accumulated or transferred assets since its earlier investigation in 2017. Assets identified as transferable to the state will be seized or auctioned, and if they prove insufficient, the department is prepared to initiate bankruptcy proceedings. [Bangkok Post 5] [Bangkok Post 6] [Bangkok Post 7]

The accumulation of these cases has reinforced the impression that Thaksin, who has long been the Pheu Thai Party's strategic center, is now firmly confined and facing escalating legal exposure. Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has publicly denied that the revised prison regulations or other actions carry political intent. He insisted that his government seeks to prevent undue influence in the corrections system and recalled that his own party had, in the past, been treated unfairly. At the same time, he disclosed that he had revoked a petition for a royal pardon for Thaksin that had been submitted under the previous Pheu Thai–led government, a decision that further entrenches the finality of Thaksin's prison sentence. [Bangkok Post 8] [Bangkok Post 9]

Against this backdrop, Pheu Thai is moving to rebuild its strategic capacity. The party has appointed veteran politician Chaturon Chaisang as head of a newly formalized 17-member strategic committee, tasked with refining long-term strategy, preparing election plans, and coordinating directly with the executive board. Chaturon—who previously contributed to party strategy for more than 15 years—said this is the first time such a body has been formally constituted with comprehensive representation from across the party's key sectors, noting it will strengthen communication between the executive board, MPs and the election center. [Bangkok Post 10]

Pheu Thai has also welcomed back senior figure Varathep Rattanakorn, a former minister under Thaksin and an experienced operative in policy, finance and organizational work. Party executives say his return will bolster operations in Kamphaeng Phet province at a time when Pheu Thai has suffered by-election losses and defections to rival parties. Varathep said he had wanted to return "for a long time" and that the party's policy direction convinced him the timing was right. [Bangkok Post 11]

Thailand: Ruling party accelerates pre-election consolidation through defections and leadership reshuffle

(msz/lm) Thailand's ruling Bhumjaithai Party, led by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, is consolidating political strength ahead of the early-2026 general election, with a wave of MP defections and a newly announced three-person leadership slate signaling a significant realignment in the country's pre-election landscape.

In the days before Bhumjaithai's general assembly on November 23, Thai media reported that Varawut Silpa-archa — leader of the mid-sized Chartthaipattana Party and a key provincial powerbroker — was considering defecting to Bhumjaithai together with up to ten MPs. Varawut is part of the influential Silpa-archa political family; his late father, Banharn Silpa-archa, served as Thailand's prime minister in the 1990s and built long-standing political strongholds in Suphan Buri.

While Varawut has not formally confirmed a defection, days later officially welcomed 14 MPs from other parties, including ten MPs linked to Chartthaipattana-aligned networks, two former Pheu Thai MPs, and two from the United Thai Nation Party. The defections also include figures associated with the Kunplome group, a powerful political family network based in Chonburi province known for its deep-rooted influence in local governance and electoral mobilization in eastern Thailand.

Chartthaipattana officials acknowledged internal divisions over realignment, with younger MPs more willing to migrate to BJT while older figures prefer to remain with the party. Senior members stressed that the party will continue to exist, even as its regional networks reorganize. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Alongside the defections, BJT has formally expanded its leadership profile. At its general assembly, Anutin confirmed that the party will nominate three candidates for prime minister in the 2026 election: himself, Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas, and Commerce Minister Suphajee Suthumpun. This marks the first time Bhumjaithai will present multiple contenders, a move widely noted in Bangkok as an attempt to strengthen the party's technocratic credibility and broaden its appeal beyond its traditional regional bases. The inclusion of Ekniti—an economist with a long civil-service background and former head of the Revenue Department—and Suphajee, a senior executive with experience at Dusit International, Thaicom, and IBM, follows their earlier cabinet appointments, which had already been interpreted as efforts to bolster Bhumjaithai's economic portfolio. Both ministers have avoided commenting on leadership ambitions, emphasizing that they remain focused on their current government roles. [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5] [Bangkok Post 6]

Both developments came after Anutin earlier in the week openly acknowledged that his minority coalition can no longer function, stating that "it simply can't go on." He conceded that his government would be

unable to survive a no-confidence debate and declared that he is ready to dissolve parliament on December 12, the day the legislative session reconvenes, if the opposition demands immediate censure. [The Nation]

Speaking against this backdrop, he later stressed that the party has not officially launched its candidate list yet but must be prepared for election conditions at any time, given that it governs as a minority coalition. While political commentators have argued that nominating candidates early is a sign of possible House dissolution, Anutin dismissed such speculation, saying the timing is fully within his authority. [Bangkok Post 7]

Thailand: Main opposition party unveils three-person prime-ministerial slate

(msz) The People's Party, the single-largest party in Parliament's lower house, has presented a three-person slate of prime-ministerial candidates, positioning itself as offering clear and predictable leadership ahead of the next general election, expected for early 2026.

At its "Recharge the People" event in Bangkok, party leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut announced himself, deputy leader and policy chief Sirikanya Tansakul, and deputy leader and strategy chief Veerayooth Kanchoochat as the party's nominees, stressing that voters should not have to guess who could become prime minister after the polls. He argued that clarity is essential for public trust and said the party intends to operate as a collective team rather than relying on a single figure.

Natthaphong outlined the party's initial policy priorities, citing persistent inequality, gaps in public health and education, labor shortages linked to conscription and high annual road fatalities as indicators of structural neglect. He said the party seeks to pursue land reform, improve basic infrastructure and expand digital tools for government transparency. [Bangkok Post]

The People's Party was formed after the Constitutional Court dissolved the Move Forward Party in August last year and banned its former prime-ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat from politics for ten years. Former MFP members established the new party to continue their agenda, and Natthaphong became leader.

Thailand: Intensifying scrutiny of 'grey-money' networks reshapes political competition and triggers cross-party investigations

(bk/lm) Thailand's political landscape is being reshaped by a widening set of investigations and allegations involving online-gambling, transnational scam networks and suspected "grey-money" operations, with ramifications that now reach across the governing coalition, the opposition and former cabinet members.

The most politically consequential move came from former prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who recently returned as leader of the Democrat Party. Abhisit submitted a dossier to the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) alleging irregular cross-border financial activities involving two former ministers—one from the current Bhumjaithai-led government and one from a previous administration. The materials, which rely on publicly verifiable corporate records, describe unusually rapid financial expansion in companies with minimal registered capital and transactions that overlap with scam networks operating between Thailand and Cambodia.

Abhisit said the submission responds to (1) concerns that Thai nationals named in foreign investigations may be linked to transnational crime and (2) reputational risks for Thailand, as some advisers to internationally scrutinized figures still hold domestic political roles. The Democrats argue that AMLO now has sufficient grounds to begin tracing related individuals, freezing suspect assets, coordinating with the Securities and Exchange Commission on potential securities-law issues, and working with foreign counterparts to track beneficiaries of cross-border transactions. [Thai Enquirer]

At the same time, the Klatham Party—a mid-sized but increasingly influential coalition party with strongholds in northern constituencies—faces escalating pressure after one of its lawmakers, Chonnaphat Naksua, was targeted by AMLO with an asset freeze of THB 159 million (USD 4.6 million) as part of an online-gambling investigation. Chonnaphat has publicly denied wrongdoing, pledged full cooperation and said he will resign from politics if found guilty. Parliamentary materials indicate the probe could expand further, as references in official documents to "Chonnaphat and associates" suggest additional individuals may be involved [see AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]. [Bangkok Post 1]

The case has intensified scrutiny of Deputy Prime Minister and Agriculture Minister Thamanat Prompow, who is widely seen as the Klatham Party's central powerbroker. According to the source material, recent allegations tying Klatham-linked figures to illicit online-gambling networks have slowed defections from other parties into Klatham and weakened the party's public standing. Opposition figures have used the momentum to pressure Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul to remove Thamanat from the cabinet, arguing that his continued presence undermines the credibility of the government's anti-scam efforts. The People's Party, which leads the opposition, has signaled that failure to act may contribute to a future no-confidence motion.

Political analysts cited in the reporting note that electoral competition is a key driver of the current confrontation. With elections expected early next year, the People's Party aims to compete directly with Klatham in several northern constituencies, while the allegations are expected to deter additional MPs from defecting to Klatham. The developments also benefit Bhumjaithai, which stands to capture seats Klatham currently holds. Analysts quoted in the source material suggest that Bhumjaithai may allow the People's Party to maintain pressure on Thamanat through parliamentary scrutiny—possibly including a censure debate without a vote—thereby weakening Klatham ahead of the election and reducing a potential rival for influence in a future coalition. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Australian journalist faces cross-border defamation proceedings

(bk) An Australian academic and journalist, Murray Hunter, who has lived in southern Thailand for many years, is facing both civil and criminal defamation cases linked to his articles criticizing Malaysia's Communications and Multimedia Commission, the Malaysian government's internet regulator. In a civil case in Malaysia, the Shah Alam High Court ruled in the commission's favor on October 15, covering posts Hunter published between April and November 2024.

After the civil ruling, the Malaysian regulator filed a criminal defamation complaint in Thailand. The Bangkok South Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant on March 27, and Hunter was detained at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport on September 29, as he attempted to leave the country. He was later released on THB 20,000 (USD 600) bail, and his passport was seized, preventing him from traveling. He is scheduled to stand trial in Bangkok next month. Under Thailand's

criminal defamation law, the charge carries a possible penalty of up to two years in prison or a fine of THB 200,000 (USD 6,000).

According to Hunter's earlier comments reported in regional media, he sees the proceedings as an attempt by the Malaysian regulator to silence him. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights described the case as a "transnational SLAPP," referring to Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand stated that Hunter's prosecution shows how Thailand's criminal defamation law can be used in ways that have implications for freedom of expression. It also said the law is frequently used and rarely dismissed by Thai courts, contributing to a large number of ongoing defamation trials. The club called for the charges against Hunter to be dropped. [Thai Enquirer] [The Guardian]

Thailand: New royal defamation cases and suspended prison visiting rights underscore continued use of monarchy-related laws

(bk/lm) Thailand is seeing a renewed series of legal actions connected to its monarchy-related legislation.

In the most prominent case, the Supreme Court has upheld the nine-year-and-six-month prison sentence of Ukris "Kong" Santiprasitkul, a 25-year-old law student convicted over five Facebook posts made between 2020 and 2021 concerning the King and Queen. He had already spent one year and nine months in custody by the time of the ruling. The Court rejected ten bail requests, including one to allow him to sit university exams, citing flight-risk concerns. Ukris also previously received a separate two-year sentence in another Section 112 case linked to the "Royalist Marketplace" online group. [Bangkok Post 1]

New prosecutions are also emerging. Two Bangkok street vendors were indicted after displaying signs calling for abolishing Section 112 and releasing political prisoners. A royalist group filed the complaint after photos circulated online. Both women were released on THB 200,000 (USD 6,000) bail, and an evidence hearing is scheduled for January 22, 2026. One of the defendants has a prior monarchy-related conviction. [Bangkok Post 2]

Separately, the Bangkok South Criminal Court sentenced three activists for a statement delivered during a 2021 protest outside the German Embassy.

The court deemed their remarks to violate Section 112. After providing testimony considered helpful, their sentences were reduced to two years, with one suspended.

Concerns about detention conditions have also intensified. A pro-democracy activist imprisoned under Section 112 and Section 116—Thailand's sedition provision—had his family visiting rights suspended without explanation following a transfer and an extended quarantine period during which he wrote a political message on a wall. An opposition lawmaker urged the Department of Corrections to clarify the decision, stressing that visitation is critical to inmate welfare.

Figures from Thai Lawyers for Human Rights indicate the broader scale of such prosecutions: from July 2020 to October 31 this year, 1,986 people have faced charges related to protests or political expression, including 284 under Section 112 and 156 under Section 116. [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Opposition questions large pre-election renewable-energy procurement

(lm) Thailand's opposition People's Party, the single-largest party in Parliament's lower house, has intensified its criticism of the Bhumjaithai-led coalition after the cabinet moved to fast-track more than 3,600 megawatts (MW) of new renewable-energy purchases ahead of the next general election. The party argued in parliament that the government's decisions come despite Thailand's persistent electricity oversupply, raising concerns that the accelerated approvals may serve politically connected business groups rather than the public interest.

Central to these concerns is the revival of the 2,100 MW "RE Big Lot" program at a feed-in tariff of THB 2.16 (USD 0.063) per unit. The rate mirrors the original price structure, even though global solar-equipment costs have fallen significantly, which, according to the opposition, would lock Thailand into elevated electricity prices for more than 25 years. At the same time, the government has opened a new 1,500 MW "community solar farm" scheme set at THB 2.25 (USD 0.065) per unit. While presented as community-oriented, critics argue that its design continues to favor major investors, leaving unclear how local communities would meaningfully participate or benefit.

The opposition also warned that committing to additional procurement at above-market tariff levels would ultimately raise long-term costs for consumers. They linked the current pattern to the pre-2019 election period, when nearly 1,940 MW of private-power purchases were approved without open bidding. Against this backdrop, the People's Party has called for a suspension of all new energy-procurement decisions until an independent and transparent review is undertaken. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government accelerates fiscal, investment, and stimulus agenda amid rising uncertainty over early dissolution

(bk/msz) Thailand is moving rapidly to implement an expansive economic and fiscal agenda as political uncertainty intensifies and Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul signals he may dissolve the House as early as December 12 if the opposition files a no-confidence motion. With general elections otherwise expected in late January 2026, the government faces a compressed timeframe to demonstrate policy direction, safeguard macroeconomic stability and reassure investors that continuity will be maintained even if a caretaker administration is installed ahead of schedule.

A core component of this push is the newly approved "Thailand Fast Pass" initiative, designed to remove regulatory obstacles that have stalled major private-sector investments. The scheme fast-tracks roughly 80 large projects worth around THB 480 billion (USD 13.9 billion)—projects that already have Board of Investment approvals but remain delayed by permitting, energy-supply constraints, land-use rules, or visa and construction bottlenecks. The government expects the program to unlock around THB 390 billion (USD 11.3 billion) in investment between 2025 and 2027 and potentially support up to THB 1 trillion (USD 29 billion) over three years. Priority sectors include organic agriculture, food processing, next-generation vehicles and integrated medicine. Measures include allowing data-center operators to purchase clean energy directly from producers and easing restrictions on large land acquisitions for new industrial sites. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The Fast Pass initiative complements the government's final package of twelve "Quick Big Win" measures—short-term cost-of-living relief combined with efforts to revive investment pipelines and ease financial pressures on small and medium-sized enterprises. The package includes stable energy prices, frozen transport

fares, extensions of welfare mechanisms and targeted SME support. Ministers argue that without these measures, Thailand risks losing economic momentum during an election year. [The Nation 1]

The broader framework reflects Thailand's fiscal constraints. Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas has introduced a Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF) that envisions raising the value-added tax to 8.5 percent by 2028 and, if economic conditions permit, to 10 percent by 2030. These adjustments aim to reduce the fiscal deficit—currently about 4.4 percent of GDP—and bring it below three percent by 2029. The MTFF also seeks to consolidate overlapping welfare schemes, expand the use of public–private partnerships and enhance infrastructure financing through vehicles such as the Thailand Infrastructure Fund. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5]

Despite the MTFF's projected VAT path, Prime Minister Anutin has insisted the VAT rate will stay at 7 percent for now, emphasizing that higher rates are part of long-term planning rather than an imminent policy shift. Tourism, hospitality and restaurant associations have warned that a future VAT increase would push up operating costs and undermine competitiveness, particularly as these sectors already face indirect VAT burdens through supply chains. [The Nation 2] [The Nation 3]

Additional fiscal restructuring includes a planned THB 1 (USD 0.03) per liter increase in petrol and diesel excise taxes starting in 2027, revised personal income-tax brackets, higher import duties on low-value shipments and stronger tax enforcement enabled by integrated data systems such as a national Data Lake. Rising dividends from selected state-owned enterprises are expected to support revenue growth as well. Under these measures, government revenue is projected to rise from 14.8 percent to approximately 15.1 percent of GDP, while expenditure gradually declines to about 18 percent. [The Nation 4]

For fiscal year 2027, the government has set a THB 3.78 trillion (USD 113.4 billion) budget framework, with expected revenue of THB 3 trillion (USD 90 billion) and a deficit of THB 788 billion (USD 23.6 billion)—an 8.4 percent decrease from the previous year's deficit. Ministers aim to finalize the 2027 budget bill in January to avoid delays similar to those that followed the 2023 election. Of the previous government's THB 157 billion (USD 4.7 billion) stimulus package, THB 110 billion (USD 3.3 billion) has already been disbursed, with the remainder to be spent swiftly, including through the next phase of the Khon La Khrueng Plus co-payment scheme. [Bangkok Post 6]

Ekniti has also sought to reassure investors that trade negotiations—including those with the United States—will continue uninterrupted even under a caretaker government, as ongoing talks do not constitute binding treaties. His comments aim to mitigate concerns arising from Anutin's readiness to dissolve parliament earlier than planned under his governing arrangement with the People's Party.

Despite global economic headwinds and ratings downgrades by Moody's and Fitch (with S&P maintaining its view based on confidence in fiscal discipline), the finance minister has highlighted Thailand's strong macroeconomic fundamentals: core inflation below one percent, unemployment under one percent, a well-capitalized banking sector and foreign reserves of USD 270–300 billion, more than three times short-term external debt. Still, bureaucratic delays remain a major obstacle, with more than THB 1.3 trillion (USD 39 billion) in investment applications pending action. [Bangkok Post 7]

In parallel, the Finance Ministry is designing a new SME-promotion program involving loans, guarantees, tax measures, improved access to government procurement and a "big brothers help little brothers" pairing model supported by tax incentives. A Thailand Individual Savings Account is also being developed to consolidate multiple retirement and savings schemes into a unified long-term structure aligned with the MTFF.

Thailand: Parallel investigations expose deep institutional vulnerabilities exploited by Chinese-linked 'grey networks'

(bk/msz/lm) Thailand is confronting two major scandals that reveal how Chinese-linked "grey networks" have penetrated weak points in the country's governance system — from prison administration to the nationality-registration process — prompting high-level investigations and renewed scrutiny of official oversight.

At the center of the first case is Bangkok Remand Prison, where a political activist has petitioned the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) to investigate the assets of the former prison chief and several corrections officers accused of facilitating illicit VIP privileges for Chinese inmates. The allegations include demands for payments ranging from THB 3–15 million (USD 84,000–420,000), reportedly transferred overseas

to circumvent Thai banking scrutiny. The petitioner also suggested potential involvement of the former chief's family members. AMLO has formally accepted the petition and will determine whether the case falls under its jurisdiction before initiating any financial investigation or asset freezes. [Bangkok Post 1]

These allegations surfaced alongside a broader misconduct probe after a November 16 raid uncovered mobile phones, alcohol, knives, deleted CCTV footage and evidence that Chinese women were being brought into the prison weekly. Investigators found "secret rooms" secured with double-locked doors, luxury items, air-conditioning units and indications that sexual services may have been arranged. Senior officials said donated goods intended for general inmates had been diverted to Chinese detainees, who in some cases hired Thai prisoners with Chinese-language skills as aides.

The Corrections Department has transferred more than twenty officers, the Justice Minister has suspended two senior officials and several Chinese inmates have been relocated to other facilities. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post 2]

In a separate nationwide sweep, Thai authorities dismantled a citizenship-fraud ring linked to Chinese "grey" syndicates, uncovering forged nationality records, fraudulent Thai IDs and illicit residency arrangements. The operation — conducted jointly by the Department of Provincial Administration, Central Investigation Bureau, National Anti-Corruption Commission, Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission and Department of Special Investigation — resulted in 12 arrests across 28 suspects, including brokers, local officials and foreign nationals. Investigators seized weapons, bank accounts and falsified documents.

Officials said the network supported wider transnational criminal activities, including online scams, gambling and call-center operations, echoing earlier cases in which fake Thai IDs circulated on Chinese platforms. Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anutin said that long-standing vulnerabilities inside local bureaucracy had enabled such abuses, citing Wiang Haeng district — a known hotspot for fraudulent nationality claims since 2011 — where a district chief has now been charged for the first time. He stressed that only a minority of officials were implicated but acknowledged that Thailand's "grey sector" connects narcotics, human trafficking, online fraud and prostitution, all of which rely on corrupted documentation and weak institutional safeguards. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Recognizing that illicit financial flows underpin these networks, the Bank of Thailand (BoT) is moving to tighten financial oversight. BoT Governor Vitai Ratanakorn announced new directives under the Financial Institutions Business Act that will require commercial banks to report suspicious transactions directly to the central bank, in addition to their existing obligations to AMLO.

The BoT also plans to expand oversight beyond conventional banking. Gold trading — largely conducted on mobile applications and currently lacking a unified regulatory framework — will come under closer scrutiny, enabling the central bank to track transactions that affect foreign-exchange movements and may be linked to illicit capital. Moreover, Know-Your-Customer (KYC) requirements will be strengthened for e-wallet providers, money-transfer agents, and money changers, with new benchmarks aimed at improving detection of unusual activity. [Bangkok Post 5]

Thailand: Navy orders review of frigate procurement plans

(msz) Thailand's navy chief has instructed a new committee to reassess the planned purchase of two frigates before the proposal is submitted to the cabinet for approval. According to the navy, contractor selection is underway following a review of available models showcased at the recent Defence & Security exhibition in Nonthaburi, a central Thai province just north of Bangkok.

The navy emphasized that the procurement must include an offset arrangement requiring construction work inside Thailand, with the naval commander stating that any frigate project "must serve the people" by generating domestic economic benefits rather than only meeting naval needs.

The review committee, chaired by the commander of the Royal Thai Fleet, has been tasked with evaluating the various designs and drafting the Terms of Reference. If the navy proceeds with a package purchase of two ships, it will seek cabinet authorization and funding next.

Addressing speculation about interest in Turkish designs, the navy said that it is assessing proposals from multiple countries. Turkish shipyards presented three models, while South Korean firms—including Ocean, Hyundai, and SK—also offered designs. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Allegations over Region 8 police transfers draw official attention

(lm) Allegations that senior officers in Royal Thai Police Region 8 solicited money in exchange for appointments and transfers have drawn scrutiny after media and social-media reports suggested that officers had been asked to pay to keep their current posts or secure new ones. Region 8 covers several southern coastal provinces along the Andaman Sea.

Deputy Inspector-General Trairong Phiwphan said he became aware of the claims from public reporting and that no verified evidence or formal complaints have yet been received. He noted that any formal investigation requires authorisation from the national police commissioner. According to Trairong, the new National Police Act provides strict rules for appointments, and corroborating testimony from affected officers would allow disciplinary procedures to begin.

National police chief Kittharath Punpetch questioned the Region 8 commander and deputy commander; both denied involvement in the alleged bribery. Social-media posts have continued to circulate claims about payments for transfers, but these remain unverified in the absence of complaints.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul commented that the government's anti-corruption efforts have reduced illicit practices and said he supports investigations into the allegations. He encouraged cooperation from independent oversight bodies, including the National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Office of the Auditor-General.

Former deputy national police chief Surachate Hakparn, known publicly as "Big Joke," referred to bribery in police appointments as a long-standing problem and suggested the issue had gained attention partly because some people may have paid for promotions that were not granted. He argued that misconduct of this kind could not occur without support from higher ranks and said the national police chief should take legal action against anyone who requested favours. Surachate also warned that the prime minister could face accusations of dereliction of duty if he does not order the police chief to step aside or move to inactive duties—remarks clearly attributable to him in the source material. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Southern hub declared red zone as floods affect more than 465,000 people across six provinces

(bk) Southern Thailand is facing severe flooding, with Hat Yai—the largest commercial and transport hub in the deep south, located near the Malaysian border—declared a red zone after days of intense monsoon rains. Between November 19 and 23, the floods affected more than 465,000 people across 16 districts, 100 subdistricts, and 637 villages, with Hat Yai alone accounting for over 243,000 affected residents.

According to satellite data, six southern provinces—Songkhla, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phatthalung, Trang, Satun, and Surat Thani—have 228,060 rai (approximately 364.9 square kilometers) under water, in some areas more than one meter deep. Reported damage includes homes, shops, schools, temples, and over 4,000 rai (approximately 6.4 square kilometers) of farmland. [The Nation]

Timor-Leste: WHO certifies country malaria-free after dramatic two-decade decline

(ms) The World Health Organization has officially certified Timor-Leste as malaria-free, marking the culmination of one of Southeast Asia's most dramatic public health turnarounds. The certification, issued in July 2025 after an independent WHO evaluation, confirms that the country has not recorded a single indigenous malaria case since 2018.

When Timor-Leste restored independence in 2002, malaria was a major national health crisis. Transmission by *Anopheles barbirostris* and *Anopheles subpictus* was widespread, diagnostic capacity was limited, and prevalence in some districts historically reached above 80 percent. As late as 2006, the country reported more than 223,000 clinically diagnosed cases.

A decisive shift began in 2009 with Global Fund support, enabling nationwide distribution of long-lasting insecticide-treated nets, expansion of indoor residual spraying, and major investments in laboratory and rapid-test diagnosis. Cases plummeted from nearly 48,000 in 2010 to 5,262 in 2012, and to below 350 by 2014. Under the WHO E-2020 initiative, Timor-Leste achieved zero local transmission in 2018.

Two small outbreaks—one in Oecusse during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and another near the

Indonesian border in 2023—were swiftly contained through targeted surveillance and rapid treatment campaigns. The country formally requested certification in 2023, and WHO confirmed malaria elimination in mid-2025. [DevDiscourse]

Timor-Leste: Parliament approves USD 2.29 billion 2026 state budget focused on transformation and regional integration

(ms) Timor-Leste's National Parliament has approved the 2026 General State Budget (OGE), allocating USD 2.291 billion to drive economic transformation, deepen regional integration and promote inclusive development. The bill passed on November 21 with 42 votes in favor, 23 abstentions and no opposition, completing weeks of committee debate and plenary scrutiny.

The 2026 budget aligns with the country's 2011–2030 Strategic Development Plan and the program of the 9th Constitutional Government. Funding prioritizes social sectors, strategic infrastructure, economic diversification, and institutional reform. Key measures include expanded investment in health, education and social protection, alongside improvements to roads, electrification, water systems, telecommunications, and essential equipment.

Structural reforms feature prominently. The government plans to establish the National Development Bank of Timor-Leste (BDNTL), modernize public financial management, strengthen digital governance, introduce digital identification, and prepare for the rollout of VAT in 2027. Resources will also support Timor-Leste's final steps toward full ASEAN membership.

Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão welcomed the constructive parliamentary debate, saying the budget reflects the government's commitment to responsible governance and national development. Macroeconomic forecasts project 4.5 percent non-oil GDP growth in both 2025 and 2026, driven by public investment and improving private-sector activity.

The approved budget will now be submitted to the President for promulgation. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Timor-Leste: Analysts warn ASEAN's newest member risks becoming a hub for transnational crime

(ms) A new analytical report has warned that Timor-Leste, admitted as ASEAN's eleventh member in October 2025, faces a growing risk of becoming a regional hub for transnational organized crime unless both Dili and ASEAN move quickly to strengthen law enforcement and regulatory oversight. The assessment — based on findings from the Global Organized Crime Index 2025, UNODC reporting, and recent investigative cases — argues that Timor-Leste's weak institutions, porous borders, and newly liberalized investment zones have begun attracting criminal networks displaced by crackdowns elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

While interstate conflict risks involving Timor-Leste remain low, analysts highlight that non-traditional security threats are rising sharply. The report points to the Special Administrative Region of Oecusse as a flashpoint: its free trade zone, launched in late 2024 to court foreign investment, saw an immediate influx of illicit actors. A major police raid in August 2025 uncovered a foreign-run cyber-fraud operation using the same equipment and methods as scam compounds in Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. Subsequent UNODC briefings indicated that scam operators, online gambling groups, and triad-linked networks had begun using shell companies to establish a foothold in the country.

Concerns intensified after senior minister Agio Pereira warned publicly in September 2025 that foreign syndicates had funneled "tens of millions of dollars" into Timor-Leste to bribe officials and secure fraudulent licenses. Analysts cited in the report argue that the country's under-resourced police, fragmented regulatory environment, and limited digital oversight leave it vulnerable to rapid criminal expansion.

The report concludes that ASEAN will need to take a more active role — including deeper intelligence sharing, coordinated investigations, and technical assistance to Dili — if the bloc is to prevent its newest member from becoming a weak link in regional security. [Eurasia Review]

Vietnam: National Assembly advances draft resolution to deepen international integration

(hn/ms) Vietnam's National Assembly has begun advancing a draft resolution introducing new mechanisms to strengthen the country's international integration, following its initial presentation on November 19. Lawmakers are now examining key proposals that would allow provinces to open overseas representative offices, expand economic diplomacy tools and create support funds for Vietnamese enterprises—measures seen as central to Vietnam's next phase of institutional and economic reform. Parliamentary committees have since provided feedback as the draft moves toward a final vote later in the session.

Vietnam's National Assembly has moved forward with a draft resolution introducing new mechanisms to strengthen the country's international integration, following its initial presentation and debate on 19 November. Lawmakers have since continued reviewing the proposal, with parliamentary committees providing feedback and requesting refinements before the document proceeds to a final vote.

The proposal includes measures to expand international partnerships, allow provinces and major cities to open overseas representative offices, support strategic foreign investment projects, and establish development funds to help Vietnamese enterprises integrate into global supply chains.

Committee members have called for clearer identification of structural bottlenecks that hindered previous integration strategies, a defined period of validity for the resolution, and synchronized implementation of all accompanying legal documents so that the new mechanisms can take effect on January 1, 2026. Current discussions are focused on aligning the draft with Politburo Resolution No. 59, which outlines Vietnam's long-term vision for strengthened external engagement.

The effort reflects Vietnam's broader push toward what officials increasingly refer to as "Đổi Mới 2.0"—a new stage of reform meant to complement the market-opening policies launched in 1986. While the original Đổi Mới transformed Vietnam into a fast-growing, trade-driven economy, policymakers argue that the next phase requires deeper institutional modernization, stronger state capacity, and more competitive domestic enterprises.

Analysts note that Vietnam faces rising global pressures: shifting supply chains across Asia, intensifying US–China strategic competition, and higher expectations from new-generation trade agreements such as the CPTPP, EVFTA and RCEP. These

factors demand more flexible diplomatic and economic tools, greater decentralization, and improved coordination between ministries and provinces.

A notable element of the proposal is the authorization for localities to open overseas offices—an unprecedented step that signals a move toward more decentralized economic diplomacy. Officials argue that provinces like Hồ Chí Minh City, Hải Phòng and Bắc Ninh need direct representation abroad to attract investment and support local industries.

Another key pillar is boosting the role of Vietnamese enterprises in global markets. Many domestic firms—especially small and medium-sized enterprises—struggle with international standards, legal compliance, financing and branding. The proposed "integration development funds" aim to address these challenges and help firms climb higher in global value chains. [Vietnam Economic News] [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Prime Minister directs urgent measures to support exporters and boost trade amid US tariffs

(hn) Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính has directed urgent measures to support Vietnamese businesses affected by US reciprocal tariffs and to review import–export tax policies.

Ministries and agencies are tasked with maintaining macroeconomic stability, boosting exports, and enhancing domestic production. The Ministry of Finance will propose targeted support and adjust fiscal and tax policies, while the Ministry of Industry and Trade will promote exports, diversify markets, and advance trade negotiations, including with the US. The State Bank will manage credit, exchange rates, and interest rates to support production and investment. The Ministry of Agriculture and Environment will tackle IUU fishing, enhance sustainability, and expand market access for key agricultural products. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will intensify economic diplomacy and support FTAs with the GCC and other regions.

Local authorities and state-owned enterprises are urged to adjust production, improve competitiveness, and manage logistics efficiently. Over the first 10 months of 2025, Vietnam's import-export turnover reached USD 762.4 billion, with a USD 19.6 billion trade surplus, but Chính emphasized the need for stronger export efforts to achieve an 8 percent national growth target while maintaining macroeconomic stability. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Government targets overseas journalist in expanding crackdown on dissent

(ms) Vietnamese authorities have opened a criminal case against Berlin-based journalist and editor Le Trung Khoa, accusing him of producing and disseminating material "aimed at opposing the state." The decision, announced on 18 November, marks another high-profile action against a critical voice ahead of the Communist Party's National Congress in January, a period when political sensitivities traditionally rise.

According to the Ministry of Public Security, Khoa — editor of the independent news site *Thoibao.de* — has been charged under Article 117 of the Penal Code, one of Vietnam's most frequently used provisions against dissidents. Authorities have approved his prosecution and issued an arrest warrant. Khoa, who holds both Vietnamese and German citizenship, dismissed the allegations as a "farce," arguing that the move is part of a broader effort to intimidate independent media operating outside state control. His website has long been inaccessible inside Vietnam due to state censorship.

The case fits a longstanding pattern. Despite decades of market-oriented reforms and increasing global integration, Vietnam maintains strict limits on press freedom, with all domestic media operating under state oversight. Independent journalism is not legally recognized, and journalists who work outside state structures face significant legal risks. Article 117 — along with charges such as "abusing democratic freedoms" or "sabotaging the state" — has been repeatedly used to detain bloggers, environmental activists, lawyers and social media commentators. Convictions can carry sentences of up to 20 years.

In recent years, the government has intensified monitoring of online content, tightened cybersecurity regulations and increased arrests linked to digital activity. Critics note that these measures have allowed authorities to target individuals located abroad as well as within Vietnam, often by issuing warrants, pressuring family members at home, or coordinating with foreign governments.

International rights groups have repeatedly raised concerns about shrinking civic space, warning that the crackdown on journalists and commentators is at odds with Vietnam's commitments to transparency and reform — particularly as it seeks deeper trade ties,

foreign investment and expanded global partnerships. [Bloomberg] [Reuters] [Vietnam+]

Vietnam: Proposed higher fines for marriage and family violations in new draft decree

(hn) Deputy Minister of Justice Phan Chi Hieu chaired a session on a draft decree detailing administrative penalties in judicial support, civil administration, marriage and family, civil enforcement, and corporate/cooperative bankruptcy. The draft defining violations, penalties, and enforcement authorities.

It proposes higher fines in the marriage and family sector, increasing some penalties from VND 3–5 million to VND 5–10 million (approximately USD 113–378). Targeted behaviors include bigamy, cohabitation with married individuals, prohibited familial marriages, obstructing marriage or divorce, and demanding property during marriage. [Tuoitrenews]

Vietnam: VinFast posts deeper quarterly loss as expansion accelerates despite rising revenue

(ms) Vietnamese electric vehicle maker VinFast reported a sharp increase in losses for the third quarter of 2025, underscoring the financial strain of its rapid global expansion. The company, part of Vingroup —one of Vietnam's "national champions" and the country's most influential conglomerates—recorded a net loss of 24 trillion dong (about USD 910 million), nearly double its loss from the same period last year.

The heavier losses come even as sales continue to rise. VinFast delivered almost 38,200 EVs in the third quarter, with total deliveries in 2025 reaching 110,000 units, up 149 percent year-on-year. Quarterly revenue rose nearly 47 percent to 18.1 trillion dong. The company credits this growth to an aggressive regional diversification strategy, shifting emphasis from the U.S. and Europe to Asia, where demand remains more favorable.

However, the expansion has come at significant cost. VinFast's gross margin fell to negative 56 percent, weighed down by warranty provisions, production costs, and incentives needed to compete with Tesla and fast-growing Chinese EV manufacturers. The company has also taken on additional debt, securing

two loan facilities totaling USD 250 million during the quarter.

Domestically, VinFast continues to benefit from policy momentum: major cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are moving toward restrictions on petrol-powered motorbikes, boosting demand for e-scooters and e-bikes, which saw sixfold growth this quarter.

As a flagship enterprise backed by Vietnam's richest businessman, Pham Nhat Vuong, VinFast plays an outsized role in Vietnam's industrial ambitions. But the company faces mounting pressure to improve profitability as it pushes deeper into international markets and navigates increasingly competitive pricing environments. [Barrons] [Reuters]

Vietnam: Government prioritizes plan to keep full-year inflation at 3.3 percent

(ms) Vietnam is prioritizing a plan to keep full-year inflation at around 3.3 percent in 2025, as the government intensifies efforts to manage price risks and stabilize key markets ahead of the Lunar New Year. The target was reaffirmed at a national price-management meeting on November 21, where Deputy Prime Minister Ho Duc Phoc urged ministries to focus on controlling costs for essential goods and preventing sudden supply disruptions.

According to updated data from the Ministry of Finance, Vietnam's consumer price index rose 3.27 percent year-on-year in the first ten months, supported by stable domestic supply and modest month-to-month price movements. Retail sales reached VND 5.77 quadrillion (USD 222 billion) during the same period, reflecting resilient household spending.

Authorities warned that several regulated sectors—fuel, electricity, healthcare services and school fees—continue to exert upward pressure on prices. At the same time, provinces are accelerating public-investment disbursement, raising concerns about shortages of construction materials such as sand, stone and gravel. Officials said close monitoring of supply chains will be essential to avoid cost spikes as infrastructure projects ramp up.

The government has also called for tighter coordination between fiscal and monetary policy to maintain stable interest and exchange rates. Market observers note that credit growth has outpaced

deposit mobilization this year, tightening liquidity and adding complexity to inflation-control efforts.

Economists say the 3.3 percent target remains achievable if global energy prices stay contained and domestic supply chains avoid major disruptions. However, the aftermath of severe regional flooding, which damaged agricultural output and transport links, could introduce additional volatility in early 2026. [The Saigon Times 1] [The Saigon Times 2] [Vietnam+]

Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange (HoSE) launches new index to spotlight dividend-focused companies

(hn) The Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange (HoSE) has launched the Vietnam Shareholder Interest Enhanced Index (VNSHINE) to highlight companies delivering strong shareholder value through consistent dividends and solid financial performance.

The index will include 15–30 stocks from the VNAllShare pool that meet criteria such as three consecutive years of cash dividends, at least three years of listing, and an average daily trading volume of VND 10 billion. Stocks are evaluated using a shareholder yield score based on dividend yield, net debt changes, and share dilution. The VNSHINE-Index uses a free-float market capitalization model, updates every five seconds during trading, and undergoes annual component reviews with quarterly adjustments.

This new index complements HoSE's VNDIVIDEND-Index, offering investors a tool to identify companies with stable dividends and strong cash flows. [Vietnamnews] [Thoibaonganhang, in Vietnamese]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

China calls on G20 to reinforce multilateralism

(dql) At the G20 summit in Johannesburg past weekend, Chinese Premier Li Qiang called on major economies to reinforce multilateral cooperation, resist protectionist tendencies, and strengthen global governance institutions.

He urged members to resolve disputes through equal dialogue, support debt relief for developing nations, and advance reforms at the IMF, World Bank, and WTO to give the Global South greater influence. [Ministry of Foreign, China] [Anadolu Ajansı]

Notably, for the first time, the United States skipped the G20 leaders' summit, boycotting the meeting after President Trump accused South Africa of persecuting white farmers—allegations Pretoria rejects. Washington also cited trade grievances and South Africa's close ties with China and Russia. [SCMP 1]

Despite Washington's boycott, South Africa opened summit with a strong appeal to protect the forum's credibility. President Cyril Ramaphosa urged members to keep the first G20 hosted by an African nation focused on the continent's priorities, including climate finance, debt relief, and fairer trade rules.

China quickly emerged as Pretoria's main diplomatic backer. Premier Li Qiang criticized Washington's stance and pledged to coordinate closely with South Africa within the G20 and Brics to uphold multilateral trade rules, push global governance reforms, and champion the interests of developing economies. Beijing's support boosts South Africa's efforts to advance issues such as processing critical minerals locally and strengthening disaster resilience. [SCMP 2]

Bilateral talks in Johannesburg

Germany

In talks with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Li urging Berlin to pursue a pragmatic China policy and resist external pressure. Li called for deeper cooperation in advanced industries such as hydrogen, biomedicine, and intelligent vehicles, and encouraged Germany to adopt a more forward-looking approach toward China-EU relations. [The State Council, China 2]

Chancellor Friedrich Merz signaled willingness to expand political and economic engagement and confirmed plans for a state visit to China next year, while noting that the Ukraine war would feature prominently in future talks and that Beijing could exert more influence on Moscow. [SCMP 3]

The meeting unfolded against a backdrop of persistent tensions in Berlin's China policy: concerns about Chinese support for Russia's war in Ukraine, security restrictions on Huawei and other suppliers, and a new German effort to "de-risk" critical sectors and supply chains (see AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3). [Reuters 2]

Speaking with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Johannesburg, Premier Li Qiang encouraged greater participation by Italian companies in China's market and called for a fair, non-discriminatory environment for Chinese investors in Italy. Li emphasized Beijing's interest in maintaining broad engagement with Rome as global trade tensions evolve. [The State Council, China] [Devdiscourse]

Italy

Meloni, stressing the importance of stable supply chains and balanced competition, underscored Italy's focus on expanding trade, investment, and scientific cooperation. Although Rome backed the EU's 2024 tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, it has continued to cultivate goodwill with Beijing by regularly emphasizing the importance of Chinese investment and cooperation in Europe. [Reuters] [Government, Italy]

The exchange highlights both sides' efforts to preserve a pragmatic economic relationship amid wider shifts in Europe-China relations.

South Africa

Meanwhile, China and South Africa signaled a tightening of political and economic ties ahead of the G20 summit as Li met President Cyril Ramaphosa. Li pledged stronger strategic trust, support for multilateral trade rules, and faster progress on zero-tariff access for South African exports.

Both sides highlighted plans to expand cooperation in mining, infrastructure, energy, autos, artificial intelligence, and science and technology, framing it as part of a broader effort to advance Africa's development. [The State Council, 3] [Africa News]

Reflecting efforts to deepen ties, China and South Africa jointly unveiled a new Initiative on Cooperation Supporting Modernisation in Africa on the final day of the Johannesburg G20 summit. The plan, introduced after Li's announcement at the summit's opening session, builds on earlier G20 commitments to African industrialization and positions modernization as a shared objective for developing countries.

Beijing framed the initiative as an extension of its own development model, arguing that modernization is not the preserve of advanced economies and that the Global South can pursue accelerated growth despite external pressures such as protectionism and economic coercion. [IOL] [China Daily]

The launch underscores China's broader effort to deepen its political influence and development role in Africa while promoting a multipolar approach to global governance through the G20.

Chinese foreign minister strengthens Central Asia ties with three-nation tour amid US minerals diplomacy

(dql) Last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi undertook a four-day visit to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan aimed at strengthening China's political and economic engagement in Central Asia. Throughout the trip, he held strategic consultations with each country's foreign minister.

Tajikistan

On November 22, Wang and his Tajik counterpart Sirojiddin Muhriddin held the first China-Tajikistan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue. Wang pledged to increase China's purchases of high-quality agricultural goods from Tajikistan and encouraged more Chinese investment in the country, reassuring that China would remain a dependable strategic partner and thanking Tajikistan for backing Beijing on sensitive issues such as Taiwan.

Wang also announced plans to deepen economic cooperation with Tajikistan, expand joint mineral development, and strengthen security ties through

coordinated border patrols. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1] [Reuters]

Uzbekistan

In talks with both Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov on November 21, the two sides agreed to broaden economic cooperation—including a major new initiative to jointly develop "green" mineral resources across the full supply chain—while noting continued momentum in trade, investment, and projects spanning energy, transport, agriculture and industry. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 3]

Regional security, particularly the situation in Afghanistan, featured prominently in the discussions. China and Uzbekistan stressed the need for aligned approaches to Afghanistan's economic and security challenges, reflecting shared concerns over extremism and cross-border threats. Their position aligns with a joint declaration issued by China and five Central Asian states earlier this year calling for a peaceful and terrorism-free Afghanistan. [The Caspian Post] [Afghanistan International]

Kyrgyzstan

In Bishkek, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi launched the first strategic dialogue with Kyrgyzstan, positioning the new mechanism as a tool to deepen political trust, improve policy coordination, and expand cooperation. He voiced China's support for Kyrgyzstan's upcoming chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and encouraged Bishkek to join the Hong Kong-based International Court of Mediation.

Wang also met President Sadyr Japarov, with both sides underscoring that bilateral ties have reached an unprecedented level. Kyrgyzstan highlighted growing economic engagement—China is its largest trading partner—and the two countries noted progress in multilateral cooperation through the SCO and the China–Central Asia format. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 4] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 5] [Anadolu Ajansı]

U.S. minerals diplomacy in Central Asia

Wang's visits came shortly after the United States stepped up its bid for influence in Central Asia as President Donald Trump welcomed the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for the first C5+1 summit of his presidency earlier this month. Trump highlighted the region's untapped mineral wealth and framed critical minerals

as the core of Washington's engagement, reflecting a broader Western push to secure supply chains independent of Russia and China. [The Diplomat] [Radio Free Europe]

The Central Asian presidents presented a united front, with Kazakhstan calling the talks the start of a new phase in regional cooperation with Washington. Astana also made a symbolic geopolitical move by becoming the first state to join the Abraham Accords since 2020. [Al Jazeera]

Uzbekistan used the occasion to publicly embrace Trump and later announced a large-scale investment plan—over USD 100 billion in the coming decade—targeting US industries such as minerals and aviation. Kazakhstan signed new memorandum of understanding that solidifies U.S. interest in accessing Kazakhstan's underdeveloped mineral resources—especially rare earths and tungsten, further positioning the US as an alternative partner to Moscow and Beijing. [Euronews] [Mining.com] [DW]

China deepens strategic footprint in Africa with modernization of Tanzania–Zambia Railway

(dql/ajs) China has agreed to invest USD 1.4 billion to upgrade the TAZARA (Tanzania–Zambia Railway Authority) railway, the strategic line connecting Zambia to the Tanzanian coast. The deal, concluded during Premier Li Qiang's first visit to Zambia in nearly three decades, where he reaffirmed Beijing's readiness to work with Zambia and Tanzania to transform the corridor into a new economic "prosperity belt." [The State Council 1]

The agreement aims to modernize a route Beijing originally built in the 1970s and which today functions as a counterweight to the U.S.- and EU-backed Lobito Corridor. The overhaul—covering stations, tracks, tunnels, bridges and related infrastructure—should dramatically boost freight capacity from 100,000 tons to 2.4 million tons a year. The initiative comes as Zambia stabilizes its finances and as China seeks to consolidate influence in a copper-rich country that is becoming a target for Western outreach.

The agreement comes after in October Zambia has secured crucial bilateral debt-restructuring deals with key Chinese lenders, including the Export-Import Bank of China, marking a significant step toward restoring financial stability after its 2020 sovereign default. China

is owed USD 5.7 billion, making it the country's largest official creditor.

The railway deal, along with a newly approved USD 1.1 billion Chinese-backed oil refinery, underscores how Beijing is reinforcing its long-standing economic dominance in Zambia, particularly in mining and energy. [Ecofin Agency]

The three countries—China, Tanzania and Zambia—also pledged to expand cooperation around the TAZARA corridor, promote African intra-regional trade, and support zero-tariff access for African exports to China. They aim to stimulate local production and develop industrial zones along the route, further embedding China's Belt and Road Initiative in southern Africa. [Reuters]

The project strengthens China's logistical and political foothold in a strategically important part of Africa at a time of heightened competition with the U.S. and Europe. It signals Beijing's commitment to maintaining influence over regional supply chains—especially for critical minerals—while showcasing Zambia as a compliant and valued partner within the Belt and Road framework. [AP] [CNBC Africa] [The Conversation]

In bilateral talks with Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema, Li reaffirmed China's readiness to expand economic cooperation with Zambia, using China's zero-tariff access for Zambian goods as a springboard to deepen trade and collaborate in sectors such as mining, green technologies and artificial intelligence. Li also highlighted opportunities for cooperation in agriculture, healthcare and skills development, and encouraged more cultural and educational exchanges ahead of the 2026 China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. [The State Council, China 2] [Capital FM]

Japan commits to defending rules-based order, backing Ukraine

(dql) At the G20 summit in Johannesburg past weekend, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi underscored Japan's commitment to defending the rules-based international order, denouncing Russia's war in Ukraine as a grave assault on global stability. She pledged continued Japanese support for Kyiv and framed a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as central to her foreign policy vision.

Takaichi also stressed the need to safeguard fair economic governance amid rising protectionism,

implicitly responding to U.S. tariff policies, and reaffirmed Japan's backing for a strengthened, reformed World Trade Organization. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan 1] [Asia News Network]

Bilateral talks

Takaichi used the G20 summit to consolidate strategic partnerships across Asia, Europe, and Africa amid rising geopolitical competition with China. Her bilateral meetings focused on securing technology cooperation, strengthening supply-chain resilience, and aligning with key partners on regional security.

India

In their first in-person meeting at the summit, Takaichi and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to deepen cooperation in strategic technologies such as AI and semiconductors, reaffirming a shared interest in balancing China's growing influence. Takaichi pledged continuity with Tokyo's earlier commitments, including Japan's plan to mobilize JPY 10 trillion (USD 63.9 billion) in private investment for India over the next decade.

Both leaders reiterated support for a free and open Indo-Pacific and highlighted the importance of building resilient supply chains for chips and critical minerals that avoid overreliance on China.

Takaichi's outreach to Modi comes as Beijing intensifies pressure on Tokyo over her recent comments on a Taiwan contingency (see article in this edition). With India's expanding economy and large market, Japan views New Delhi as a central partner for long-term security and economic strategy, reflected in growing trade and a broadening corporate presence. [Nikkei Asia] [Prime Minister's Office, Japan 2]

UK

Meanwhile, Takaichi and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer agreed to sustain close cooperation on security and economic issues. The two leaders reviewed regional security dynamics and pledged coordinated responses to global challenges. Their discussion builds on steadily expanding Japan–UK defence ties, including regular visits by British carrier strike groups and the joint fighter-jet development program with Italy aimed at fielding a next-generation aircraft by 2035. [The Mainichi] [Prime Minister's Office, Japan 3]

South Africa

In talks with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Takaichi highlighted the need for a stable, predictable investment environment as Japan seeks to strengthen supply-chain resilience, particularly for critical minerals. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Her statement comes as a strategic competition is intensifying in central-southern Africa as China, the United States, and Japan race to secure logistics corridors that will shape global access to critical minerals. The crossroads of this contest is Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia, where three rival transport networks – China's Tazara Railway, the U.S.- and EU-backed Lobito Corridor, and Japan's Nacala Corridor – converge.

Japan is expanding the Nacala Corridor to diversify mineral supply routes away from China. Washington, through the G7's PGII initiative, is funding the rehabilitation of the Lobito Corridor linking Angola to mineral-rich areas of Congo and Zambia. [SCMP]

France, Germany

In meetings with Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz and France's President Emmanuel Macron, she highlighted the strategic link between European and Indo-Pacific security and pledged closer coordination ahead of France's chairing of next year's G7. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan 4] [Prime Minister's Office, Japan 5]

No Japan–China contact

Meanwhile, Takaichi and Chinese Premier Li Qiang pointedly avoided direct contact, underscoring the diplomatic freeze triggered by Takaichi's recent remarks on a Taiwan contingency. While Takaichi stressed openness to dialogue, both sides appear unwilling to soften their positions, raising the prospect of a prolonged standoff. [Nikkei Asia]

Mongolia discusses trade and energy cooperation with China, Russia

(fs) Prime Minister of Mongolia Gombojav Zandanshatar met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Moscow on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on November 18 for high-level talks focused on strengthening strategic cooperation in infrastructure, trade, and energy.

Zandanshatar highlighted the importance of aligning national development strategies and advancing the

phased construction of major cross-border railway corridors, including Shiveekhuren-Sekhee, Khangi-Mandal, and Bichigt-Zuunkhatavch, which are intended to improve connectivity and support regional trade.

To bolster economic ties, he proposed increasing Mongolia's annual coal exports to China to 100 million tons and called for diversifying the bilateral trade structure while expanding total trade to USD 20 billion. He also stressed the need to enhance quarantine cooperation for agricultural exports to facilitate market access.

Qiang welcomed Mongolia's proposals, reaffirming China's openness to Mongolian goods and expressing confidence in the long-term stability of bilateral relations. Both sides underscored the strategic importance of the Power of Siberia II—a planned gas pipeline transporting Russian natural gas to China via Mongolia—, identifying it as a priority for future energy cooperation. [GoGo]

Zandanshatar also held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, following talks with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on November 17 (see AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3). Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

During the meeting, Zandanshatar proposed opening a branch of a Russian bank in Ulaanbaatar to improve bilateral payment and settlement mechanisms, noting that Mongolia is ready to grant all necessary permits and that finance ministers from both sides have agreed on practical steps to advance the process. No Russian bank currently operates in Mongolia. [Russia's Pivot to Asia]

Meanwhile, Russian Energy Minister Sergey Tsivilev and Mongolia's Minister of Industry and Minerals Gongor Damdinnyam also held official talks.

Following the meeting, it was announced that Mongolia has decided to establish a special working group to coordinate the implementation of the Soyuz Vostok gas pipeline project, which is the section of the Power of Siberia-2 pipeline planned to pass through Mongolian territory. The working group will be responsible for outlining the next steps required to move the strategically significant energy project forward. [Sonin]

Mongolia, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe address money-

laundering risks in virtual asset sector

(fs) A two-day Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) workshop held on November 13-14 in Ulaanbaatar convened 27 representatives from the Independent Authority Against Corruption (IAAC), the Financial Regulatory Commission, law enforcement bodies, financial institutions, and other agencies to strengthen Mongolia's capacity to address money-laundering risks linked to virtual assets and blockchain-based finance.

The sessions focused on compliance, supervision, and investigative practices, with participants receiving hands-on training in blockchain analytics tools and reviewing international approaches to risk mitigation. Discussions covered best practices for financial institutions dealing with virtual asset service providers, due diligence standards, on-chain transaction monitoring, and the importance of inter-agency cooperation.

The event also examined Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism supervision under the EU's Markets in Crypto-Assets framework and mechanisms for reporting and freezing crypto assets. [OSCE]

U.N. panel resolution condemns North Korea's rights abuses as Seoul backs resolution despite political shifts

(dql) The U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee — in charge of social, humanitarian, cultural, and human rights issues — has adopted a resolution denouncing North Korea's severe and persistent human rights abuses, calling for the closure of political prison camps and the unconditional release of all political detainees. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South Korea]

South Korea backed the measure as a co-sponsor, signaling that the new administration will maintain a principled stance on human rights despite expectations of a softer approach toward Pyongyang.

North Korea rejected the resolution as a political attack, with China and Russia also distancing themselves from the consensus, underscoring the continued geopolitical divide over addressing Pyongyang's rights violations ahead of the resolution's final adoption next month. [UPI] [The Korea Herald]

‘Nuclear Domino’ claim signals Pyongyang’s escalating rhetoric on U.S.-South Korea cooperation

(sm) North Korea criticized the recent U.S. approval of South Korea’s efforts to pursue nuclear-powered submarines, warning that the decision could create what it described as a “nuclear domino” in the region. In a statement carried by state media, Pyongyang said the move reflects the allies’ deepening military cooperation and argued that Seoul’s submarine ambitions are advancing under Washington’s support. The statement presented the development as a shift with potential regional implications and thereby emphasizing concerns about the broader security environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula. [KCNA]

This statement also illustrates how Pyongyang is positioning itself as it responds to changing dynamics in U.S.–South Korea defense planning. By invoking the idea of a “domino” effect, the North appears to be signaling concern that new capabilities of the South could influence future regional security decisions.

This framing allows Pyongyang to register its objection while situating the submarine issue within a wider discussion about strategic balance. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea highlights its global role at G20 summit

(dql) At the G20 summit in Johannesburg past weekend, South Korea President Lee Jae Myung positioned South Korea as an active shaper of global economic governance while announcing that Seoul will host the 2028 summit — a milestone he framed as a responsibility to strengthen the G20’s role amid growing geopolitical fragmentation.

He urged members to revive the WTO’s multilateral system, expand cooperation on climate and food security and pursue inclusive access to advanced technologies, especially artificial intelligence.

A central theme of Lee’s intervention was supply-chain resilience. He pressed for stable and mutually beneficial critical-mineral networks, warning that intensifying U.S.–China competition over rare earths threatens global stability.

He welcomed the G20's new Critical Minerals Framework and cited South Korea's leadership in the Minerals Security Partnership and its Africa-focused initiatives as contributions to a more balanced global supply system.

Lee also promoted global standards that ensure equitable access to AI and highlighted Seoul's push for inclusive AI governance through APEC. At the same time, he introduced capacity-building programs for women and youth in Africa, underscoring his emphasis on bridging technological divides.

His participation in the summit broadened South Korea's outreach to the Global South and marked the diplomatic centerpiece of a wider regional tour covering the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Turkey (see artilces in this edition), and aimed at deepening ties in defense, energy and infrastructure. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2] [Anadolu Ajansı]

Taiwan's accession bid once again left unaddressed at CPTPP ministerial meeting

(yl) Taiwan's foreign ministry expressed regret after the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) ministerial meeting in Melbourne once again failed to address Taiwan's membership application. While members agreed to begin accession talks with Uruguay and identified the United Arab Emirates, the Philippines, and Indonesia as future candidates, the joint statement made no reference to Taiwan's long-pending application, submitted in 2021 under its WTO designation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in Chinese]

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) attributed the continued omission to political pressure, pointing indirectly to Beijing's opposition, and stressed that Taiwan meets the bloc's high standards. The ministry said it will continue seeking member support, noting Taiwan's existing trade agreements with CPTPP economies such as Singapore, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan moves to boost foreign aid budget

(dql) Taiwan plans to raise its international aid budget by adding NTD 3 billion (USD 95.7 million) to the

Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF) in 2026, as part of a longer-term push to strengthen its global development assistance.

The foreign aid agency currently operates with NTD 12.4 billion (USD 395 miilion), far below the funding level originally pledged when it was created in 1996, which has contributed to Taiwan's very low Official Development Assistance (ODA) ratio—only 0.049 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) in 2024, well under international benchmarks.

Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung said the additional funds, included in MOFA's proposed NTD 41.5 billion (USD 1.33 billion) budget, are meant to expand support for partner countries in areas such as technical cooperation, finance, and humanitarian relief. The move also aims to improve Taiwan's international standing by narrowing the gap with regional peers like Japan, South Korea, and Australia, all of which contribute a far higher share of national income to development aid. [Focus Taiwan]

Regional security advisers boost cooperation at Colombo Security Conclave

(lm) India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval hosted the 7th National Security Adviser–level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) in New Delhi on November 20, bringing together his counterparts from Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, with Seychelles participating as an observer and Malaysia attending as a guest for the first time.

The CSC is a regional security framework led by India that brings together Indian Ocean countries to coordinate on maritime security, counterterrorism, cyber security and disaster response. It was formalized in 2024 to strengthen collective security across the Indian Ocean Region.

Delegations reviewed progress under the CSC's five cooperation pillars: maritime safety and security; countering terrorism and radicalization; combating trafficking and transnational organized crime; cyber security and protection of critical infrastructure; and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. They also discussed expanding training and capacity-building initiatives, and affirmed their commitment to deeper operational coordination.

The meeting took place amid heightened regional concerns, including the recent terror attack in Delhi, the growth of cyber-enabled trafficking networks and

continuing maritime security threats. The CSC's India-appointed first Secretary General presented a comprehensive update on actions taken since the previous meeting in Mauritius in December 2023, and member states formally welcomed Seychelles' accession as a full member. [The Indian Express] [Ministry of External Affairs, India]

Bangladesh's interim government seeks full Commonwealth support for February 2026 election

(lm) Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has asked the Commonwealth for full backing as the interim administration prepares to hold the general election in the first half of February 2026. During talks in Dhaka with Commonwealth Secretary-General Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, he reiterated the government's commitment to delivering a free, fair, and credible vote.

The Secretary-General said the Commonwealth would fully support both the election and the subsequent political transition. She noted that she had already met Bangladesh's chief justice, law adviser, foreign affairs adviser, and the chief election commissioner, and stated she was "hopeful about the country's future." She also confirmed that the Commonwealth plans to deploy multiple observer missions ahead of polling.

The meeting additionally covered areas such as youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, and Yunus's "three-zero" vision aimed at reducing unemployment, carbon emissions, and inequality. [The Daily Star]

Sanctions deadlines reshape flows of Russian crude as Indian refiners halt purchases and Chinese buyers become more risk-averse

(lm) Western sanctions imposed in response to Russia's war in Ukraine are beginning to alter the pattern of Russian crude oil sales to Asia, the largest remaining outlet for Moscow's seaborne exports. Russia has relied heavily on shipments to India and China since 2023, after the European Union banned Russian energy and forced Moscow to redirect flows to Asian markets.

According to U.S. officials cited by Reuters, many Chinese and Indian entities are increasingly "risk-

averse," conscious of sanctions exposure, and "moving to comply" with restrictions. This shift comes as the United States implements its toughest measures yet on Russia's energy sector, targeting the country's two largest oil producers, Rosneft and Lukoil, and requiring all companies globally to wind down dealings with them by November 21. The European Union will apply additional restrictions from January 21, 2026, on fuel produced at refineries that processed Russian crude in the preceding 60 days. [Reuters 1]

In India, refiners have begun making changes ahead of these deadlines. Reliance Industries, India's largest private-sector refinery operator, stopped importing Russian crude into its Jamnagar refinery complex in the state of Gujarat on November 20. Reliance stated that from December 1 all products exported from its refinery will be derived from *non-Russian* crude to ensure compliance with the upcoming European rules; Europe accounts for 28 percent of Reliance's total exports. Other Indian refiners—Mangalore Refinery and HPCL-Mittal Energy—have also halted Russian purchases, while additional refiners are considering sourcing from non-sanctioned Russian suppliers. Reliance said all previously scheduled Russian shipments were honored, with the last cargo loaded on November 12. [Reuters 2]

These shifts follow a period in which Russian crude supplies to Asia remained high. Tanker-tracking firms Kpler and OilX reported that India's imports of Russian crude increased slightly in October. India's total crude imports rose to 20.28 million metric tons that month, the highest since April. [Reuters 3]

The changing purchasing behavior is also visible in pricing. Traders told Reuters that the discount for Russia's flagship Urals crude grade has widened sharply for shipments delivered to Indian ports. For December-delivery cargoes, the discount to dated Brent is USD 5–6 per barrel, compared with USD 1–2 per barrel in August.

Urals crude loaded at Russian ports is currently estimated at around USD 20 per barrel, according to traders. Most shipments continue to rely on Russia-linked "shadow fleet" tankers—commercial vessels that operate outside mainstream Western insurance and shipping networks and are used extensively for sanctioned oil trade. Despite sanctions, Russia's crude exports from its western ports remain near peak levels, supported by OPEC+ (a coalition of oil-producing countries including Russia and members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) production allowances and outages at Russian refineries caused by Ukrainian drone strikes.

Freight rates for these tankers have remained stable. The cost of transporting crude from Russia's Baltic ports is around USD 7.5 million for an Aframax tanker (capacity roughly 700,000 barrels) and USD 8–8.5 million for a Suezmax tanker (capacity roughly 1 million barrels).

India's imports of refined petroleum products fell 7.1 percent year-on-year in October, while exports of such products rose 1.4 percent to 5.12 million tons. These figures are preliminary because Indian private refiners disclose data voluntarily. [Reuters 4]

Central banks of India and EU begin first phase of linking domestic payment systems

(lm) The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the European Central Bank (ECB) have agreed to launch the initial phase of connecting their domestic payment systems, according to an RBI statement. The plan aims to enable cross-border remittances between India and the euro area by linking India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) —the country's real-time digital payments platform— with fast-payment systems used within the European Union.

The ECB said the move is part of the Eurosystem's broader effort to make international payments easier for individuals and businesses, including transfers sent from or received in the euro zone. It noted that India is among the top ten recipients of remittances originating from the euro area.

India has been expanding UPI-based international cooperation and is also in discussions with countries in Africa and South America to help develop their digital payment infrastructure modeled on UPI, according to earlier Reuters reporting.

The agreement comes as New Delhi and Brussels continue negotiations on a long-pending trade agreement they aim to finalize by the end of 2025. [Reuters]

U.S. increases funding for Nepal's electricity-and-infrastructure program by USD 50 million

(lm) The United States has approved an additional USD 50 million for the Nepal program of the Millennium

Challenge Corporation (MCC), a US government agency that provides large, grant-based infrastructure assistance. The expansion raises the package's total value to USD 747 million, with USD 550 million financed by Washington and USD 197 million by the Government of Nepal.

The additional funding follows a suspension earlier this year, after the incoming Trump administration ordered a comprehensive review of all foreign-assistance portfolios, including MCC programs worldwide. With the review now completed, MCC has realigned its global portfolio with the administration's strategic and economic priorities and begun releasing previously paused allocations.

For Nepal, the new US contribution is directed primarily at completing high-voltage electricity transmission infrastructure, improving grid reliability, and expanding the country's capacity for cross-border power trade—areas viewed in Washington and Kathmandu as essential to long-term economic modernization. The program also includes measures to support regional market access and maintain key transport corridors. [The Kathmandu Post]

U.S. congressional panel says China used May India–Pakistan conflict to market its weapons and discredit French Rafale jets

(lm) A new report by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) says China exploited the May 7–10 India–Pakistan conflict to test and promote its advanced weapons systems while launching an online disinformation campaign aimed at undermining the French-made Rafale fighter. According to the report, the clash — the most intense India–Pakistan exchange in decades — created an opportunity for Beijing to highlight the battlefield performance of Chinese hardware used by Pakistan, including the J-10 fighter, the HQ-9 air-defense system and PL-15 air-to-air missiles. The panel notes that nearly 82 percent of Pakistan's arms imports from 2019–23 came from China and that Chinese embassies later emphasized Pakistan's "military success" in outreach to potential foreign buyers.

The commission also says Beijing used fake social-media accounts and AI-generated or video-game imagery to depict supposed Rafale losses, following reports that a Pakistani J-10 had shot down at least one Indian-operated Rafale in the May conflict. It adds that Chinese officials even persuaded Indonesia to pause a Rafale acquisition already underway while encouraging

consideration of Chinese alternatives. China rejected the USCC findings as biased and false, while India has not commented publicly.

Beyond information activity, the report argues that the confrontation underscored China's expanding influence over South Asian security dynamics. It cites Indian allegations — denied by both Beijing and Islamabad — that China provided "live inputs" on Indian military positions during the fighting, as well as Beijing's subsequent offers to Pakistan of additional high-end systems, including J-35 fighters and KJ-500 early-warning aircraft. The USCC concludes that regardless of China's operational role, future India–Pakistan crises are likely to unfold under the shadow of Beijing's growing defense industry, data-gathering capabilities and deepening partnership with Islamabad, raising the stakes for outside crisis-management efforts. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Suicide attack on paramilitary headquarters in Pakistan unfolds amid UN warnings on cross-border militancy

(lm) Pakistan continues to experience one of its most volatile security phases in years, as in the past days a deadly suicide attack on the Federal Constabulary headquarters in Peshawar unfolded alongside renewed United Nations warnings over cross-border militancy and intensified counterterrorism operations across the country.

The assault, carried out on November 23, killed three paramilitary personnel and injured more than a dozen others after a bomber detonated explosives at the main entrance and armed attackers attempted to enter the compound during morning parade drills. Federal Constabulary units, responsible for public-order duties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, shot two assailants before they reached the assembly area in what authorities described as a response that prevented far higher casualties. A faction of the Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2] [Al Jazeera]

The attack occurred as Pakistan and several UN Security Council members warned of escalating threats emanating from Afghanistan. Denmark's deputy permanent representative told the Council that the TTP, estimated at around 6,000 fighters, was receiving substantial logistical support from Afghanistan's de facto authorities, enabling increasingly lethal attacks inside Pakistan. Pakistan's ambassador meanwhile

cited more than 80,000 casualties and severe economic losses linked to cross-border militancy, accusing the TTP, Islamic State Khorasan Province and Baloch separatists of operating from Afghan territory with alleged external assistance, accusations India rejects. [Arab News 3]

The UN discussion coincided with a significant intensification of counterterrorism operations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Military statements over the past several days report the killing of dozens of TTP militants in intelligence-led engagements in Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Mohmand, Tank, Bajaur, North Waziristan, and Kurram. The army repeatedly labeled many fighters as "Indian-sponsored," terminology Pakistan uses to describe networks it alleges are supported by New Delhi; India rejects the claim. [Arab News 4] [Arab News 5] [Arab News 6]

The operations reflect a broader nationwide surge in militant violence since the collapse of a short-lived TTP–government ceasefire in late 2022. KP has experienced a wave of attacks on security forces, targeted killings, kidnappings, and jailbreaks, as well as the re-emergence of assaults on peace committees—tribal elder groups aligned with the state. In one of the deadliest such incidents last week, seven peace committee members were shot dead in Bannu, a district that has become one of the hardest hit by TTP activity. [Arab News 7]

Against this backdrop, the KP government has approved a major restructuring of its policing architecture, transforming the province's Special Branch into a dedicated intelligence and counterterrorism unit. The overhaul includes 1,221 new posts along with 98 vehicles and 404 motorcycles. The restructuring also reflects political friction, with KP authorities accusing the federal government of withholding resources — an allegation Islamabad denies. [Arab News 8]

The worsening security crisis has prompted responses outside KP as well. Punjab — Pakistan's most populous province — has launched the country's first mobile Counterterrorism Department platform, a real-time surveillance and rapid-response vehicle designed to support complex operations. The initiative follows earlier sweeps that led to the arrest of nearly 90 suspected militants, including individuals linked to the TTP, ISKP, Al-Qaeda and other groups. [Arab News 9]

US EXIM prioritizes major investment in Reko Diq as part of a USD 100 billion

global supply-chain initiative

(lm) The US Export–Import Bank (EXIM) has announced plans to deploy USD 100 billion to secure critical mineral and energy supply chains for the United States and its allies. In this first tranche, Pakistan features as a central beneficiary through a planned USD 1.25 billion loan for the development of the Reko Diq copper-gold mine operated by Barrick Mining. The project is one of Pakistan's most important resource ventures and forms part of Washington's broader effort to strengthen access to strategic raw materials amid concerns over global supply vulnerabilities.

EXIM's remaining early deals include support for energy shipments to Egypt and various projects in Europe, but the bank emphasized that stabilizing critical mineral supply lines—such as those originating in Pakistan—is essential for its long-term strategy. [Arab News]

Yet the investment comes at a moment of increased uncertainty around Reko Diq. Barrick is facing internal upheaval following the abrupt departure of its chief executive amid investor pressure for a corporate break-up, with activist shareholders questioning the financial and political risks associated with the USD 9 billion project. Industry analysts note that the mine's scale, security environment and jurisdictional exposure have made it a focal point in discussions about whether Barrick will divest, with US-based Freeport reportedly approached about taking a potential stake. [Financial Times]

Security and rights concerns around the site have also intensified. Local sources report that two Baloch employees were recently abducted near Reko Diq by security personnel, reinforcing longstanding grievances over unequal treatment of local workers and fears of intimidation around a project already linked to land disputes, displacement and heavy securitization. [Balochwarna]

Pakistan pushes regional digital-connectivity agenda while broadening tech, trade, and investment ties across Eurasia

(lm) Pakistan has used last week's Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Ministerial Conference in Bishkek to position itself as a southern digital gateway for landlocked Central Asian economies and to expand its broader Eurasia outreach. Islamabad

formally called for a joint working group with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and interested member states to advance a proposed CAREC Digital Corridor, which would route secure, high-speed regional connectivity through Pakistan's Internet gateways.

Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan told CAREC counterparts that Pakistan's recent modernization measures — including the new Land Port Authority Act, expansion of TIR/eTIR international transit, digital customs certificates via the Pakistan Single Window, and rapid adoption of RAAST, the national real-time payments system — have strengthened its readiness to host a regional digital corridor. Pakistan also urged early access to ADB's new climate-preparedness fund, arguing that climate-vulnerable countries need tailored financing models. [Arab News 1]

The digital push was reinforced by a parallel visit to Bishkek by Pakistan's IT Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja, who is overseeing B2B agreements with CAREC states, meeting the ADB president, and presenting Pakistan's vision for "smart connectivity" and deeper digital integration. Her trip follows outreach in Baku, including joint-venture proposals with China on 5G/6G, hardware manufacturing, and ICT components, and ongoing work with Saudi Arabia on an AI-based tech-skills and digital-jobs partnership. [Arab News 2]

At the same time, Pakistan's Eurasian diplomacy widened to the Caucasus. Azerbaijan signaled plans to significantly expand trade, defense, energy, and investment cooperation, arguing bilateral political ties have reached a "strategic" level even as trade volumes remain modest. Baku's removal of customs duties on Pakistani rice has already boosted imports, while defense ties are deepening, with Pakistan's JF-17 showcased in Azerbaijan's Victory Day parade. Azerbaijani institutions are now exploring investment opportunities in Pakistan, and rising direct flights between major cities are accelerating tourism and people-to-people exchange. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan and EU widen economic engagement and call for Afghan action amid Strategic Dialogue in Brussels

(lm) Pakistan and the European Union convened the seventh Pakistan–EU Strategic Dialogue in Brussels at a moment when both sides are reassessing their political, economic, and security cooperation under the 2019 Strategic Engagement Plan. Pakistan's Deputy

Prime Minister Ishaq Dar co-chaired the talks with EU High Representative Kaja Kallas, using the visit—which also included participation in the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum—to position Pakistan within wider European debates on regional security and connectivity.

Both sides conducted a comprehensive review of bilateral engagement, stressing the need to expand trade and investment ties, particularly through the GSP Plus preferential scheme that grants Pakistan duty-free access to European markets and currently absorbs more than 30 percent of its exports. With over 300 European companies already active in Pakistan and the European Investment Bank financing major infrastructure projects, the meeting sought to identify new avenues for cooperation and reinforce ongoing dialogues across trade, migration, development, climate, and education. [Arab News 1]

Alongside economic discussions, Islamabad and Brussels also jointly addressed Pakistan's deteriorating security environment, marked by escalating cross-border attacks from militants operating out of Afghanistan. Both sides called on Afghanistan's de facto authorities to take concrete action against these groups, following recent clashes along the border and continued concerns over support networks for the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3]

Cambodia secures ADB funding to advance inclusive and sustainable finance agenda

(dql) Cambodia has received a significant boost to its long-stalled financial reforms after the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a USD 50 million policy loan aimed at strengthening regulation, expanding financial inclusion, and improving digital and sustainable finance frameworks. [ADB]

The program supports reforms across banking and non-bank services, development of fintech and digital asset rules, and new measures for consumer protection. It also backs nationwide financial literacy efforts and introduces structures for green finance, including sustainability reporting and future sovereign sustainable bonds.

The initiative is central to Cambodia's goal of reaching upper-middle-income status by 2030 by creating a more resilient financial system, widening access to affordable services—especially in rural areas—and

enabling stronger private-sector-driven growth. [Kiripost]

Malaysia advancing strategic collaboration with Ethiopia and wider African region

(ea/tl) At the Malaysia-Ethiopia High Level Business Forum in Addis Ababa, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim emphasized Malaysia's commitment to expanding economic ties not only with Ethiopia but with Africa more broadly. Highlighting the impact of shifting geopolitics, supply chain disruptions, and climate challenges, Anwar underscored the need for dependable international partnerships.

He described Africa as a strategic collaborator for Malaysia and Southeast Asia, noting the steady growth of Malaysian economic engagement on the continent in sectors such as telecommunications, aviation, agriculture, education, and energy.

Anward pointed to Ethiopia's ongoing reforms, logistics ambitions, and youthful workforce as a key foundation for deeper cooperation. He identified strong potential for joint initiatives in digital technology, renewable energy, agro-industry, infrastructure development, and Islamic finance.

Malaysia's own development agenda places sustainability and green growth at its core. This opens new avenues for collaboration with Ethiopia in clean energy, climate-smart agriculture, and green industrialization. Several Malaysian companies have already shown interest in using Ethiopia as a strategic hub for East Africa, which reflects growing Malaysian confidence in Ethiopia's economic trajectory. [The Star]

The two nations also signed and exchanged several documents including air services agreements, a MoU on health cooperation, on tourism, and a partnership between Kuala Lumpur City Hall the Addis Ababa City Hall administration. Furthermore, both sides announced regular bilateral consultations to strengthen engagement. [Malay Mail 1]

During his visit to Addis Ababa, Anwar also discussed the potential of connecting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) with the ASEAN market in a meeting with African Union Commission Chair Mahamoud Ali Youssouf. Anwar said such a linkage could boost economic growth and improve regional connectivity.

He also noted Malaysia's readiness to support Africa's development goals, particularly in areas such as Islamic finance, digital economy, sustainable infrastructure, and key commodities like palm oil. Anwar reiterated Malaysia's commitment to deeper engagement with African nations, highlighting the recent reopening of its embassy in Ethiopia as a major step toward expanding cooperation.

Africa's population stands at 1.5 billion and ASEAN at 700 million, underscoring the scale of potential economic partnership.

Ethiopia was Anwar's first stop of his Africa continent tour that also included South Africa—to attend the G20 summit—and Kenya. [Malay Mail 2]

Egypt invites Malaysia to co-organize Gaza Reconstruction Conference

(ea) Malaysia has announced that Egypt has formally invited it to not only participate in but also co-organize the Gaza Reconstruction Conference. The proposal was conveyed by Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly during his meeting with Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Johannesburg.

At the summit, Egypt reiterated its readiness to convene an international conference focused on early recovery and reconstruction in Gaza, with broad involvement from Arab, Muslim, and other international partners to secure support for an initial development phase.

According to Anwar, Egypt's outreach may reflect Malaysia's consistently firm position on Gaza and Palestine, though he noted that Malaysia will make a final decision after further consultation with the Foreign Ministry. Malaysia has indicated broad agreement with the first phase of development proposed by the US, but Anwar stressed that any long-term plan must be more comprehensive and in line with Malaysia's policy stance. [Malay Mail] [The Star]

Malaysia has maintained an outspoken stance on the Gaza crisis. Earlier this year, the Foreign Ministry stated that any forced displacement of Palestinians would amount to ethnic cleansing and reaffirmed Malaysia's support for a negotiated two-state solution. [Reuters]

Malaysia Prime Minister rejects claim of Malaysia's interference in Thailand-Cambodia border dispute

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim dismissed accusations that Malaysia, as Asean chair, interfered in Thailand's handling of its border tensions with Cambodia. The allegations followed a protest in front of the Malaysia embassy in Bangkok, where demonstrators accused Anwar of directing Thailand to halt its border operations and asserted that both Malaysia and the United States were attempting to influence Thailand's decisions.

Anwar clarified that Malaysia's role was only to facilitate communication and to seek resolution by helping to arrange talks between the countries' military chiefs and foreign ministries and encouraging both prime ministers to engage directly. He stressed that all decisions, including the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord signed at the recent 47th ASEAN summit in October, were made solely by Thailand and Cambodia, and that Malaysia respected their sovereignty.

Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan earlier said Malaysia is ready to host dialogue "a neutral ground" between the two neighbors amid the renewed escalation. [Free Malaysia Today]

EU condemns junta's rights abuses following UN resolution on Rohingya crisis

(su) The European Union (EU) issued a statement on November 19 at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly after member states adopted a resolution on the human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar. The resolution, co-tabled annually by the EU and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), responds to the atrocities that forced more than one million Rohingya to flee the country.

This year's text contains stronger language than previous iterations, expressing concern over the junta's intention to hold elections amid escalating conflict and human rights abuses. It calls for an immediate end to violence, inclusive dialogue, and expanded international financial support for the refugee response.

The statement noted that prospects for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Rohingya refugees remain limited given current conditions and

emphasized Bangladesh's continued role in hosting the displaced population. While supporting the strengthened resolution, the EU said it believes the text should have gone further in addressing the supply of arms, weapons, and dual-use technology to the Myanmar military. [Mizzima]

Philippines secure USD 321 million EU grant as trade talks set for 2026 restart

(ghd) The Philippines and the EU are set to resume formal negotiations for an FTA by the first quarter of 2026, with both parties racing to finalize the deal before the expiration of the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) at the end of 2027.

EU Ambassador to the Philippines Massimo Santoro emphasized a shared commitment to a swift conclusion, aiming to secure long-term stability for investors and businesses currently benefiting from the GSP+, which allows over 6,000 Philippine products to enter the EU duty-free. Santoro further assured that the ongoing infrastructure corruption controversy in Manila has not derailed diplomatic progress, noting that the EU is satisfied with the Philippine government's response and willingness to ensure accountability. [PhilStar]

Underscoring this deepening partnership, the Philippines has simultaneously secured a funding package worth approximately USD 321 million from the EU, Finland, and France. This financing is earmarked to accelerate the country's digital transition and significantly strengthen disaster response capabilities—a critical priority following the devastation caused by recent typhoons. The "EU-Philippines Digital Economy Package" – which includes specific contributions of USD 23 million from the EU, USD 2 million from Finland, and USD 692,000 from France – aims to modernize digital infrastructure and deploy high-tech solutions for climate resilience and emergency management. [Manila Bulletin]

Chinese involvement in Vietnam electronics hub raises questions for U.S. regulators

(ms) A new industrial project in northern Vietnam is drawing international attention after revelations that a Chinese state-owned construction giant is helping expand a major electronics factory supplying the U.S.

market. The development highlights how deeply intertwined regional supply chains remain — even as Washington pressures companies to reduce exposure to China.

The factory in Hai Phong is operated by TP-Link Systems, one of the world's largest makers of Wi-Fi routers and networking equipment. TP-Link has been trying to convince U.S. officials that its restructuring in 2024 effectively separated its American and Chinese operations, with Vietnam positioned as its primary manufacturing base for exports to the United States.

However, public notices from officials in China's Hunan province show that the expansion of the Vietnam plant was listed as a state-backed "Key Project for Foreign Investment and Cooperation" for 2025. The construction work is being carried out by a subsidiary of China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), a firm designated by the Pentagon as linked to the Chinese military.

The involvement of a major state-owned enterprise raises questions about the depth of TP-Link's ties to China at a time when U.S. regulators are weighing whether the company's products pose national-security risks. The U.S. Commerce Department has completed an assessment indicating that TP-Link's continued reliance on Chinese supply chains and technology ecosystems may expose American networks to vulnerabilities. Lawmakers have also warned that China's national-security laws could obligate companies with operations there to cooperate with state intelligence agencies.

TP-Link, which still imports nearly all components for its Vietnam factory from China, denies any political influence and insists the construction contract in Hai Phong was awarded through a competitive market process. Beijing has criticized Washington's scrutiny as discriminatory, saying the U.S. should stop "overgeneralizing national security."

The case highlights a broader challenge for global manufacturing: even companies shifting production out of China often remain embedded in Chinese supply networks, business structures, or state-linked institutions. For Vietnam, which has become a prime destination for firms diversifying away from China, the situation illustrates both the opportunities and geopolitical risks of hosting major China-associated manufacturers.

For the U.S., the question now is whether Vietnam-based assembly — supported in part by Chinese state firms — can be considered meaningfully insulated

from Chinese influence. The answer may determine whether TP-Link faces future restrictions in its most important foreign market. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Bangladesh and Bhutan deepen economic, digital, and health cooperation during Bhutanese PM's state visit

(mml/lm) Bangladesh and Bhutan strengthened bilateral cooperation during Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay's two-day state visit to Dhaka on November 22–23, which included ceremonial engagements, high-level meetings, and the signing of two memoranda of understanding on healthcare and digital connectivity.

The central focus of the visit was the push to expand economic, trade, and connectivity ties. Both sides agreed to begin formal discussions on a bilateral free trade agreement, a step that would build on the preferential trade agreement they concluded in 2020. Tobgay stressed that Bhutan hopes to move quickly and become the first country to sign a full free trade deal with Bangladesh.

During the talks, he also introduced Bangladesh to Gelephu Mindfulness City, Bhutan's flagship development project in the southern border town of Gelephu, which aims to create a cross-border economic hub combining technology, green industry, and Buddhist-inspired wellness infrastructure. In that context, Bhutan requested practical cooperation, including the use of space in Narayanganj—an industrial city just south of Dhaka—for handling Bhutanese cargo and improving regional logistics.

For Dhaka, the visit reaffirmed Bhutan's importance in Bangladesh's wider regional economic vision. Yunus said he had instructed Bangladeshi agencies to accelerate clearance procedures for Bhutanese containers to facilitate smoother trade flows. He also invited Bhutanese nationals to benefit from medical services and training once Bangladesh's new 1,000-bed hospital and medical college in Nilphamari, a northern district near the Indian border, is completed.

Following the meeting, the two governments signed memoranda of understanding on health-sector cooperation and on the trade of international internet bandwidth. The health agreement will enable Bhutan to hire Bangladeshi doctors and medical workers to address shortages in its public health system, while the connectivity agreement will allow Bhutan to import

internet bandwidth from Bangladesh to strengthen its digital infrastructure.

Both leaders also discussed prospects for importing hydropower from Bhutan, a plan that would require India's involvement because all electricity would have to be transmitted through Indian territory. The two sides agreed as well to establish a joint working group to promote two-way tourism. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh renews extradition push as high-level security talks with India cautiously resume

(mml/lm) Dhaka has again formally requested New Delhi to extradite former prime minister Sheikh Hasina after ICT-1 — a domestic war-crimes court originally set up to try 1971-related atrocities — sentenced her and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death for crimes against humanity committed during the July 2024 uprising. The tribunal issued its ruling on November 17. Hasina has lived in India since fleeing during last year's uprising, and Dhaka has revoked her diplomatic passport. Prosecutors are now preparing to seek Interpol cooperation. A similar extradition request submitted to India in December 2024 went unanswered. [The Daily Star 1]

The extradition issue shaped the context of the first senior-level bilateral meeting in months, as Bangladesh's National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman met Indian NSA Ajit Doval in New Delhi. Political engagement has been limited since Hasina's ouster, and Dhaka recently summoned an Indian diplomat over interviews Hasina gave to Indian media. Despite tensions, cooperation on border security, counter-smuggling, and river-water management continues through technical channels. [The Daily Star 2]

India has not indicated whether it will extradite Hasina. Following the verdict, the Ministry of External Affairs stated only that India "noted the verdict" and reiterated support for stability and democratic processes in Bangladesh. Under the 2013 bilateral extradition treaty, India may decline extradition on grounds of "political offence," though the treaty explicitly excludes crimes such as murder from that category—an issue both sides are expected to test if the process advances.

Separately, bilateral frictions have also surfaced in the energy sector. The Bangladesh High Court has

suspended an arbitration process between the Bangladesh Power Development Board and India's Adani Power over disputed power-supply payments, pending a domestic expert review of the fairness and possible irregularities in the 2017 contract. Adani's 1,600-MW Godda plant supplies nearly one-tenth of Bangladesh's electricity, and Reuters reporting shows Bangladesh paid Adani BDT 14.87 (USD 0.122) per unit in FY2023–24—significantly above the BDT 9.57 (USD 0.078) average paid to other Indian suppliers. [Reuters]

German and French envoys weigh in on Bangladesh's upcoming election

(mml) German Ambassador to Bangladesh Rüdiger Lotz has voiced strong support for the country's ongoing democratic transition, saying the 2026 national election will send a "powerful signal" across a South Asia where democratic processes are increasingly under pressure.

Speaking to Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), Ambassador Lotz said he was confident that the active participation of Bangladesh's millions of voters would attract regional attention and underscore the country's growing political weight. He added that it is "extremely likely" the European Union will send a large election observation mission, provided the government extends a formal invitation—an indication, he said, of Europe's continued engagement with Bangladesh's democratic trajectory.

On the economic front, Lotz emphasized that strengthening legal certainty and regulatory clarity will be essential to drawing greater German investment. He noted that Bangladesh's long-term competitiveness depends not only on stable rules but also on diversifying its industrial base beyond the garment sector, identifying pharmaceuticals and logistics as two sectors with significant potential for growth. [The Daily Star 1]

In a separate meeting, French Ambassador Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet delivered a similar message of readiness during a meeting with Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, where the two discussed disaster preparedness, fire safety, and election security. Jahangir outlined government efforts to enforce building codes, expand open spaces, and bolster the capacity of the Fire Service and Civil Defense. He requested French technical assistance for modern rescue tools and investigative capabilities—areas where the ambassador expressed willingness to cooperate. [The Daily Star 2]

Bhutan-Inda hydropower partnership expands through major PPP project and region-wide storage shift

(lm) Bhutan's energy cooperation with India has taken a major step forward after Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC), Bhutan's state-owned hydropower operator, and India's Tata Power, one of India's largest integrated power utilities, signed the shareholder agreement for the 1,125-megawatt Dorjilung Hydropower Project. The venture, Bhutan's largest public–private partnership so far, will be implemented through a Special Purpose Vehicle in which DGPC will hold 60 percent and Tata Power 40 percent. Tata Power will invest INR 15.72 billion (USD 188.64 million), while the project's total cost is estimated at BTN 131 billion (USD 1.57 billion). Once operational in 2031, Dorjilung is expected to export around 80 percent of its electricity to India.

The agreement coincides with a broader regional transition toward storage-based hydropower. At the Second International Conference on Sustainable Hydropower Development in the Himalayas, Bhutan and India emphasized reservoir projects and pumped-storage systems as essential solutions to rising electricity demand, climate-related variability and India's rapidly expanding solar capacity. Bhutan, which has used only 11 percent of its estimated 32,600-megawatt hydropower potential, aims to reach 25,000 megawatts of installed capacity by 2040, including 15,000 megawatts of hydropower and 5,000 megawatts of solar. Achieving this will require more than BTN 2,094 billion (USD 25.13 billion) in investment and reliable access to India's market, especially for Bhutan's large expected summer surplus. [Kuensel 1] [Kuensel 2]

France, Brunei commit to expanding naval cooperation

(dql) Brunei and France have agreed to deepen their naval cooperation following the three-day visit of the French Navy vessel FNS *Prairial* to Brunei. The two sides reaffirmed plans to expand training, capacity-building, and operational coordination, highlighting a steady strengthening of their long-standing defense relationship. Politically, the move supports Brunei's efforts to enhance maritime security while giving France another avenue to reinforce its Indo-Pacific presence, contributing to a broader network of

partnerships aimed at maintaining stability and open sea lanes in the region. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia, Indonesia deepen cooperation on migrant protection

(dql) Cambodia and Indonesia agreed to step up cooperation on protecting their citizens working abroad, using a bilateral meeting on November 24 to align their policies as regional labor mobility grows. During a meeting on November 24 between Keo Remy, Chairman of the Cambodia Human Rights Committee (CHRC), and Natalius Pigai, Indonesia's Minister of Human Rights, both sides committed to improving support mechanisms, sharing information, and expanding joint capacity-building to strengthen institutional responses to migrant worker issues—an area of increasing political importance across ASEAN.

Pigai urged Cambodia to work closely with Indonesia to safeguard both Indonesian nationals in Cambodia and Cambodian citizens abroad. With more than 131,000 Indonesians now living in Cambodia, both sides recognized the need for more structured cooperation, including training programs and technical support that Indonesia offered to provide.

Indonesia also sought Cambodia's backing for its bid to preside over the UN Human Rights Council in 2026, part of Jakarta's effort to elevate its global human rights profile. Both sides expressed interest in deeper cooperation through regional forums and training programs, signaling a broader alignment in their human rights diplomacy. [Cambodianess] [Kiripost]

Germany extends concessional loans to boost Cambodia's energy network

(dql) Germany has agreed to provide EUR 47.5 million (USD 55 million) in concessional loans to strengthen Cambodia's energy infrastructure and expand rural electricity access. The funding, formalized in agreements signed on November 19 will finance the second and third phases of Cambodia's rural energy efficiency program.

Most of the package—USD 34.5 million—supports phase two, which focuses on improving transmission and distribution systems, expanding 22-kilovolt lines in Siem Reap, Oddar Meanchey, Kampong Thom and Preah Vihear, and upgrading substations and

underground transmission lines. The goal is to stabilize electricity prices, enhance supply reliability for industry and agriculture, and promote renewable energy and efficiency to strengthen national energy security. [Cambodianess] [Kiripost]

Cambodia, Rwanda launch diplomatic consultations, ease official travel

(dql) Cambodia and Rwanda agreed to deepen their diplomatic engagement during Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn's visit to Kigali, where the two countries signed agreements to launch regular consultations between their foreign ministries and to introduce visa exemptions for diplomatic and official passport holders.

Sokhonn and his Rwandan counterpart Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe also discussed expanding cooperation in political, economic, and cultural fields. [Cambodianess]

China intensifies pushback against Japan after Prime Minister Takaichi's Taiwan comments

(dql) China has continued its forceful criticism of Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi after she suggested in parliament that a Chinese naval blockade or other attack on Taiwan could trigger a Japanese military response.

Chinese Foreign Minister and Politburo member Wang Yi became the most senior official to address the issue, declaring that Takaichi's remarks "crossed a red line" and accusing Tokyo of signaling intent to intervene militarily in the Taiwan Strait. He stressed that Beijing must "resolutely respond" to defend China's sovereignty, its post-war settlement, and what he framed as "international justice and human conscience." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1, in Chinese] [AP]

China's ambassador to the UN also sent a letter to Secretary-General António Guterres condemning the comments as a "grave violation of international law" and warning that any Japanese armed intervention would constitute "aggression," to which China would respond under its right to self-defense. [Reuters 1]

Chinese missions in the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia and the United States have circulated posts portraying Takaichi as reviving militarism and invoking historical grievances from the Second World War. A now-deleted post by the consul general in Osaka — which stated that a "dirty neck that sticks itself in must be cut off" — was the first sign of the renewed approach, with later posts featuring caricatures and warnings that China would "strike back resolutely." Analysts said the messaging seeks to influence public opinion in countries central to any Taiwan scenario and to discredit Japan's international standing. [Reuters 2]

Beijing's diplomatic pressure has been accompanied by broader punitive measures. Following a travel advisory urging Chinese citizens to exercise caution in Japan, Chinese travel agencies cancelled hundreds of thousands of trips, including group tours and flights, with major airlines offering full refunds for Japan-bound travel through December (see AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3). Cultural exchanges have also been curtailed, with concerts by Japanese artists in China abruptly cancelled and planned screenings of Japanese films delayed or suspended. [CNBC] [NHK]

China hardens military posture

At the same time, China has showcased intensifying military readiness. The PLA's Eastern Theatre Command—responsible for the Taiwan Strait—conducted round-the-clock live-fire drills under complex electromagnetic conditions to test real-war combat capabilities. Other theatre commands and naval fleets have released combat-readiness footage, including videos framing units as prepared to fight "if battle breaks out tonight." China has also carried out consecutive live-fire exercises in the Yellow Sea. [SCMP]

China renews seafood ban

In addition, China has reimposed a sweeping ban on Japanese seafood imports, using food-safety justifications but clearly tying the move to Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's recent comments indicating Japan could support Taiwan militarily in a conflict. Beijing argues Tokyo failed to provide required technical documents on Fukushima wastewater but simultaneously claims that domestic outrage over Takaichi's "egregious moves and erroneous remarks," leaves "no market" for Japanese products. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2]

The renewed ban delivers a sharp setback to businesses hoping to regain access to a market that

once absorbed over 20 percent of Japan's seafood exports. Nearly 700 firms have sought re-approval to ship to China, but only three have been cleared so far. [The Guardian] [Reuters 3]

China condemns Japan's missile deployment near Taiwan

China also sharply criticized Japan's plan to deploy a medium-range surface-to-air missile unit on Yonaguni Island—just 110 km from Taiwan—accusing Tokyo of "creating regional tension and provoking military confrontation."

The foreign ministry framed the deployment as an outgrowth of Takaichi's recent Taiwan remark, calling Japan's "right-wing provocateurs" a threat to regional stability.

Beijing's rebuke came after Japan's defense ministry has unveiled a far-reaching plan to reinforce the defence of its southwestern island chain, placing new air-defence, electronic-warfare, and long-range strike capabilities just 110 km from Taiwan. Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi confirmed that Yonaguni Island—Japan's westernmost point—will host Type 03 Kai surface-to-air missiles, NEWS electronic-warfare systems, and the new Type 24 directed-energy EW platform. The garrison will house the 101st and 301st electronic warfare companies and a battery of Type 03 Kai missiles.

The 2026 budget and Okinawa's defence enhancement plan also envision similar deployments on Ishigaki, Miyako, Amami Ōshima, and Okinawa itself. Tokyo will simultaneously expand Maritime Self-Defense Force and Coast Guard deployments to strengthen situational awareness and deterrence across the region. [Militarnyi] [Naval News]

Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi defended the deployment as necessary to protect Yonaguni and argued that the move would reduce the likelihood of an armed attack. [Reuters 4]

Trilateral China-Japan-South Korea culture ministers' meeting postponed

Furthermore, China postponed a planned November 24 Japan–China–South Korea culture ministers' meeting in Macau, citing the breakdown in "foundation and atmosphere" for trilateral cooperation.

The cancellation underscores how the diplomatic clash over Takaichi's comments is now spilling into broader regional frameworks. [The Japan Times]

Philippines accuses China of jamming communications during South China Sea resupply mission

(ajs) Reports have emerged that a Chinese vessel jammed the communications of Filipino forces during a resupply mission to a Philippine outpost in the highly disputed South China Sea last week.

According to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the mission successfully delivered food, fuel, and personnel to the outpost despite the temporary loss of communication capability. Officials said the interference occurred while Philippine vessels were operating near the contested shoal, though the delivery itself proceeded without incident. [ABC News]

China, U.S. reaffirm engagement in presidential phone call, maritime talks

(dql) In a phone call on November 24, Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Donald Trump reaffirmed efforts to stabilize U.S.–China relations. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Referring to their in-person meeting in South Korea in late October, Xi called on both sides to "keep up the momentum, [...] lengthen the list of cooperation and shorten the list of problems, so as to make more positive progress, create new space for China-U.S. cooperation." Trump described the telephone call as "very good," confirming that the "relationship with China is extremely strong!" [Donald Trump, Truth Social]

Both leaders confirmed reciprocal state visits in the coming months, signaling a diplomatic push amid a fraught geopolitical backdrop. They reviewed progress since their recent summit, highlighting temporary relief in their trade dispute and China's commitments to ease export controls on critical inputs, halt fentanyl-related chemical shipments to North America, and reopen supplies of auto chips.

On Taiwan, Xi underscored Beijing's claim to Taiwan as a core element of the post-WWII order and warned against Japan's recent signals that it would intervene militarily if China moves against the island — a stance Beijing calls intolerable.

The call also touched on the war in Ukraine, with Xi repeating China's support for initiatives aimed at ending the conflict — a position that allows Beijing to project neutrality while retaining strategic flexibility. [UPI] [POLITICO]

The exchange on Taiwan and Ukraine comes as Beijing is locked in a growing dispute with Tokyo over Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan (see article in this edition), while Washington has unveiled a comprehensive 28-point plan aimed at resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict that began in February 2022. [CNN]

Following their first face-to-face meeting since 2019, held in Busan in late October, Beijing and Washington have portrayed their relationship as stabilizing under a one-year pause on tariffs and export controls. Chinese officials say the dialogue has put bilateral ties on a more predictable track and want to build on this momentum through expanded cooperation and reduced friction. [SCMP]

US–China maritime talks seek to stabilize military communication to strengthen risk reduction

Meanwhile, China and the U.S. held a second round of maritime-security consultations in Hawaii, part of their renewed effort to stabilize military communication amid persistent friction in the East and South China Seas. Both sides reviewed recent air and naval encounters and reaffirmed the value of the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) in reducing operational risks — a mechanism revived only last year after years of political rupture. [Ministry of Defense, China] [Reuters]

China restated its strong objection to activities it sees as threats to its sovereignty and security, including operations conducted under the banner of freedom of navigation or surveillance missions near its territory. It emphasized that it will continue to defend its territorial and maritime claims in line with domestic law and remain committed to maintaining stability in the region.

The talks unfolded against a backdrop of escalating tensions involving key US allies. Beijing has retaliated sharply against Japan after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi indicated that Tokyo might intervene militarily in a Taiwan contingency, prompting Washington to reiterate its firm defence commitments to Japan, including over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. [Nikkei Asia]

In the South China Sea, US-China rivalry continues to intensify as maritime run-ins between China and the Philippines persist. Both states accuse each other of destabilizing behavior: Washington criticizes China's coercive tactics, while Beijing says US military deployments — including recent missile systems and stepped-up patrols — are the primary source of regional instability.

Although the Hawaii meeting focused on preventing incidents at sea and in the air, it took place shortly after two US naval aircraft crashed in disputed waters, an episode China used to again argue that frequent US operations near its coastlines heighten the risk of accidents. Despite the rancor, Beijing signaled a willingness to provide humanitarian assistance if requested. [SCMP]

US congressional panel warns of deepening strategic risks in expanding China rivalry

(dql) A key bipartisan commission advising the U.S. Congress is urging major institutional reforms to counter what it describes as a rapidly intensifying security challenge from China. The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) recommends in its "2025 Annual Report to Congress" creating a new high-level interagency "economic statecraft" body, that integrates Commerce, Treasury, State, Defense and the Intelligence Community, to coordinate sanctions enforcement, export controls and technology restrictions, arguing that bureaucratic fragmentation has weakened U.S. responses to Beijing's advances. [USCC] [SCMP 1]

The report warns that China's expanding capabilities — from AI and semiconductors to energy infrastructure, satellites and cyber operations — could undermine U.S. military readiness and disrupt critical supply chains in a future conflict. It calls for stronger controls on AI chips, robotics and pharmaceuticals; new funding to secure the electrical grid; and banning Chinese-made energy storage systems due to espionage risks.

The panel further highlights that China is heavily investing in dual-use quantum and AI capabilities that could accelerate its military and intelligence power. It calls for a "quantum first" national goal by 2030, backed by major federal funding for scalable quantum hardware, secure communications, post-quantum cryptography, and workforce development. It also proposes creating a Quantum Software Engineering

Institute to align US software capabilities with emerging quantum hardware. [Breaking Defense]

The commission also pushes for greater support to Indo-Pacific partners, expansion of U.S. Coast Guard activities in the region, and clearer Pentagon reporting on its capacity to deter or defeat a Chinese assault on Taiwan. It cautions that the People's Liberation Army, backed by near-continuous military pressure around the island, may soon be capable of launching an invasion with minimal warning. [Focus Taiwan] [The Washington Post]

China's state-run newspaper Global Times was quick to cite Chinese analysts, dismissing the findings as deeply biased and arguing that the report reflects a unilateral US viewpoint and wrongly frames China's ordinary economic activities as security threats—a political tactic, they say, aimed at justifying tougher measures to contain China and one that is ultimately bound to fail. [Global Times]

Tighter chip export controls demanded

Meanwhile, at a public hearing convened by the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, lawmakers and experts urged Washington to intensify its semiconductor export controls amid growing unease over China's rapid progress in chip manufacturing. They called for sealing regulatory gaps, expanding inspection capacity, and empowering the Bureau of Industry and Security to curb Chinese access to sensitive technologies—including through China's flagship semiconductor firms and their US-based subsidiaries.

The appeals follow the Trump administration's decision to pause key export-control measures for one year in return for Chinese concessions on rare earths. Committee members at the hearing warned that this temporary truce gives Beijing valuable time to design workarounds and accelerate domestic capability-building, potentially undermining US leadership in advanced chips and artificial intelligence—central battlegrounds in the US-China strategic competition.

Participants also highlighted the importance of allied cooperation, particularly with the Netherlands and Japan, whose firms supply indispensable chipmaking equipment. Additional proposals included codifying the foreign direct product rule, expanding country-level controls, and shifting from selling to renting advanced chips to improve oversight of their end use. [SCMP 2]

China accuses U.S. of meddling after ambassador urges Greece to reconsider Chinese role at Piraeus port

(dql) China sharply criticized the United States for what it called an attempt to disrupt Beijing's relations with Greece, after the U.S. ambassador in Athens suggested that Greece consider selling the Chinese-operated port of Piraeus. [Transport Intelligence]

Beijing condemned the remark as displaying "Cold War thinking" and charged Washington with trying to use Greek infrastructure to advance its own strategic agenda, insisting the port remains a symbol of successful Sino-Greek cooperation and a core component of the Belt and Road Initiative. [Chinese Embassy in Greece, in Chinese]

China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) — a state-owned shipping conglomerate and one of the world's largest maritime transport and logistics firms — first obtained a terminal concession and later acquired a 67 percent stake in the port authority in 2016, turning Piraeus into a flagship Belt and Road project and a major gateway for Chinese goods entering Europe.

The episode underscores a broader geopolitical struggle over control of critical maritime infrastructure. Washington has grown increasingly wary of Chinese involvement in global ports—from Panama to Peru—seeing these investments as expanding Beijing's strategic reach. China, meanwhile, continues to build out its port network to reinforce trade corridors and political ties, making assets like Piraeus flashpoints in the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry. [SCMP] [Euractiv]

U.S. weighs allowing Nvidia's advanced AI chips to China

(dql) Washington is reportedly weighing whether to permit Nvidia to sell its high-performance H200 AI chips to China, signaling a potential softening of U.S. tech-export restrictions following the recent meeting between Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping in Busan. The move would reopen access to a major market Nvidia says it is losing to foreign competitors under current rules.

The deliberation is politically sensitive: U.S. security hardliners fear advanced chips could accelerate China's military AI capabilities, while the administration is balancing those worries against commercial interests and Beijing's own leverage through rare-earth

controls. Allowing H200 sales would mark another rollback of earlier U.S. export limits and reflect a broader recalibration of tech containment strategies.

The H200, significantly more powerful than the legally exportable H20, underscores the stakes for both commercial dominance and national security. The review follows high-level engagement between Trump and Nvidia's CEO and comes as Washington authorizes large shipments of next-generation Nvidia chips to partners in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, highlighting differentiated U.S. technology diplomacy across regions. [Reuters1] [Qazinform News Agency]

Nvidia's China revenues fell sharply to USD 3 billion in the latest quarter — a 63 percent drop — while its China-oriented H20 chip generated only about USD 50 million after earning USD 4.6 billion in the first quarter and nothing in the second. Once commanding 95 percent of China's advanced AI chip market, Nvidia now says it is effectively "100 percent out of China," squeezed by U.S. export bans and Beijing's mistrust of foreign hardware as domestic rivals such as Huawei and Alibaba race to fill the gap. [SCMP]

Meanwhile, U.S. prosecutors have charged two Americans and two Chinese nationals with illegally routing hundreds of Nvidia's restricted AI chips to China, exposing gaps in Washington's export-control regime. The group allegedly used fake contracts, false paperwork, third-country transshipment through Malaysia and Thailand, and a front company, based Tampa, Florida, to move 400 A100 GPUs and attempt shipments of H100 and H200 chips worth millions of dollars. [CNBC]

In parallel, a bipartisan group in the U.S. House has proposed legislation that would bar recipients of CHIPS Act funding from buying Chinese-made semiconductor manufacturing equipment for a decade, aiming to prevent U.S. subsidies from indirectly supporting China's tech ambitions. The measure covers everything from wafer production tools to advanced lithography systems and would apply to major grant beneficiaries such as Intel, TSMC, and Samsung, though foreign facilities would be exempt.

Lawmakers say the bill is needed because China has poured more than USD 40 billion into developing chipmaking tools and is rapidly expanding its market share, while U.S. equipment suppliers fear that existing export controls already curb sales and weaken their ability to invest in innovation. The proposal also blocks equipment from other "countries of concern" — including Russia, Iran, and North Korea — and allows

waivers when no U.S. or allied-made alternatives exist. [Reuters 2]

China, U.S. showcase rival stealth jets as Middle East becomes key battleground

(dql) The Dubai Air Show placed China–US rivalry in sharp focus as both countries showcased their most advanced fighter technologies in a region where defence purchases increasingly reflect geopolitical alignment. The U.S. demonstrated its F-35, long the gold standard for fifth-generation jets and now potentially headed to Saudi Arabia after years of American reluctance. Nearby, China displayed its new carrier-capable J-35, signaling Beijing's intent to challenge U.S. dominance in the Middle Eastern arms market.

Analysts noted that China is emerging as Washington's strongest competitor: the J-35 is seen as more sophisticated than Russia's Su-57 and an attractive option for states unable to secure or afford the F-35. While doubts persist about China's software maturity and long-term support, its rapid technological advances and aggressive pricing position it as the most serious rival to U.S. platforms.

The simultaneous presence of the F-35 and J-35 underscored a broader strategic contest over regional influence. As fifth-generation fighters become available to Middle Eastern militaries, procurement choices will signal not just military needs but political orientation, making China–US competition a defining factor in the region's future security landscape. [SCMP]

Netherlands pauses Nexperia takeover after China eases chip export blockade

(dql) The Netherlands has paused its state intervention in Dutch chipmaker Nexperia—owned by partially state-owned Chinese semiconductor company Wingtech—after productive talks with China eased a dispute that had disrupted supplies to the automotive sector.

Economy Minister Vincent Karremans framed the suspension as a goodwill signal, noting that China has taken steps to stabilize chip deliveries to Europe and global markets. [Vincent Karremans]

The Dutch government had taken temporary control of Nexperia in late September to prevent a relocation of

operations to China, prompting Beijing to block exports of the company's finished chips (see AiR No. 41, October/2025, 2, AiR No. 42, October/2025, 3)—a move it has now partially reversed. [Channel News Asia] [The New York Times]

UK tightens China strategy with critical minerals push and fresh MI5 espionage warning

(dql/ajs) The United Kingdom (Uk) is sharpening its approach to China on both the economic and security fronts. While London launches a major new critical minerals strategy to reduce reliance on Chinese supplies, MI5 has simultaneously issued an expanded warning about alleged Chinese intelligence activities targeting British political and policy circles. The two developments underscore the complexity of the Starmer government's effort to stabilise relations with Beijing while managing rising security concerns.

UK unveils critical minerals strategy to curb dependence on China

The British government has unveiled a new critical minerals and rare earths strategy aimed at reducing dependence on China, which dominates global supplies essential for technologies ranging from electric vehicles to consumer electronics. Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced a GBP 50 million (USD 65 million) investment to scale up lithium and tungsten production in Cornwall, part of a broader plan to ensure Britain is not relying on any single country for more than 60 percent of a given critical mineral by 2035. [Government, UK 1]

The initiative comes amid mounting geopolitical tensions over supply chains, including a recent China–EU standoff over chip components for the car industry. London is trying to diversify away from Chinese-controlled materials, though developing domestic mining and processing capacity is expensive and slow. The UK currently meets only 6 percent of its critical-mineral needs domestically.

The strategy also builds on Britain's new cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia and broader efforts across Europe to secure refining capacity, particularly for lithium. Starmer characterized critical minerals as central to economic security, national resilience, and the transition to green technologies and AI infrastructure. [The Guardian] [Arab News]

Starmer is expected to travel to China at the end of January, which would mark the first visit by a UK leader since 2018. The Labour government has made stabilizing relations with Beijing a priority as it seeks foreign investment to support its economic revival agenda.

London to approve controversial Chinese embassy construction

The potential visit comes at a sensitive moment as the UK government is expected to approve China's plan to build a vast new embassy complex in central London, following security assessments by MI5 and MI6 that reportedly did not recommend blocking the project. The 20,000-square-metre site would become China's largest diplomatic mission in Europe, despite concerns from some politicians and security experts that its location near sensitive data infrastructure could present espionage risks. [Grand Pinnacle Tribune]

The decision has been repeatedly postponed due to its political sensitivity. Approval is likely to intensify domestic debate over the Starmer government's push to stabilize relations with Beijing. Critics, including senior Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, argue the move underestimates security threats and sends the wrong message after a recent UK espionage case collapsed due to insufficient evidence of Chinese activity. [BBC]

MI5 warns of expanding Chinese espionage effort targeting UK lawmakers and institutions

In addition, MI5, the UK's internal security and intelligence service, has issued a fresh alert to British lawmakers warning that Chinese intelligence officers are actively trying to gather information and shape political outcomes by posing as corporate recruiters—often through LinkedIn outreach. The MI5 notice also highlights tactics such as offering fully funded trips to China and compensating sources with cash or cryptocurrency. Those reportedly targeted range from parliamentary employees and economists to think-tank staff, geopolitical analysts, and others working with the government, including MPs and peers.

Parliamentary leaders said the Chinese Ministry of State Security is directly behind these operations, which involve large-scale contact efforts by individuals using front companies and headhunter profiles.

Security Minister Dan Jarvis called the alleged activity a deliberate attempt to infiltrate UK political processes and announced new countermeasures, including upgraded encryption for civil servants, stricter

donation rules, and additional guidance for election candidates. Britain will also brief universities amid concerns that China is trying to influence academic research. [Government, UK 2]

The warning comes at a politically sensitive moment: a high-profile espionage case against two British men collapsed for lack of evidence, leading critics to accuse the government of soft-pedalling on China to repair bilateral relations. It also precedes a decision on whether to approve a large new Chinese embassy in London, which opponents view as a security risk. [BBC] [Reuters]

China dismissed the allegations calling them "pure slander," and urging London "to stop those phantom allegations and the false projection." [Chinese Embassy in London] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

London to target China with scrapping low-value import exemption

In the latest development, Britain announced on November 25 plans to end the tariff exemption for imported items priced under GBP 135 (USD 178), a move expected to generate roughly GBP 500 million (USD 659 million) annually. The policy aims to level the playing field between UK retailers—who pay tariffs on bulk imports—and overseas e-commerce platforms, particularly those shipping low-cost goods from China.

While the government argues that consumer price effects will be minimal, the decision reflects growing global efforts to close low-value import loopholes, following similar actions by the United States and upcoming EU measures. [Reuters]

China, Russia deepen strategic military cooperation

(dql) China and Russia used a new round of high-level military talks in Moscow to signal a further tightening of their strategic partnership, particularly in missile defence and nuclear-related cooperation. During meetings between General Zhang Youxia, first-ranked Vice-Chairman of China's Central Military Commission, and visiting Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov on November 20, both sides committed to expanding senior-level exchanges and deepening collaboration in sensitive defence technologies. [Ministry of Defense, China]

Parallel talks between their foreign ministries focused on missile defence and strategic stability, with

negotiators warning of emerging threats to global security and agreeing to intensify joint work. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia]

These engagements unfold as the United States under President Trump pursues an ambitious missile-shield project—dubbed the "Golden Dome"—and hints at resuming nuclear testing, steps that have prompted anxiety in both Beijing and Moscow. With the last US-Russia nuclear arms-limit treaty nearing expiration and no new agreement in sight, China and Russia are placing greater emphasis on their own strategic forces and highlighting recent demonstrations of nuclear capability.

Beijing unveiled a fully developed nuclear triad—air-, sea- and land-based delivery systems—during its September 3 military parade and has signaled in its upcoming five-year plan that bolstering strategic deterrence is a national priority. Moscow, for its part, announced successful tests of the Poseidon nuclear-powered underwater drone and the Burevestnik long-range nuclear cruise missile, underscoring its push toward novel, hard-to-intercept weapons. [SCMP] [Reuters]

China warns of enslavement risks for Central African Republic's illegal gold mining sector

(dql) China's embassy in the Central African Republic (CAR) issued an unusually stark alert warning that Chinese migrants working in the country's informal gold sector risk falling into "slave-like" conditions, amid reports of killings, kidnappings, scams, and forced labor. As economic pressures at home drive more Chinese workers to Africa's unregulated mining belts, many are being exploited by local partners, targeted by armed groups, or caught in militia conflicts across CAR, Congo, Ghana and Mali.

Beijing's warning reflects both the severe insecurity in CAR and China's growing concern about the safety of its citizens as more seek opportunities abroad. Officially championing non-interference, China has for long abstained from public criticism of partner states, especially in Africa. However, increased danger to its nationals from the Sahel to the Congo Basin — including repeated kidnappings — is pushing Beijing toward more assertive consular diplomacy and public messaging. [Reuters] [Modern Diplomacy]

Brazil clears Chinese hospital ship as U.S. vessel also heads to region

(dql) Brazil has approved a week-long port call for China's PLA Navy hospital ship Ark Silk Road in Rio de Janeiro this coming January, ending a protracted internal review that had raised concerns within Brazil's navy and foreign ministry. The ship's request initially omitted that the visit is part of Harmony Mission 2025, a global humanitarian deployment, prompting questions about its purpose.

The clearance coincides with the scheduled arrival of the U.S. research vessel Ronald H. Brown at another Brazilian port, underscoring the growing naval footprint of both China and the United States in Latin America. Washington has intensified patrols in the Caribbean and northern South America, while Beijing is deepening its maritime and port presence across the region.

Brazil, under President Lula, has criticized U.S. military activity in the region and positioned itself as a mediator in regional disputes. At the same time, it has expanded security and naval cooperation with China, including renewed defense exchanges since 2023. The Ark Silk Road's visit marks the resumption of significant Chinese naval port calls in Brazil after a decade. [SCMP]

Brazil's approval came shortly after the U.S. announced a new military campaign in Latin America, heightening fears of escalatory action in a region already tense over Washington's expanding naval presence. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth unveiled "Operation Southern Spear," describing it as a mission to eliminate "narco-terrorists" and protect the U.S. homeland, but offered no operational details. The announcement comes as the Trump administration continues an aggressive anti-drug deployment across the Caribbean and eastern Pacific, which has already included strikes on roughly 20 vessels and dozens of fatalities since September.

The lack of clarity around the new operation has fueled concern that Washington may be preparing for broader military action, especially after reports that senior commanders have presented President Trump with updated options for strikes inside Venezuela. Caracas, viewing the U.S. build-up as a veiled push for regime change—a view shared by China—, has launched a nationwide military mobilization in response to the arrival of a U.S. aircraft carrier group, F-35 fighters in Puerto Rico, and additional Navy ships in the Caribbean. [DW] [China Military]

China reinforces political trust, expands economic outreach in New Zealand

(dql) Zhao Leji, chairman of China's National People's Congress Standing Committee, used a rare visit to New Zealand to reaffirm political goodwill and press for deeper economic cooperation at a time when Wellington's ties with Beijing have seen minor strains, particularly over recent parliamentary engagement with Taiwan. [CGTN]

During talks with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, Zhao stressed respect for each other's "core interests" — diplomatic language underscoring Beijing's sensitivity over Taiwan — while welcoming New Zealand's continued adherence to the one-China policy.

Both sides highlighted the resilience of their long-standing relationship and signaled interest in expanding cooperation in trade, education, tourism, and emerging sectors such as green technology and the digital economy. China extended its visa-free regime for New Zealanders and praised growing parliamentary links, framing them as useful for stabilizing ties and shaping global governance in directions more favorable to Beijing.

Zhao's stop in New Zealand, followed by a trip to Australia, fits into China's broader diplomatic push to mend and strengthen ties with key partners in the Pacific amid ongoing geopolitical competition with the United States. Economic engagement remains central: Beijing promised new commercial opportunities under its next five-year plan, while senior New Zealand ministers continue to engage China through trade missions and new industry deals. [SCMP]

In parallel, New Zealand has awarded China's Guangzhou Shipyard International a NZD 596 million (USD 335 million) contract to build two hybrid-powered ro-pax ferries, part of a broader NZD 1.866 billion (USD 1.045 billion) program to modernize the Cook Strait fleet and upgrade port infrastructure.

The vessels, ordered by state-owned KiwiRail, are expected to significantly boost passenger and freight capacity and adopt a hybrid diesel–electric system to improve environmental performance. [Marine News]

China reaffirms support for Maduro amid rising US military pressure in Venezuela

(dql) China has publicly reinforced its political alignment with Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro at a moment of heightened friction between Caracas and Washington. In a congratulatory message, President Xi Jinping underscored Beijing's commitment to Venezuela's sovereignty and condemned what he framed as foreign intrusion—an implicit rebuke of the United States' expanded military activities in the Caribbean under Operation Southern Spear. [SCMP 1]

Russia issued a parallel show of support, signaling coordinated backing from two major US rivals. This follows the Venezuelan National Assembly's approval of a 15-year extension for two oil joint ventures between state firm PDVSA and Petromost, a Moscow-based unit of Russia's Roszarubezhneft, allowing operations at the Boquerón and Perijá fields to run through 2041. Roszarubezhneft—created after Washington sanctioned Rosneft subsidiaries for trading Venezuelan oil—now holds the Russian stake in these ventures. [Reuters]

Washington's deployment of warships, its designation of a Venezuelan military-linked network as a terrorist organization, and heightened US surveillance operations have intensified regional unease. This has prompted regional leaders—most notably Colombia's President Gustavo Petro—to call for a broader security dialogue involving China, the United States, and regional powers to prevent further escalation. [CNN] [SCMP 2]

The security atmosphere deteriorated further after the US Federal Aviation Administration warned of risks in Venezuelan airspace, leading several international airlines to suspend flights. Meanwhile, senior US military leadership continues to visit troops engaged in counternarcotics operations near Venezuela, underlining Washington's sustained pressure campaign. [MENAFN]

India and Canada move toward major uranium pact as both sides restart trade negotiations

(lm) India and Canada are advancing on two parallel tracks to rebuild ties after a prolonged diplomatic freeze. According to Canadian media, the two governments are close to finalizing a long-term uranium export agreement valued at about USD 2.8

billion, with supplies expected to come from Cameco Corp under a ten-year arrangement. The deal would form part of an expanded civil-nuclear partnership that both countries have reaffirmed as a strategic priority. Officials have not yet confirmed the reported details, but the negotiations come at a moment of broader political recalibration.

On the sidelines of the G20 summit in Johannesburg, the two prime ministers agreed to restart stalled talks on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement designed to double bilateral trade to USD 50 billion by 2030. Canada's leader noted that the negotiations could push the volume to more than CAD 70 billion and emphasized India's significance as the world's fifth-largest economy. The decision marks the first substantive step toward re-engagement after Ottawa halted trade discussions in 2023, when it accused New Delhi of involvement in the killing of a Canadian Sikh separatist—an allegation India rejected. Despite that episode, two-way trade continued to rise, reaching roughly CAD 31 billion (USD 21.98 billion) in 2024, driven largely by Canada's services surplus.

Relations began to improve after the two leaders met at the G7 summit in June 2025 in Kananaskis, and Canada has since made diversifying beyond the United States a central economic priority. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

India-U.S. defense ties deepen as trade talks continue under elevated tariffs

(lm/ppms) The United States has approved a USD 93 million sale of advanced military equipment to India, including the Javelin anti-tank missile system and Excalibur precision-guided artillery projectiles. U.S. officials describe the transfer as strengthening India's role as a major defense partner in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia. The approval follows India's recent reorder of General Electric engines for its domestically produced Tejas fighter aircraft, underscoring continued defense-industrial cooperation despite ongoing tariff disputes. [Reuters]

The closer defense partnership also extends to naval cooperation. During a high-level visit to Washington, Admiral R. Hari Kumar Tripathi, the Chief of the Indian Navy, held strategic discussions with Pentagon officials and U.S. Navy leadership on interoperability, joint maritime operations, technology sharing, and the integration of advanced surveillance, communications, and unmanned systems. Both sides reiterated their support for freedom of navigation and maritime rule of

law across the Indo-Pacific and highlighted the importance of coordinated approaches to piracy and the security of sea lanes. Analysts cited in the reporting view the visit as reflecting a wider trend of deepening strategic alignment between New Delhi and Washington amid shifting regional dynamics. [ANI News]

These military developments unfold alongside a complex trade environment shaped by Washington's decision earlier this year to raise tariffs on Indian imports to 50 percent. Reuters reporting indicates that India's strong domestic economy and a smaller-than-expected drop in exports are giving New Delhi greater flexibility in ongoing trade negotiations. Indian exports to the United States fell 8.6 percent year-on-year in October, which was a milder decline than the 12 percent drop seen in September after the tariffs took effect.

Government officials and exporters attribute this resilience to broader economic momentum, diversification into African, European, and Middle Eastern markets, selective discounting to maintain U.S. clients, and recent domestic tax cuts that reduced production costs. India's economy grew 7 percent in the July–September quarter and is projected by the central bank to expand 6.8 percent for the full financial year. Officials cited in the reporting expect that Washington may eventually reduce the tariff linked to Russian oil purchases and potentially move toward a 15 percent overall rate, while India is prepared to lower its own import duties on more than 80 percent of goods, excluding sensitive sectors such as agriculture. [Reuters]

India and Afghanistan revive trade channels as Kabul seeks alternatives to Pakistan

(lm) India and Afghanistan are expanding their trade links as Afghan ministers visit New Delhi to secure new transport routes and commercial cooperation. The push comes after Pakistan—Afghanistan's main transit corridor—closed key border crossings following armed clashes, disrupting the movement of Afghan goods.

During meetings in India's capital, New Delhi, Afghanistan's Taliban Trade Minister Al-Haj Nooruddin Azizi asked India to increase trade, open cargo hubs in Afghanistan and support new routes for Afghan exports. India confirmed that air cargo services between the two countries will begin soon. According to an Indian foreign ministry official, freight corridors

connecting Kabul, the Afghan capital, with the Indian cities of Delhi and Amritsar in northern India have already been "activated," and flights will start once Afghan paperwork is completed. Indian airlines currently do not fly to Afghanistan because Pakistan has closed its airspace to them, but Afghan airlines continue passenger flights between Kabul and Delhi. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Afghanistan also requested that India expand use of the Chabahar Port in Iran, which India operates and which provides sea access for Afghan cargo without passing through Pakistan. Kabul asked New Delhi to help set up scheduled shipping services from Chabahar and to ease cargo handling at Nhava Sheva, India's largest container port, located near Mumbai on the country's west coast. Afghanistan further proposed that India support the development of dry ports in Nimroz, a southwestern Afghan province bordering Iran.

Afghan officials told Reuters that trade routed through Iran and Central Asia has recently grown faster than shipments through Pakistan due to repeated border closures. The Afghan commerce ministry reported that over the past six months, trade with Iran reached USD 1.6 billion, compared to USD 1.1 billion with Pakistan. [Reuters 3]

Azizi's visit also involved discussions on investment, joint ventures, and support for Afghan exporters. Meetings took place with India's Minister of State for Commerce in New Delhi, and with India's foreign minister. According to statements from both sides, the agenda covered expanding bilateral trade, improving connectivity and strengthening Afghanistan's role in regional transit routes.

India and Afghanistan have historically had friendly ties, although New Delhi does not recognize the current Taliban government. Even so, India has recently increased contact, reopening its embassy in Kabul, which had been closed in 2021 after the Taliban took power following the withdrawal of U.S.-led NATO forces. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Indonesia immigration arrests Chinese real estate figure sought for USD 138 million loan case

(ms) Indonesia has detained a Chinese real estate executive wanted in his home country over a USD 138 million loan default, immigration officials announced on 19 November. The 58-year-old man, identified only

as WZ, was arrested in Batam, Riau Islands, on 14 November following a request from the Chinese embassy in Jakarta. According to Agus Waluyo, the immigration intelligence director, WZ previously served as president and director of a Chinese property firm that failed to repay CNY 980 million (about USD 137.8 million) in corporate loans. Chinese authorities launched a financial crime investigation after the default and issued a wanted notice when he fled the country.

Indonesian immigration officials said WZ had been moving between several Asian nations since August before entering Indonesia on 7 October. He is now in detention while authorities coordinate with Chinese officials on the next steps. The arrest comes as Southeast Asian governments increasingly detain foreign nationals wanted for financial crimes, with Indonesia recently handling several cases involving fugitives linked to loan fraud, embezzlement, and online scam operations. [The Jakarta Post]

UK, Indonesia seal USD 5.24 billion maritime deal with major shipbuilding partnership

(ms) Britain and Indonesia have finalized a maritime partnership worth GBP 4 billion (USD 5.24 billion), enabling the joint development of naval and civilian vessels in a move expected to deepen strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The agreement, led by British defense firm Babcock, was announced on November 21 and will be formally highlighted by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer during a call with President Prabowo Subianto.

Under the Maritime Partnership Program, the two countries will co-develop vessels for Indonesia's navy and more than 1,000 boats for its fishing fleet. While construction will take place in Indonesia, British technical expertise will be embedded throughout the program, securing an estimated 1,000 jobs in the UK across Babcock facilities in Rosyth, Bristol and Devonport.

For Indonesia, the deal brings large-scale investment into domestic shipbuilding, supports maritime security goals and reinforces President Prabowo's push to upgrade the fisheries sector and bolster food security. In Britain, the agreement is the latest in a series of major defense export wins following multi-billion-pound deals with Norway and Türkiye.

Both governments framed the cooperation as a signal of their shared commitment to Indo-Pacific stability, including freedom of navigation and a rules-based maritime order. The partnership also includes plans for technology transfer, joint research in advanced shipbuilding, and expanded naval training and interoperability. [Reuters] [UK Government]

Japan rejects China's complaint over Taiwan remark at United Nations

(dql) Japan has formally rejected China's call for Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to withdraw her recent Taiwan-related remarks, with Ambassador Kazuyuki Yamazaki informing the U.N. Secretary General that Tokyo's defense posture remains strictly defensive and consistent with its long-standing one-China policy. He stressed that Japan's stance on Taiwan has not shifted since the 1972 normalization agreement and reiterated that cross-Strait issues must be resolved peacefully.

Beijing, by contrast, accuses Tokyo of signaling a readiness to intervene militarily in a Taiwan crisis—an allegation Japan denies. [The Straits Times]

Japan reasserts U.S. alignment as amid deepening rift with China over Taiwan remarks

(dql) Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi reaffirmed strong coordination with Washington in a November 24 phone call initiated by U.S. President Donald Trump, shortly after Trump spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping (see article in this edition). [Prime Minister's Office, Japan]

The conversation comes amid heightened friction between Tokyo and Beijing, triggered by Takaichi's recent warning that a Chinese attack or blockade targeting Taiwan could endanger Japan's security and potentially justify support operations alongside the United States.

While Trump has not clarified his view on Takaichi's Taiwan-related remarks, Beijing claims he acknowledged the sensitivity of the issue in his discussion with Xi. Tokyo, meanwhile, stresses that steady U.S.–China relations are vital for regional stability but avoids commenting on the substance of the Trump-Xi exchange. [Kyodo News] [CNBC]

Japan sets landmark precedent with first patriot interceptor export to U.S.

(dql) Japan has exported complete Patriot PAC-3 missile interceptors to the United States for the first time, following newly relaxed export rules that allow shipment of U.S.-licensed defense products beyond components. Washington requested the missiles to replenish its own stockpiles as it continues supplying air-defense systems to Ukraine.

Japan manufactures the PAC-3 interceptors under U.S. license, and the Defense Ministry confirmed they will be used exclusively by U.S. forces, not transferred to third countries. [Kyodo News] [The EurAsian Times]

Japan is the only country outside the U.S. licensed to assemble PAC-3 MSE interceptors, and production capacity—currently projected to reach around 600 units in 2025—is expected to expand to roughly 750 by 2027 through broader international supply-chain participation, especially from European firms.

Despite the export-rule revisions, Japan's missiles are unlikely to be sent directly to Ukraine, as sales to countries in active conflict remain prohibited. A replenishment "round-robin" system—where U.S.-made interceptors go to Ukraine while Japan backfills U.S. inventories—remains a theoretical option but would require explicit U.S. approval. [Defense Express]

Japan to purchase additional U.S. precision-guided munitions

(ay) The U.S. State Department has approved a new military sale to Japan worth an estimated USD 82 million, expanding Tokyo's stockpile of precision-guided air-launched weapons. The package adds to an earlier FMS case valued at USD 81.04 million and includes up to 120 GBU-39 Small Diameter Bombs (SDB-I), 28 GBU-53 SDB-IIs, multiple Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) tail kits, and general-purpose bombs ranging from 500 to 2,000 pounds. The sale also covers fuzes, laser sensors, training munitions, support equipment, software, and logistics services. [DSCA] [The Defense Post]

Vietnam–Laos defense ministries conclude major trade promotion fair in

Vientiane

(ms) and Laos have concluded a four-day trade connection and product promotion fair in Vientiane (November 20–23), an event notable for being jointly overseen by the two countries' ministries of national defense. While both militaries have long cooperated in training and border management, the defense-directed organization of a commercial fair underscores the expanding economic role of military-linked enterprises in bilateral relations.

The event featured nearly 120 booths, including 50 operated by 26 firms under the Vietnam People's Army and 62 booths from 42 Vietnamese civilian enterprises. Lao companies—both private and military-affiliated—were represented across 20 booths. Exhibits ranged from consumer goods and agricultural products to industrial materials designed for the Lao and wider ASEAN markets.

A Vietnam–Laos investment promotion conference took place on November 21, and around 30 companies participated in in-person and online business-matching sessions, with the organizing committee expected to continue facilitating follow-up connections. Officials expect the fair's outcomes to support the countries' shared goal of raising bilateral trade toward USD 5 billion in the coming years.

The fair formed part of a broader uptick in Vietnam–Laos cooperation ahead of Laos's 50th National Day on December 2. Earlier this week, the Vietnam People's Army reaffirmed it will provide full logistical support for the anniversary parade, while recent investment promotion events in Hanoi highlighted new incentives for cross-border logistics, infrastructure connectivity, and border trade upgrades.

Alongside commercial exchanges, the fair included socio-political initiatives—donations to Lao ministries, cultural exhibitions, and joint performances—reflecting the increasingly multi-dimensional nature of Vietnam–Laos cooperation, where economic engagement, defense ties, and public diplomacy continue to converge. [Lao News Agency 1] [Lao News Agency 2] [Lao News Agency 3] [Lao News Agency 4]

Laos hands over three Thai fugitives as cross-border drug suppression cooperation deepens

Laos handed over three Thai nationals wanted on drug-related charges to Thai authorities on November 20, marking another step in strengthened cross-border law enforcement cooperation. The transfer took place at the First Lao–Thai Friendship Bridge in Vientiane, where Lao security officials coordinated closely with their Thai counterparts to execute the handover of the fugitives, who had crossed into Laos to evade arrest warrants.

The operation is part of expanded bilateral efforts to curb transnational drug trafficking, especially along shared border areas where criminal networks have attempted to exploit gaps in surveillance. According to Thailand's Office of the Narcotics Control Board, the latest transfer stems directly from commitments made at the 20th Thailand–Laos Ministerial Meeting on Drug Prevention and Suppression in December 2024.

Authorities said that cooperation this year has already led to the arrest and repatriation of 17 Thai fugitives hiding in Laos, with the latest handover bringing the total to 20 in 2025. Lao officials reiterated that the country will not serve as a refuge for drug offenders, emphasizing ongoing measures by the Ministry of Public Security to prevent criminal groups from using Lao territory to evade prosecution. [The Laotian Times]

EU and Lao PDR mark 50 years of diplomatic relations with high-level meeting

(ms) Laos and the European Union marked the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations on November 21 with a high-level meeting in Brussels between Lao Foreign Minister Thongsavan Phomvihane and EU High Representative Kaja Kallas. Both sides exchanged congratulatory letters and highlighted the steady strengthening of ties over five decades.

The EU reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Laos within the broader ASEAN–EU Strategic Partnership, including assistance for Laos's upcoming 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. Cooperation will continue to focus on governance, economic transformation, connectivity, and regional integration, with both parties pledging to deepen their rules-based, future-oriented partnership. [Lao News Agency]

Laos and Luxembourg reaffirm commitment to deepen bilateral

cooperation

(ms) Laos and Luxembourg reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties during Foreign Minister Thongsavanh Phomvihane's official visit to Luxembourg from November 16–18. Minister Thongsavanh met Deputy Prime Minister Xavier Bettel on November 18 for talks reviewing progress since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1997.

Luxembourg, considered one of Laos's key development partners, has long provided support in public health, education, tourism, labor and social welfare, UXO clearance, finance, rural development, and infrastructure—often through international organizations. Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation in priority sectors, enhance the implementation of joint programmed, expand trade and investment links, and increase high-level exchanges.

They also reaffirmed mutual support in multilateral forums, with Laos expressing gratitude for Luxembourg's sustained assistance. [Lao News Agency]

China, Malaysia deepen ties with train delivery and new push for cooperation in durian sector

(ea) Malaysia's ties with China continue to broaden across infrastructure, economic, and technological sectors, as reflected in recent developments spanning rail transport, agriculture, and emerging industries.

China has completed the first batch of electric trains for Malaysia's East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), marking a major milestone in one of the country's largest infrastructure projects. The trains, developed at CRRC Dalian's facility in Liaoning, include two electric multiple units (EMUs) and two electric locomotives.

CRRC Dalian, a subsidiary of CRRC Corporation Limited — the world's largest rolling stock manufacturer — will ultimately supply 11 EMUs and 12 locomotives for the project, along with long-term servicing, technical support, and training for Malaysian personnel. The completed units have already undergone factory commissioning and are expected to arrive in Malaysia by year-end, where the first EMU will undergo 8,000 kilometers of further testing.

The 600-kilometer ECRL, built by China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), is

scheduled to begin operations in early 2027. Once completed, it will link the east and west coasts of Peninsular Malaysia, significantly enhancing domestic connectivity and deepening Malaysia–China infrastructure cooperation. [Malay Mail] [Asia News Network]

Parallel to the progress on the ECRL, Malaysia is calling for broader economic collaboration with China across high-growth sectors. Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has urged Chinese partners to expand cooperation in the Musang King premium durian industry, where Malaysian exports to China have surged to nearly MYR 1 billion (USD 240 million) last year. He highlighted opportunities in downstream processing, plantation development, and strengthening the value chain to meet China's growing demand for premium durians.

Zahid also underscored the strategic importance of deepening ties with China in the digital economy, citing Beijing's rapid advances in artificial intelligence, robotics, and technical education. Expanding joint ventures, boosting digital skills, and supporting small and medium enterprises, he said, will be crucial as Malaysia positions itself for the next decade of ASEAN growth.

In addition, he called for greater cooperation in the green transition, welcoming potential Chinese investment and technology partnerships in solar energy, electric mobility, green manufacturing, and smart agriculture. Such collaboration, Zahid emphasized, could help create new industries and employment opportunities as Malaysia accelerates its sustainability agenda. [Bernama]

Malaysia prime minister pledges support of South Africa to join several international bodies

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has asked South African President Cyril Ramaphosa to support Malaysia's candidacies for several key international bodies, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), and the UN Security Council (UNSC).

The request was made during Anwar's courtesy call on Ramaphosa as part of his working visit to Johannesburg for the G20 Leaders' Summit, where Malaysia is participating as ASEAN Chair for 2025.

Anwar said Malaysia aims to deepen cooperation with South Africa based on mutual trust and shared development goals. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia removes agricultural tariffs to deepen trade cooperation with Kenya

(tl) Malaysia has decided to lift tariffs on Kenyan agricultural products and beef, a move welcomed by President William Ruto as a major boost for Kenyan farmers and bilateral trade as he held a joint press conference with Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim following a bilateral meeting on November 24.

During the talks, both countries committed to expanding cooperation in education, STEM, research, and human capital development. Malaysia will support Kenya's ambitions to develop semiconductor technology and manufacturing capabilities through the strategic partnership.

Ruto also noted opportunities to extend private-public partnerships with Malaysian companies in Kenya's large-scale infrastructure plans, including the expansion of highways and road networks. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Malaysia aims to upgrade bilateral ties to a strategic partnership covering agricultural sectors and new technological areas, expressing confidence in Kenya's future growth.

Anwar's visit to Kenya saw the signing of several agreements, including MoUs on tourism, air services, and cooperation between business chambers, along with a letter of intent between Nairobi City County and Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

Kenya remains Malaysia's third-largest African trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching USD 777 million (MYR 3.7 billion) between January and August 2024. Kenya currently exports tea, coffee, flowers, avocados, titanium ore, and beef to Malaysia, while Malaysia imports mainly edible oils, chemical products, electronics, and rubber. [Free Malaysia Today]

Maldives' judiciary signs five-year cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia

(lm) The Maldives and Saudi Arabia have signed a five-year agreement to deepen cooperation between their judicial institutions, marking the first formal partnership of its kind between the Maldivian judiciary and an Arab Islamic country. The MoU was concluded

in Riyadh on November 23 between Chief Justice Abdul Ghanee Mohamed and Saudi Justice Minister Dr. Walid Al-Samani.

According to the Maldivian Supreme Court, the agreement commits both sides to sustained collaboration on judicial systems, administrative procedures and professional capacity-building for judges and court staff. It also provides for the exchange of information on judicial practice as well as joint training programs, conferences and expert visits. [The Sun]

Mongolia, South Korea to expand cooperation in multiple sectors

(fs) Mongolia and South Korea renewed their commitment to broad bilateral cooperation during the 9th Intergovernmental Joint Committee Meeting held in Ulaanbaatar on November 19.

The meeting, co-chaired by Cabinet Secretariat Minister of Mongolia Byambatsogt Sandag and South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Jina, covered trade, investment, mineral resources, energy, transport, environmental protection, education, healthcare, and civil service reform.

Both sides agreed to encourage Korean companies to participate in open tenders for major industrial projects in Mongolia, including planned steel smelting and copper processing facilities. Mongolia raised concerns about the significant trade imbalance, noting exports of just over USD 50 million compared with imports exceeding USD 500 million, and called for improved access for agricultural and livestock products. [Montsame]

They reaffirmed cooperation in mineral resources, particularly rare metals, agreeing to combine Mongolia's resource base with Korea's refining and processing capabilities. The planned Korea-Mongolia Rare Metals Cooperation Center, expected to open by year's end, is aimed to facilitate technical collaboration. [The Korea Post]

Mongolia, Bulgaria to expand road and air transport cooperation

(fs) Ambassador of Mongolia to Bulgaria Lkhagvasuren Sayanaa and Bulgaria's Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications Dimitar Nedyalkov signed two

bilateral agreements on international road transport and air transport.

The agreements establish the basis for direct transport links, which are expected to support mobility, trade, and broader economic development. Transport operators will benefit from more favorable conditions, as well as transparent and equal regulatory frameworks. [Bulgarian News Agency]

Mongolia, Italy discuss expanding cooperation in justice and security

(fs) Minister of Justice and Home Affairs of Mongolia Nambaryn Enkhbayar held a meeting with Italy's Ambassador to Mongolia Giovanna Piccarreta.

Enkhbayar reiterated his intention to further deepen collaboration, particularly in legal and security fields, highlighting the value of sharing expertise, training officials and strengthening technical capacities. Piccarreta reaffirmed Italy's commitment to advancing cooperation in legal and internal affairs, noting that the partnership continues to grow based on mutual trust. [Ansa]

Mongolia, Switzerland sign climate cooperation agreement

(fs) The Governments of Mongolia and Switzerland signed a bilateral agreement on November 23 to enhance cooperation in climate policy implementation and sustainable development under the Paris Agreement, on the sidelines of the 30th Conference of the Parties, the annual UN climate meeting held in Belém, Brazil, from November 6 to 21.

The accord was signed by Mongolia's Minister of Environment and Climate Change Batbaatar Bat and Switzerland's Minister of the Environment, Transport, Energy, and Communications Albert Rösti. It builds on commitments made during Swiss President Viola Amherd's visit to Mongolia in August 2024, when both countries pledged to deepen collaboration on climate action (see AiR No. 32, August/2024, 1).

The agreement represents a notable advancement in bilateral climate diplomacy, reinforcing both countries' commitment to climate resilience, low-carbon development, and international cooperation under the Paris Agreement. [Montsame]

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change that was adopted by 195 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference in 2015. Its main goals are to limit global warming to well below 2° C.

NUG foreign minister meets Australia's Penny Wong to discuss Myanmar crisis

(anl) The National Unity Government (NUG) announced that its Foreign Minister, Daw Zin Mar Aung, met with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong on November 17 at Parliament House in Canberra to discuss developments in Myanmar.

According to the NUG, the discussion focused on humanitarian needs, transnational crimes, and regional peace and stability. Reportedly, Daw Zin Mar Aung briefed Minister Penny Wong on ongoing efforts to restore democracy in Myanmar, key priorities related to civilian protection, and approaches for securing practical international support. She also emphasized the need to reject any processes that entrench military rule and presented the NUG's roadmap for an inclusive federal democratic union. [Mizzima]

Myanmar accuses US of hidden agenda in anti-scam campaign

(anl) Myanmar's military has accused the United States of pursuing a "hidden agenda" through its newly announced campaign targeting online fraud and gambling operations in Southeast Asia, including major scam hubs along the Myanmar-Thai border. The military claimed there was no evidence of US-led activities inside Myanmar and argued that Washington was using online scams as a pretext to advance broader political objectives.

On November 12, the US Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia announced the formation of a Scam Center Strike Force (SCSF) under the Department of Justice to protect Americans from cyber-fraud schemes—particularly cryptocurrency-related scams—believed to be based in Southeast Asia. The unit stated that FBI agents have been deployed to Bangkok to work with the Royal Thai Police War Room Task Force in targeting scam hubs, including KK Park in Karen State.

Highlighting recent operations in Myawaddy, the military said security forces had raided Shwe Kokko—one of the three major scam compounds mentioned in his briefing—arresting 346 foreign nationals and seizing nearly 10,000 mobile phones allegedly used for online gambling. He further claimed the junta had destroyed "100 percent" of the buildings at another notorious hub, KK Park, to prevent any chance of scam operations returning.

Echoing earlier rhetoric that implicitly faulted Thailand, he asserted that roughly 99.5 percent of foreign nationals involved in online scams had entered Myanmar through the neighboring country, adding that scam syndicates relied heavily on cross-border connectivity, electricity, and financial flows. He also pointed to cooperation with regional partners, citing the China-Myanmar Joint Task Force in Laukkai and the Myanmar-Thailand-China Trilateral Cooperation mechanism in Myawaddy, as evidence of Myanmar's commitment to combating online crime.

The comments came shortly after Thailand extradited Chinese businessman, She Zhijiang—widely regarded as the mastermind behind Shwe Kokko—to China. [The Irrawaddy]

US lawmakers urge Trump administration to reject general election in Myanmar

(anl) The US Congress has called on the Trump administration to publicly denounce the upcoming general election as a sham and to appoint a Special Representative and Policy Coordinator to lead US efforts in addressing the country's deepening crisis.

In a joint statement, lawmakers from two subcommittees of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs emphasized that the United States "must continue to stand with the people of Burma as they pursue freedom, dignity, and a democratic future." The bipartisan statement followed a congressional hearing held on November 19.

During the hearing, international experts warned that Myanmar has evolved into a global hub of organized crime, posing a direct national security threat to the United States. They cautioned that any regime formed through the junta-controlled election would further destabilize Myanmar, the broader region, and US interests in the Indo-Pacific and at home. International experts urged Congress to reject the junta's electoral process and to take stronger action to protect Americans from Myanmar-based scam operations run

by Chinese transnational criminal networks operating under the protection of the military regime and its affiliated armed groups.

The Chairwoman of the East Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee also warned that the junta's planned elections are intended to create only "an illusion of legitimacy," enabling the regime to continue functioning as a proxy for China and Russia. She added that both countries have enabled the Myanmar military's atrocities by supplying weapons, surveillance technology, and diplomatic support. She further noted that Myanmar's junta-affiliated scamming networks have targeted Americans, stealing billions of dollars each year from US taxpayers, enriching transnational criminal networks and the Myanmar junta. [The Irrawaddy]

US ends temporary protected status for Myanmar nationals

(anl) On November 25, the Trump administration announced it would end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for immigrants from Myanmar, removing deportation protections for an estimated 4,000 people who have been living legally in the United States under the program.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said the decision followed a review of current conditions in Myanmar. While acknowledging that the country still faces "humanitarian challenges due in part to continued military operations against armed resistance," she argued that there have been improvements in "governance and stability at the national and local levels."

The reversal immediately drew sharp criticism from advocacy groups. Human Rights Watch (HRW) condemned the decision, calling the administration's reasoning "egregious." John Sifton, HRW's Asia advocacy director, noted that Myanmar's state of emergency—officially lifted in July—was promptly replaced with a new state of emergency and widespread martial law across townships in nine states and regions, reflecting persistent instability rather than improvement.

Rights groups warn that ending TPS places thousands of Myanmar nationals at risk of deportation to a country still engulfed in conflict and repression. [The Irrawaddy]

Pakistan advances maritime and defense outreach to Bangladesh amid ongoing broader thaw in bilateral ties

(lm) Pakistan has intensified diplomatic, maritime and defense engagement with Bangladesh, signaling continued momentum in a deeper reset in relations following Dhaka's political transition in August 2024. During talks in London, Pakistan proposed establishing a structured maritime cooperation framework to expand long-limited coordination between the two countries' shipping sectors. In parallel, a delegation from Heavy Industries Taxila, Pakistan's state-owned defense manufacturer, visited Dhaka to discuss expanded military cooperation with Bangladesh's army leadership.

In London, Pakistan's maritime affairs minister outlined a comprehensive partnership between the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation, the country's state-run merchant fleet operator, and the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation. The proposal envisions joint container and bulk shipping services, reciprocal port-call facilitation, cooperation on maritime safety, and technical and seafarer-training programs. Pakistan also pledged support for Bangladesh's candidacy in the International Maritime Organization's Category C elections and expects reciprocal backing in future multilateral maritime forums, including the International Labour Organization on seafarer matters. Islamabad argues that structured cooperation would strengthen both countries' ability to shape global maritime policy, expand regional trade routes and improve seafarer welfare.

It also reiterated an earlier offer to make Karachi Port Trust facilities available for Bangladeshi cargo and proposed launching a Pakistan–Bangladesh Maritime Dialogue as a standing platform for coordination on port development, shipping reforms, fisheries, the blue economy and emerging maritime issues. [Arab News 1]

This maritime overture coincides with renewed defense-sector engagement. Heavy Industries Taxila—a state-owned defense industrial complex and Pakistan's main producer of tanks, armored vehicles and related systems—briefed Bangladesh's army chief in Dhaka on its manufacturing capabilities and discussed opportunities for deeper cooperation. The meeting follows similar high-level military exchanges in late October, when Pakistan's senior leadership explored expanded joint training programs and professional exchanges with Bangladeshi counterparts. [Arab News 2]

Pakistani airspace ban on Indian aircraft extended amid continued post-conflict tensions

(lm) Pakistan has extended its airspace ban on Indian aircraft until December 24, continuing restrictions first imposed in April after a deadly attack in Indian-administered Kashmir triggered a cycle of tit-for-tat measures and culminated in a four-day India–Pakistan war in May. The Pakistan Airports Authority said the closure applies to all Indian-registered aircraft and aircraft owned, operated or leased by Indian airlines, including military flights, from ground level to unlimited altitude. This is the sixth extension of the ban, which has forced Indian carriers to reroute long-haul flights, increasing travel times, fuel burn and operating costs.

The continued closure has placed significant financial and operational strain on Air India, the only Indian carrier with a large international network. According to internal documents cited by Reuters, fuel costs on key routes have surged by up to 29 percent, journey times have increased by as much as three hours, and the airline estimates a yearly financial impact of around USD 455–600 million. In response, Air India is lobbying New Delhi to request that China open a sensitive military-controlled airspace corridor over Xinjiang — including access to airports at Hotan, Kashgar and Urumqi — to enable shorter routes to Europe and North America. The proposal comes only weeks after India and China resumed direct flights following a five-year freeze linked to border tensions.

The sought-after Xinjiang corridor lies within the People's Liberation Army's Western Theater Command and is normally avoided due to mountainous terrain, limited emergency divert options and its military sensitivity. Analysts cited in the reports say China is unlikely to approve the request, although the Indian government is reviewing the plea. Without alternative routings, Air India has already suspended its Delhi–Washington service and warns that nonstop links such as Mumbai–San Francisco and Bengaluru–San Francisco are becoming commercially unviable. Passengers have begun shifting to foreign carriers that can still overfly Pakistan, narrowing Air India's competitive advantage.

With the airspace ban showing no sign of easing, Air India has also asked the Indian government for temporary subsidies and expedited resolution of legacy tax disputes, arguing that the cash-flow burden from diverted routes and old tax liabilities threatens its recovery plans following recent safety challenges and

major fleet expansion commitments. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

More recently, these post-conflict pressures have formed the backdrop to another diplomatic dispute, after Pakistan condemned what it described as "dangerously revisionist" remarks by Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh regarding Sindh, Pakistan's southern coastal province that includes Karachi, the country's largest city. Singh had suggested that Sindh "civilizationally" belongs to India and could "return" to it in the future, comments Islamabad said reflect an expansionist mindset and undermine internationally recognized borders established during the 1947 partition of British India. [Arab News 3]

Islamabad and Doha expand police cooperation as Qatar funds new training infrastructure

(lm) Pakistan and Qatar have agreed to deepen cooperation between their law-enforcement agencies, with Doha committing support for a state-of-the-art firing range at the National Police Academy in Islamabad. The agreement was reached during a meeting in Doha between Pakistan's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi and Qatar's interior minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, where both sides reviewed regional security dynamics and existing bilateral cooperation.

Qatar's commitment to finance an advanced firing range is presented by Islamabad as a practical contribution to Pakistan's police-modernization agenda, at a time when the country is confronting an intensified militant threat across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Hours before Naqvi's meeting in Doha, three paramilitary personnel were killed in a suicide attack on the Federal Constabulary headquarters in Peshawar, underscoring the pressure on domestic security institutions. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia advance strategic defense ties and shift economic cooperation toward long-term investment

(lm) Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have used a high-level military visit to reaffirm and expand their strategic partnership, with both sides deepening defense, security and counter-terrorism cooperation while

simultaneously moving their economic engagement onto a longer-term, investment-driven footing.

During meetings in Islamabad, Saudi Arabia's Chief of General Staff, General Fayyadh bin Hameed Al-Rowaili, held separate talks with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, and Joint Chiefs Chairman General Sahir Shamshad Mirza. The discussions focused on regional security dynamics and practical steps to strengthen longstanding military cooperation. [Arab News 1]

The visit comes shortly after the two sides signed a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, under which any aggression against one country is to be treated as an attack on both—an arrangement reflecting heightened security concerns in the Middle East.

Alongside these military engagements, Pakistan's finance minister confirmed that Saudi Arabia's previously signaled USD 10 billion investment appetite remains unchanged, with both governments now transitioning away from crisis-era financial assistance toward commercially driven, business-to-business projects. Islamabad is preparing "bankable" private-sector proposals across minerals, IT, manufacturing, agriculture, food and tourism, a shift it attributes to early macroeconomic stabilization under its ongoing USD 7 billion IMF program.

A centerpiece for foreign investors is the Reko Diq copper-and-gold project, where financial closure is described as imminent. An International Finance Corporation–led consortium has assembled roughly USD 3.5 billion in project debt, with final approvals—especially from the U.S. Export-Import Bank—expected soon. Saudi-backed Manara Minerals has expressed interest in a 15 percent stake, aligning with Riyadh's broader resource-sector strategy. Islamabad expects Reko Diq to be a major export generator, potentially adding nearly USD 2.8 billion in its first year of operation. [Arab News 2]

Separately, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have resolved a longstanding issue regarding the legal status of Rohingya refugees who migrated from Karachi to the Kingdom in the 1960s. A formal agreement is expected to be signed in Saudi Arabia next week. During related discussions, Pakistan's interior minister and the Saudi ambassador also reviewed broader security cooperation, building on the momentum of the September defense pact. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

Philippines counters Chinese maneuvers at Scarborough Shoal amid claims of political interference

(ghd) Tensions between the Philippines and China have intensified following a series of maritime confrontations in the South China Sea and new allegations of foreign political interference within the Philippines. As Manila grapples with these challenges, it has received renewed diplomatic and material support from key international allies, including the G7 and the US.

Recent weeks have seen a spike in aggressive maneuvers in disputed waters, particularly around Scarborough Shoal and the Second Thomas Shoal. On November 21, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) monitored a significant Chinese presence at Scarborough Shoal. At least five China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels and two People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) warships were spotted in the area. During a routine maritime domain awareness flight, a Chinese jet fighter made a close pass near the Philippine aircraft, while a Chinese navy helicopter was also observed. On November 23, the PCG employed a counter-tactic by shadowing two larger CCG vessels near the same shoal.

Additionally, reports surfaced of electronic warfare tactics employed during a resupply mission to the BRP Sierra Madre on Second Thomas Shoal earlier in the month. According to Philippine officials, Chinese ships jammed communications during the mission, ostensibly to prevent US and allied drones from monitoring the operation. Despite the interference, the resupply was completed. [AP] [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

Beyond the maritime domain, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has raised alarms over potential foreign involvement in domestic political unrest. The military is currently investigating the funding sources behind a recent two-day protest rally organized by the United People's Initiative (UPI), which called for the resignation of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The AFP cited the "organized" logistics and "grand" preparations as indicators of significant financial backing, with the Chinese Communist Party being suspected of sowing discord in the Philippines. Organizers of the rally, primarily retired military and police officials, have vehemently denied these allegations. [Inquirer]

Amidst these friction points, the Philippines has welcomed strong diplomatic backing from the G7.

Following a meeting on November 12, G7 foreign ministers issued a joint statement reaffirming their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) expressed gratitude for the bloc's explicit opposition to the "use of force and coercion" in the South China Sea. The G7 statement criticized dangerous maneuvers and the use of water cannons, reiterating the significance of the 2016 Arbitral Award as a binding basis for resolving maritime disputes, a ruling Beijing continues to reject. [Manila Bulletin3]

Reinforcing this diplomatic support with material aid, the US has stepped up efforts to protect Filipino civilians operating in the South China Sea. As part of the USAID-funded "Fish Right Program," the US turned over 20 long-range radios, valued at over USD 110 thousand, to the National Maritime Center and local fisherfolk associations. This equipment is designed to improve sea-to-shore communication, allowing fisherfolk to report harassment by Chinese maritime militia and other threats more quickly to Philippine authorities. The turnover comes as coastal communities report worsening encounters with foreign vessels, underscoring the growing risks faced by civilians in the contested waters. [Manila Bulletin4]

Philippines, Japan deepen naval cooperation on operational interoperability

(ghd) The navies of the Philippines and Japan have pledged to deepen their defense cooperation, focusing specifically on enhancing operational interoperability. This commitment was reaffirmed following a high-level visit by senior Philippine Navy (PN) officials to Japan from November 20 to 22.

The PN delegation was led by Rear Adm. Joe Anthony C. Orbe, commander of the Philippine Fleet. They met with Vice Admiral Katsushi Omachi, commander of the Japan Self-Defense Fleet (JSDF), on November 20. Both commanders noted the growing frequency of joint activities and emphasized the need to align training and capabilities to ensure smoother future operations. Specifically, the parties' discussions focused on strengthening collaboration in maritime exercises and coordinating responses to humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR) scenarios.

On November 21, Orbe paid a courtesy call on Admiral Akira Saito, chief of staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. During tis visit, the leaders emphasized the importance of bolstering their collective capacity to

maintain stability and uphold a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

The visit was highlighted as a practical step in implementing the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which was signed in 2023. This agreement provides the legal framework for the rotational presence of forces and mutual logistical support, which officials underscored is crucial as both nations face shared security concerns in the East and South China Seas. [Manila Bulletin]

US grants Philippines tariff exemptions for agricultural exports

(ghd) The US has exempted more than USD 1 billion worth of Philippine agricultural products from its 19 percent reciprocal tariff, a move which is expected to strengthen the competitiveness of Filipino farm exports in the American market.

According to Philippine Trade Secretary Cristina Roque, US President Donald Trump signed the executive order on November 14, removing duties on select agricultural goods, particularly those not widely produced in the US. The newly exempted items include coconut oil (crude and refined), desiccated coconut, preserved coconut products, processed pineapples, bananas (other than pulp), dried mangoes, guavas and mangosteen, fruit juices, frozen tuna fillets, rice-wafer products, and various confectionery goods. These products collectively generated more than USD 1 billion in export value in 2024, based on government data cited by the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry.

Officials described the exemption as a major relief for agricultural industries struggling with the aftermath of recent typhoons, specifically the key sectors of coconut, banana, and pineapple. Trade and agriculture agencies are currently coordinating support for producers to expand output and fully maximize the country's improved access to the American market. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

Philippines, Palestine deepen ties with historic visit

(ghd) During a landmark visit to Manila, Palestinian Foreign Minister Varsen Aghabekian Shahin met with Philippine officials, resulting in a formal agreement to

hold regular political consultations between the two governments.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which was signed on November 18, establishes a structured mechanism for bilateral dialogue, with the first consultations scheduled for 2026. Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro described the agreement as a major step forward in building a "stronger and more dynamic cooperation," while also announcing plans for mutually beneficial programs, including technical and vocational education and capacity-building.

In the same meeting, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the two-state solution. Lazaro emphasized the Philippines' support for Palestinian statehood, calling it the "only viable path toward lasting peace and stability."

Shahin expressed appreciation for Manila's support for Palestinian self-determination, noting that the regular dialogue mechanism will help strengthen their cooperation on regional and international issues, including developments in Gaza. [Asia Times] [Manila Bulletin1] [Manila Bulletin2]

South Korea proposed inter-Korean talks remain unrecognized by North Korea

(sm/dql) North Korea has yet to respond to Seoul's proposal for military talks, even as its soldiers continue to make brief, unauthorized crossings of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). North Korean troops working near the border stepped over the line on November 19, prompting South Korea to issue warning messages and fire warning shots before the soldiers withdrew.

Seoul attributes the rising number of incursions to deteriorating MDL markers—many of which have been left unattended since the 1970s—and to increased North Korean activity inside the Demilitarized Zone, including new fencing and landmine emplacement. With roughly ten violations already recorded this year, South Korean officials warn that the risk of accidental clashes is growing.

Despite the uptick in border incidents, the defense ministry says it will await Pyongyang's response and has no plans to repeat its offer for talks. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times]

Meanwhile, South Korean police have sent 20 activists to prosecutors for allegedly launching more than 1,000

balloon-borne leaflets and materials toward North Korea from border areas, actions now deemed violations of aviation and disaster-safety laws.

The investigation resumed after Gyeonggi Province designated key border counties as “danger zones,” enabling authorities to treat the launches as public-safety threats despite a 2023 court ruling that struck down the earlier leaflet ban.

The case underscores Seoul’s effort to manage cross-border tensions and prevent civilian actions that could provoke retaliation from Pyongyang and endanger its efforts to resume inter-Korean talks. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

North Korea deploys fake job platform to target U.S. AI and crypto firms in new cyber espionage tactic

(dql) North Korean operatives have built a fake job-application platform that mimics major hiring websites to target applicants seeking roles at prominent U.S. AI and cryptocurrency firms, according to cybersecurity researchers from Validin, a U.S.-based cybersecurity firm. [Validin]

The scheme aims to gain long-term access to victims’ computers before they join a company — a shift from Pyongyang’s traditional tactic of infiltrating firms through fraudulent employee identities. The operation reflects a broader evolution in North Korea’s cyber apparatus, which has already financed much of its weapons program through hacking, crypto theft, and covert IT work abroad. [CNN]

Meanwhile, two U.S. senators of the Democratic Party are urging the Justice and Treasury Departments to investigate World Liberty Financial (WLF), a crypto firm founded by U.S. President Trump and his sons shortly before the 2024 election, over alleged dealings with entities linked to North Korea, Russia and other sanctioned actors.

They argue that WLF’s sale of governance tokens to wallets connected to illicit networks exposes national security vulnerabilities and raises potential conflicts of interest, since token proceeds significantly enrich the Trump family. The scrutiny comes as Congress debates crypto regulations that could weaken oversight, giving the case broader political and geopolitical significance. [CNBC] [The New York Times]

Russia–North Korea cyber axis emerges as hackers appear to share infrastructure

(dql) Cybersecurity researchers have uncovered signs that Russia's Gamaredon hackers and North Korea's Lazarus group—two of the most active state-directed cyber actors—are using the same digital infrastructure and, potentially, coordinating operations.

Analysts detected that servers controlled by Gamaredon were also hosting tools typically associated with Lazarus, an unusual overlap given that state-backed hacking teams almost never share platforms or deploy each other's malware.

If validated, this would signal a significant deepening of Russia–North Korea cooperation in the cyber domain, mirroring their growing military alignment and shared confrontation with the West. Such collaboration could strengthen both countries' ability to conduct espionage, disrupt adversaries, and generate illicit revenue—particularly as North Korea relies on cyber theft to offset the impact of sanctions.

The findings add to broader Western concerns about a tightening Moscow–Pyongyang axis spanning cyber operations, military support, and industrial cooperation. [POLITICO] [NK News]

Hong Kong, Singapore prime office rents to equalize by 2027

(st) Prime office rents in Singapore are expected to reach parity with Hong Kong by late 2027, according to new projections by CBRE. The consultancy estimates that tenants will pay about USD 123 per square foot annually in Singapore by the fourth quarter of 2027, compared with slightly above USD 122 in Hong Kong. This would close a two-decade gap during which Hong Kong consistently commanded higher premium office rents, peaking at nearly USD 196 per square foot in 2017.

CBRE said the shift reflects diverging market conditions. Hong Kong faces persistently high vacancy rates that could rise to 19 percent once 2 million square feet of new supply enters the market this year. Effective rents there have already declined by 5.1 percent year-on-year. Singapore, meanwhile, has one of the tightest vacancy rates in Asia at 5.3 percent and limited new supply, which has kept rents rising. CBRE forecasts that rents in Singapore will grow about 3 percent in 2026.

Analysts say these trends could influence companies' decisions on workforce allocation between the two hubs. Both markets are also competing for family offices and private wealth businesses, although Hong Kong may face greater exposure to geopolitical tensions due to its closer economic ties with mainland China. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore, Germany to deepen cooperation on supply chain resilience

(st) Germany plans to strengthen cooperation with Singapore on supply chain security, German Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil said after meetings with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, and Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong. Klingbeil noted that both countries are seeking to diversify supply chains and reduce strategic dependencies as global trade becomes more fractured.

Germany has been squeezed by United States tariffs under President Donald Trump and by China's export restrictions, while Singapore faces a 10 percent tariff on exports to the United States and is preparing for additional sector-specific tariffs, including those targeting pharmaceuticals. During his visit, Klingbeil also met German and Singaporean industry and financial sector representatives before traveling to Johannesburg for the Group of Twenty summit, which the United States will not attend. [Reuters]

Laos, South Korea step up cooperation on online scams, critical minerals and green Economy

(mo) South Korea and Laos held vice-ministerial talks in Seoul on November 24, agreeing to deepen cooperation on combating online scams and expand ties into future-oriented sectors. First Vice Foreign Minister Park Yoon-joo urged stronger regional law-enforcement collaboration and asked for Laos' active assistance in investigations related to cross-border online fraud. Lao Vice Foreign Minister Phongsamouth Anlavan said Vientiane places high priority on tackling the issue and welcomed closer coordination with Seoul.

The two sides also agreed to broaden cooperation in critical minerals, the green economy and other emerging industries, with both expressing hope for

concrete progress as South Korea and Laos mark the 30th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic ties this year. [The Korean Herald]

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were first established in 1974, then severed in 1975 following Laos' communist takeover, and restored in 1995.

South Korea and Thailand push toward high-standard CEPA amid shifting global trade landscape

(mo) South Korea and Thailand signaled renewed momentum in their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations during a business forum in Bangkok, presenting the deal as a strategic response to rising protectionism and an increasingly unstable global trade environment. Deputy Trade Minister Kwon Hye-jin stressed that bilateral agreements like the CEPA are now essential tools for expanding trade, investment and supply-chain cooperation, especially as the multilateral trade system weakens. [The Korea Herald 1] [Thai Government Relations Department]

Launched in 2024, the CEPA talks have completed seven rounds covering 24 chapters—from goods and services to digital trade, sustainability and supply-chain resilience. Chotima Iemsawasdikul, head of Thailand's Department of Trade Negotiations, emphasized that the new pact will go further than any agreement the two countries currently share, describing it as "more modern, transparent and aligned with international standards." She added that Thailand expects the deal to boost its GDP by more than 1 billion USD. [Asia Manugacturing Review]

Both governments anticipate clear sectoral benefits. Thailand expects wider access for tropical fruits, processed foods, rubber and chemical products, while Korea is poised to gain in automobiles, machinery, electronics and steel. Korean companies also see new opportunities in logistics, transportation, hospitality and digital infrastructure, while Thailand anticipates openings in business services, tourism, entertainment and health care—including elder-care services in Korea's aging market. [The Bangkok Post] [The Nation]

The agreement is set to break new ground in digital trade, with provisions on cross-border data flows, cybersecurity and e-commerce. These rules are expected to support both countries' digital transformation, reduce barriers, enhance trust and

strengthen security capabilities. Sustainability and supply-chain chapters are also under development to reinforce resilience in key sectors such as electronics, autos and food processing. [The Korea Herald 2]

Amid shifting global dynamics and heightened geopolitical risks, Seoul and Bangkok see the CEPA as a foundation for long-term economic partnership. As Chotima noted, the final agreement is expected to expand trade and investment flows, deepen supply-chain cooperation and elevate bilateral relations to a higher level. [The Korea Herald 1]

South Korea, Vietnam sign MoU to deepen parliamentary cooperation

(mo/hn) Vietnam's National Assembly Chairman Trần Thanh Mẫn and South Korean National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik signed a new Memorandum of Understanding in Hanoi on November 20 to strengthen bilateral parliamentary cooperation.

Building on earlier MoUs from 2006 and 2013 and recent upgrades to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the agreement commits both legislatures to expanding high-level exchanges, reciprocal delegation visits, joint research activities and deeper cooperation at the committee level.

During talks, both sides highlighted robust bilateral ties, noting that South Korea remains Vietnam's top foreign investor and third-largest trading partner, with both countries targeting USD 150 billion trade by 2030. Vietnam welcomed South Korea's recent development achievements, while Seoul emphasized close cultural links and strong people-to-people ties, including five million mutual visits recorded in 2024.

The two leaders also agreed to broaden cooperation in human-resource development, culture, tourism and parliamentary diplomacy, while enhancing the role of friendship groups and coordinating closely in regional and global forums such as APPF and the IPU. Hanoi additionally asked Seoul to continue protecting the rights and welfare of the Vietnamese community in Korea, including around 100,000 multicultural Vietnamese-South Korean families. [Asia News Network] [Vietnamnews]

South Korean defense chief, acting U.S. envoy discuss advancing 'future-oriented'

alliance

(mo) South Korean Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back held talks on November 21 with acting U.S. Ambassador Kevin Kim to explore ways to further advance the Seoul–Washington alliance in the wake of last month's summit between President Lee Jae Myung and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Ahn called for close coordination to develop the bilateral partnership into a "forward-looking and comprehensive strategic alliance," referencing the joint fact sheet released this month outlining new trade and security agreements. He also briefed the envoy on Seoul's efforts to maintain a firm combined defense posture while pursuing sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Kim reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad" commitment to South Korea's defense and pledged strong embassy support to deepen cooperation, including on North Korea policy.

Both sides agreed to strengthen collaboration in maintenance, repair and operations (MRO), shipbuilding and other defense industrial cooperation, aligning with U.S. efforts to modernize alliances and encourage partners to take on greater roles amid rising regional security challenges, particularly from China. [The Korean Times]

South Korea presses submarine, high-tech cooperation in talks with Canada

(mo) South Korea's Industry Minister Kim Jung-kwan underscored the technological and security advantages of Korean-built submarines during a meeting November 24 with Canadian Industry Minister Mélanie Joly in Seoul, as the two sides discussed deepening cooperation in advanced industries and critical resources.

Kim also called for broader strategic cooperation in key industrial sectors, including batteries, electric vehicles, hydrogen and critical minerals. He noted that bilateral trade has doubled since the Korea–Canada Free Trade Agreement took effect in 2015, emphasizing the potential for further growth.

The meeting comes as Hanwha Ocean — South Korea's major shipbuilder — competes in Canada's patrol submarine program and was shortlisted in August as one of the final two bidders. [The Korea Herald]

Polish envoy warns of “great concerns” over North Korea’s role in Russia’s war, urges direct communication with Pyongyang

(mo) Poland’s Ambassador to South Korea, Bartosz Wisniewski, expressed deep alarm on November 21 over North Korea’s growing military support for Russia’s war in Ukraine, stressing that maintaining *d*irect channels of communication with Pyongyang is essential for regional and global security.

Speaking during a meeting with Unification Minister Chung Dong-young in Seoul, Wisniewski noted that the conflict now binds the security of the Korean Peninsula, Central Europe and NATO’s eastern flank. North Korea has dispatched an estimated 15,000 troops and supplied weapons to Russia since last year, a development Warsaw sees as a mounting threat given its position as a frontline hub for military and humanitarian support to Kyiv.

Calling Pyongyang’s involvement “a source of great concerns,” the ambassador said that direct engagement with North Korea can help the international community better understand conditions on the ground and potentially create openings for renewed inter-Korean dialogue.

Chung agreed that both countries are increasingly affected by the security ramifications of North Korea’s alignment with Moscow and underscored the need for closer South Korea–Poland cooperation in safeguarding peace. [The Korea Times]

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand cooperation on nuclear power during Lee’s state visit to Ankara on Nov. 24. The agreement, signed between Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) and Türkiye’s Electricity Generation Company, outlines collaboration on reactor technology, site evaluation, regulatory processes, licensing, financing models, and project implementation. It also establishes a joint working group, positioning South Korea for stronger participation in Türkiye’s planned Sinop Nuclear Power Plant project.

South Korea, Turkiye broaden strategic partnership with new defense and

nuclear energy push

(mo) South Korean President Lee Jae-myung and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan agreed to broaden cooperation across defense, nuclear energy, and advanced technologies, signaling a push to elevate their ties into a more strategic, future-focused partnership. The agreement was reached during Lee's state visit to Ankara on November 24, part of his wider regional tour covering also Egypt, South Africa — to attend the G20 summit — and the United Arab Emirates.

During their talks, the two leaders underscored the deep historical connection between their countries and highlighted existing defense projects—such as Turkey's Altay tank drawing on South Korea's K2 technology—as a foundation for expanding joint production and technology sharing.

The summit also saw moves to deepen collaboration in renewable energy, AI, and digital technologies, including a new wind-power partnership. Beyond economics, the leaders exchanged views on regional security—from the Korean Peninsula to the Middle East—affirming mutual support, including Seoul's commitment to humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees in Turkey. [Yonhap News Agency]

Lee and Erdoğan also witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand cooperation on nuclear power between state-run Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) and Türkiye's Electricity Generation Company. The agreement outlines collaboration on reactor technology, site evaluation, regulatory processes, licensing, financing models, and project implementation. It also establishes a joint working group, positioning South Korea for stronger participation in Turkiye's planned Sinop Nuclear Power Plant project.

Additional MOUs on road construction and Korean War veterans affairs were signed. [The Korea Times] [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea and UAE expand strategic partnership with Nuclear Exports, AI Megaproject and defense cooperation

(mo) South Korea and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have agreed to jointly pursue nuclear energy exports and deepen cooperation across AI, defense and

culture, following a November 18 summit between President Lee Jae Myung and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi. The meeting was part of Lee's wider regional tour covering also Egypt, South Africa — to attend the G20 summit — and Turkey.

Building on the Barakah nuclear plant project, the two sides committed to jointly developing third-country nuclear projects, including cooperation in fuel supply, maintenance, AI-based optimization and workforce training. Seoul will also join the UAE's USD 20 billion+ Stargate UAE initiative — the first overseas deployment of OpenAI's hyperscale AI infrastructure — with South Korean firms expected to take priority roles in power and data-center development.

Defense cooperation was also significantly upgraded, with plans for joint development, technology sharing and local production of defense systems, a move that could bolster South Korea's bids to export K9 howitzers and Cheongung-II missile systems to the UAE. The presidential office estimates the Emirati defense market at over USD 15 billion.

Beyond security and AI, the two sides agreed to expand collaboration on Korean cultural content and explore the creation of a large-scale "UAE K-City" industrial and cultural cluster integrating advanced technology, aerospace, healthcare and defense. Space cooperation is also accelerating, highlighted by the launch of Etihad-SAT in 2025, the latest joint satellite developed with South Korea's Satrec Initiative. [The Korea Economic Daily]

Seven memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to strengthen cooperation in advanced industries, including artificial intelligence (AI), aerospace, and nuclear energy. [Anadolu Ajansı]

South Korea, Egypt vow joint role as peace facilitators, expand economic and defense cooperation

(mo) South Korean President Lee Jae Myung held summit talks on November 20 with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo, where the two leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation on peace efforts in both the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, while deepening economic and defense industry ties. The meeting was part of Lee's wider regional tour covering also the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and South Africa — to attend the G20 summit.

Lee said the two countries will work together as "facilitators of peace" and jointly contribute to regional and global stability. He added that El-Sisi expressed full support for Seoul's efforts to usher in "a new era of peaceful coexistence and shared growth" on the Korean Peninsula.

Lee also commended Egypt's diplomatic role in securing a ceasefire and supporting reconstruction in Gaza, as well as its broader efforts to advance Middle East peace. He added that South Korea will continue humanitarian cooperation with Egypt, particularly in assisting Gaza refugees. [The Korea Times]

South Korea's coal phaseout plan raises red flags for Australia's fossil-fuel export economy

(mo) South Korea's decision at COP30 to join the Powering Past Coal Alliance and phase out all coal-fired power plants by 2040 is raising major concerns in Australia, one of Seoul's largest thermal coal suppliers, as analysts warn of steep declines in export revenue and call for an accelerated pivot toward green industries. [Green Peace] [COP30]

Seoul — the world's fourth-largest thermal coal importer and Australia's third-biggest customer for electricity-grade coal, with coal providing about 30 percent of Korean electricity — plans to retire 62 coal plants, signaling a long-term structural decline in demand. Analysts say Australia, the second-largest thermal coal exporter globally, must brace for falling export revenues and accelerate its shift toward green industries.

Treasury modelling already forecasts a 50 percent drop in fossil-fuel export value within five years, even without further climate policies. Experts argue that Seoul's move underscores the need for Canberra to plan its own fossil-fuel phaseout and reposition itself as a supplier of green iron, aluminum and critical minerals as key Asian partners advance decarbonization. [The Guardian]

China outlines future cooperation priorities as Sri Lanka seeks support for new infrastructure and transport projects

(lm/ss) During a briefing in Colombo, China's envoy informed Sri Lankan officials that Beijing's new

development blueprint—adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the Communist Party's Central Committee—will determine the nature of Chinese cooperation with Sri Lanka in the coming years. Instead of announcing new funding or headline projects, he outlined the policy direction of China's forthcoming Fifteenth Five-Year Plan, which prioritizes innovation-driven growth, green industries and higher-quality external engagement. He pointed to the previous plan's economic performance, with average annual growth of around five point five percent and an expected national output exceeding USD 19 trillion by 2025, as the baseline from which China intends to expand its international partnerships.

The envoy made clear that Sri Lanka will remain embedded in China's broader development outreach and the Belt and Road Initiative but indicated that future cooperation will likely reflect China's own economic restructuring. For Sri Lanka, this suggests a shift toward more selective collaboration—especially in technology, renewable energy, infrastructure modernization and other areas aligned with China's domestic priorities—rather than large-scale construction financing of the past decade. [Daily Mirror 1]

In parallel, China is reviewing a Sri Lankan request for an aid-based supply of electric buses. Ambassador Qi Zhenhong said the proposal is being examined alongside other ongoing joint projects, including the resumption of work on the Central Expressway and the pending completion of the Sinopec Group venture.

He added that high-level visits earlier in the year helped define the direction of future engagement, and noted that around 1,000 Sri Lankan professionals took part in more than 100 short-term training programs in China across 17 sectors through 2025. [Daily Mirror 2]

India and Sri Lanka advance energy and security cooperation

(lm) Sri Lanka and India signaled progress on two parallel tracks of cooperation, with the government in Colombo confirming that both countries are preparing to connect their power grids through a high-voltage transmission line. The Minister of Power and Energy told Parliament that technical work is underway and that Sri Lanka aims to secure electricity exchanges at favorable rates once the link becomes operational.

At the same time, senior officials from both governments met on the margins of the National

Security Advisers-level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave in New Delhi, where they reviewed cooperation across the Conclave's five priority areas. The discussions covered maritime security, counterterrorism, transnational crime, cyber security and disaster response, underscoring that energy integration is unfolding alongside a wider effort to strengthen strategic coordination. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Against this backdrop, Sri Lanka repatriated 27 Indian fishermen detained for poaching in its waters, the Indian High Commission said, marking the latest handover in the recurring cross-border fisheries dispute. [Daily Mirror 3]

Pakistan and Sri Lanka reaffirm plans to strengthen bilateral cooperation

(ss) Sri Lanka and Pakistan reiterated their intention to deepen bilateral ties during a meeting held on the sidelines of the 4th EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum in Brussels on November 21. According to official readouts, Pakistan's foreign minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar and Sri Lanka's deputy foreign minister Arun Hemachandra discussed expanding cooperation in economic, diplomatic, and regional security areas.

Both sides also noted opportunities to enhance collaboration across bilateral and multilateral platforms. [Ada Derena]

Sri Lanka raises concerns with Canada over diaspora groups promoting separatist narratives

(lm) Sri Lanka has formally asked Canada to curb activities by diaspora groups that Colombo views as advancing separatist narratives, including the public display of symbols associated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the armed separatist organization defeated in 2009 and banned in both countries. The request was made by Sri Lanka's foreign minister during a meeting with Canada's high commissioner in Colombo, where Sri Lanka argued that such activities risk undermining the government's efforts to strengthen national unity.

Canada's envoy reiterated that the LTTE is a proscribed organization under Canadian law and that the federal government does not recognize related insignia or

rhetoric advocating separation. She also restated Canada's commitment to Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity. [Daily Mirror]

The issue is part of a long-standing pattern in Sri Lanka–Canada relations. Colombo has repeatedly raised concerns about political mobilization within Canada's large Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, some of whom engage in commemorations or activism that Sri Lankan authorities interpret as sympathetic to the LTTE. While Canada outlawed the group in 2006, its legal and constitutional protections allow forms of political expression that do not constitute material support for terrorism, creating recurring diplomatic tension—particularly around war-related memorial events or local political resolutions referencing wartime accountability.

Sri Lanka finalizes bilateral debt deal with Denmark

(lm) Sri Lanka has concluded a bilateral agreement with Denmark as part of its external debt restructuring effort. The Finance Ministry confirmed that Denmark will reschedule USD 39 million in outstanding debt, following earlier discussions held after Sri Lanka reached a memorandum of understanding with the Official Creditor Committee — the group of major bilateral lenders coordinating debt treatment for Sri Lanka under a common framework. [Daily Mirror]

U.S. Senate passes bill to expand official engagement with Taiwan

(dql) The U.S. Senate has unanimously approved the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act, a measure that requires the State Department to routinely update and reduce restrictions on official U.S. contact with Taiwanese authorities. The bill—already passed by the House of Representatives and awaiting President Trump's signature—mandates a review of Taiwan engagement guidelines every two years, replacing the previous one-time review requirement.

The legislation aims to dismantle long-standing internal "contact guidelines" created after Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. It directs the State Department to demonstrate how updated guidelines strengthen U.S.–Taiwan relations, reflect shared democratic values, and support peaceful cross-strait stability.

The move builds on earlier steps. Then-Secretary of State Pompeo's 2021 removal of all restrictions on U.S.–Taiwan engagement was followed by the Biden administration's later decision to reinstate but significantly relax those rules. [Taiwan News]

US deepens security support for Taiwan with air-defense system sale

(dql) The United States has approved a nearly USD 700 million sale of NASAMS air-defense systems to Taiwan, its second major arms package within a week and part of a broader USD 1 billion commitment. The US says the system — already proven in Ukraine — will significantly strengthen Taiwan's medium-range air-defense capabilities. Delivery is expected by 2031.

Washington framed the deal as evidence of its "rock-solid" security commitment to Taipei amid intensifying cross-Strait and regional tensions. Beijing has condemned recent US-Taiwan military cooperation, while Japan's increasing concern over Taiwan's security — including comments hinting at possible military involvement — has added to friction with China.

Taiwan continues to expand its defenses, including building indigenous submarines, to counter China's sustained military pressure and "grey-zone" activities. Under US law, Washington must support Taiwan's self-defense despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties, a stance that remains a persistent source of conflict with Beijing. [Al Jazeera]

Taiwan legislative delegation meets with Texas officials to deepen trade ties

(acl/yl) On November 22, a cross-party delegation led by Deputy Legislative Speaker Johnny Chiang arrived in Dallas, Texas where they met with state and local officials and visited a recently opened Taiwan trade office as part of an ongoing trip to the US and Paraguay.

The 14-member delegation included lawmakers from the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT), the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and the smaller opposition Taiwan People's Party (TPP).

During the talks, Chiang highlighted the establishment of the Texas Taiwan Office in July 2024 and the launch of direct flights from Taiwan to Dallas in October as concrete efforts to expand bilateral exchanges. He also

pointed to strong Taiwan–Texas economic and trade ties, noting that bilateral trade reached USD 25.8 billion in 2024 and Taiwanese investment in Texas exceeded USD 14.1 billion.

The delegation also visited the newly opened Taiwan Trade and Investment Service Center in Dallas, which was set up in August to strengthen bilateral trade and expand supply chain cooperation. Taiwanese officials said Texas' major industries – including semiconductors, AI servers, aviation, biomedicine, electric vehicles, and energy – align closely with Taiwan's industrial strengths.

Chiang also toured the Texas operations of Taiwanese companies such as Wistron and Sysgration to review their US strategies, current investments, production models, and business prospects. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News] [Legislative Yuan Taiwan, in Chinese]

Growing U.S. state engagement boosts Taiwan-U.S. cooperation

Meanwhile, U.S. state-level engagement with Taiwan continues to expand, according to Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung. At a reception hosted by the American State Offices Association (ASOA), he noted that 26 U.S. state and territorial offices now operate in Taiwan, with more than half established or reopened in the past three years, including Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Idaho in 2025. Lin also highlighted a surge in governor-led trade missions this year, with delegations from Arizona, Alaska, Wyoming, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Guam visiting Taiwan.

American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) deputy director Karin Lang said 2025 marked a strong year for bilateral commercial ties, citing over USD 100 billion in Taiwanese investment announcements and visits from more than 20 U.S. states to explore economic cooperation. She reiterated U.S. support for Taiwan's plan to establish a science and technology park in the United States, a move aimed at integrating more Taiwanese suppliers into U.S. supply chains. National Science and Technology Council Minister Wu Cheng-wen said U.S. officials responded positively to the proposal during the recent APEC Ministerial Meeting. [Focus Taiwan]

Danish lawmakers visit Taiwan

(yl) A four-member Danish parliamentary delegation, led by Parliamentary Taiwan Friendship Group Vice Chair Kasper Roug, arrived in Taiwan on November 25

for a five-day visit focused on Taiwan's political and economic developments, cross-Strait dynamics, and regional security. During the trip, the group will meet Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim, Deputy Legislative Speaker Johnny Chiang, Deputy Foreign Minister François Wu, and senior defense and energy officials.

The delegation will also tour key technology and policy institutions, including the Hsinchu Science Park Bureau, the Taiwan Space Agency, and the Taiwan FactCheck Center.

This marks the second straight year that a Danish parliamentary group has visited Taiwan, following a similar visit in 2024. [Focus Taiwan] [Taipei Times]

Cross-party Taiwan delegation meets with Paraguayan Congress in Asunción

(acl) On 20 November, a 14-member cross-party legislative delegation from Taiwan, led by Deputy Legislative Speaker Johnny Chiang, met with Basilio Gustavo Núñez Giménez, president of Paraguay's Congress and Senate, who received them alongside 15 cross-party senators in Asunción.

The delegation arrived in Paraguay on November 18 and included four Kuomintang (KMT) lawmakers — including Chiang — two from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and one from the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Paraguay remains Taiwan's sole diplomatic ally in South America, and Chiang said the visit affirmed Taiwan's unified support for their 68-year relationship.

During the meetings, Chiang noted that bilateral cooperation has expanded into areas such as education and health care and expressed hope for more systematic exchanges between Taiwan's Legislature and Paraguay's Congress. [Focus Taiwan]

Núñez reaffirmed that the relationship is rooted in shared values of democracy, human rights, and freedom. He said the senators present reflected broad public support for bilateral ties and expressed hope for continued parliamentary diplomacy and the eventual establishment of direct flights to facilitate people-to-people exchanges. [Legislative Yuan, Taiwan 1, in Chinese]

On November 19, Chiang also met with Paraguayan President Santiago Peña, who highlighted the two countries' shared values and expressed hope that more Taiwanese businesses would recognize

Paraguay's strengths and investment potential to advance mutual benefits. [Taiwan News] [Legislative Yuan, Taiwan 2, in Chinese]

Panamanian lawmakers visit Taiwan despite reported pressure from Beijing

(yl) A nine-member delegation of Panamanian lawmakers arrived in Taiwan on November for a five-day visit, despite reports that China urged them to cancel the trip. Led by Manuel Cohen and Ronald Ameth De Gracia Moreno, the group is scheduled to meet Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim, Legislative Speaker Han Kuo-yu, and attend a banquet hosted by Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung.

The delegation will visit trade, technology, and foreign aid agencies, including the International Trade Administration, Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF), and the Hsinchu Science Park.

Media in Panama reported that the Chinese embassy attempted to block the visit, prompting Taiwan's foreign ministry to condemn Beijing for interfering in Taiwan's normal international exchanges. [Focus Taiwan] [ICRT]

Cambodia-Thailand border tensions persist

(lm) Border tensions between Thailand and Cambodia remain elevated as both governments issue conflicting accounts of landmine incidents, localized clashes, and security operations along several stretches of their approximately 800-kilometer shared border. The most sensitive areas lie in the Thai provinces of Si Sa Ket, Surin, Sa Kaeo, and Trat, opposite Cambodia's northern and western frontier regions, including the long-disputed area around the Preah Vihear Temple.

A key flashpoint concerns a series of landmine explosions inside Thai-administered territory in Si Sa Ket province in northeastern Thailand, opposite Cambodia's Preah Vihear region [see AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]. The ASEAN Observer Team–Thailand (AOT-TH) examined PMN-2 anti-personnel mines found in the Phu Makua area — a forested ridge along the border — and concluded that the mines were recently laid, contradicting Cambodia's claim that

they were remnants from earlier conflicts. Mobile phones found in the same area contained images and videos of mine-laying activity, though the AOT-TH did not attribute responsibility.

This investigation followed a November 10 blast that injured four Thai soldiers. In a separate incident in Surin province, northwest of Si Sa Ket, Thai authorities said Cambodian personnel removed a barbed-wire fence erected by Thai forest rangers near Chong Rayee and Chong Proe — rural crossing points in the forested border zone. Phnom Penh has not publicly confirmed the claim. Thailand has since accelerated unilateral mine-clearance, arguing that repeated explosions leave no room to wait for joint operations. Cambodia maintains that no new mines have been planted. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Despite the friction, limited cooperation continues. Both sides have advanced fieldwork in Sa Kaeo province in eastern Thailand, opposite Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey province, installing temporary boundary markers between official Boundary Posts 42 and 47 near Ban Nong Chan and Ban Nong Ya Kaeo, two small Thai border villages. To increase transparency, Thailand invited defense attachés from 17 countries to observe border procedures at Ban Khlong Luek, a major checkpoint facing Poipet City in Cambodia. Thailand also signaled that it may request additional ASEAN observer involvement. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Public messaging from both sides remains sharply divergent. Cambodia has claimed that weapons fire from the Thai side forced an ASEAN Observer Team to halt its work in Pursat province opposite Thailand's Ban Cham Rak; Thailand rejects this account and says the noise resembled firecrackers. Thai authorities have also disputed Cambodian statements concerning casualties from earlier clashes, saying that Phnom Penh failed to collect bodies of its own soldiers killed in July, while Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen reportedly told the public that the bodies were Thai. Bangkok denies this. Thailand has likewise rejected as false an allegation involving misconduct by a Thai paramilitary ranger, describing it as an attempt to tarnish the country's image. [Bangkok Post 5]

Separately, Thai police have submitted to the Office of the Attorney-General a case arising from the July 24–29 cross-border rocket attacks, which struck Thai provinces along the lower northeastern border — Surin, Buri Ram, Si Sa Ket, and Ubon Ratchathani — killing 32 people and injuring 328. Thai prosecutors are assessing whether the attacks can be treated as an

extraterritorial offence under Thai criminal law, as the impacts occurred on Thai soil. [Bangkok Post 6]

Diplomatically, Thailand has asked the United States to encourage Cambodia's adherence to the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord, signed on the margins of the ASEAN Summit in October. According to the Thai Foreign Ministry, this request followed a call between Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and U.S. President Donald Trump. Thailand stressed that its appeal concerns support for de-escalation and demining and should remain separate from U.S.–Thai trade talks. [Bangkok Post 7]

Timor-Leste visits EU military mission in Mozambique

(ms) The European Union Military Assistance Mission in Mozambique (EUMAM MOZ) hosted Timor-Leste's ambassador to Mozambique, Luís Sousa Sequeira, on November 18 for an official visit underscoring growing international engagement with the mission's work.

The ambassador met with Mission Force Commander Commodore César Pires Correia, who briefed him on EUMAM MOZ's mandate, objectives and current activities. The mission focuses on strengthening the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (FADM) through operational and maintenance training, along with specialized programs aimed at improving self-sufficiency in counter-insurgency operations.

EUMAM MOZ, a non-executive EU mission mandated until June 2026, comprises military personnel from 12 countries. Officials said the ambassador's visit highlights the mission's broader international relevance and the importance of sharing progress with partners beyond the EU. [EUMAM MOZ]

China and Vietnam strengthen cooperation between internal affairs commissions

(hn) Vietnam's Communist Party of Vietnam Commission for Internal Affairs, led by Deputy Head Le Hong Quang, held talks on November 24 with a delegation from China's Communist Party of Vietnam Commission for Political and Legal Affairs headed by Deputy Secretary-General Wang Yixing.

The two sides shared experiences on maintaining social stability, safeguarding national security, and combating corruption and wastefulness. Wang praised Vietnam's achievements and reaffirmed China's commitment to closer cooperation with Vietnam's internal affairs commission, expressing confidence that future ties will become increasingly practical and effective. [People's army newspaper]

Japan and Vietnam align on CPTPP expansion and upgrade priorities

(hn) Vietnamese Industry and Trade Minister Nguyễn Hồng Diên met with Japan's State Minister Kazuchika Iwata in Melbourne on the sidelines of the ninth CPTPP Commission Meeting to discuss CPTPP expansion, upgrade negotiations and Vietnam's priorities for its 2026 chairmanship.

Iwata stressed the importance of strengthening free trade agreements amid global economic challenges and hoped CPTPP members would soon agree on the number of economies eligible to begin accession. He praised Vietnam's positions in upgrade talks and highlighted the need for close cooperation, especially on e-commerce and trade facilitation.

Minister Diên supported expanding CPTPP membership but emphasized a transparent selection process and sufficient resources for accession talks. He also backed balanced upgrade negotiations reflecting all members' interests and outlined Vietnam's priorities for its upcoming chairmanship, affirming regular consultations with Japan.

Both sides agreed to continue supporting each other in CPTPP implementation and upgrade efforts under their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. [Vietnamnews] [Nhandan]

Chinese PLA Navy task group conducts for four-day visit in Vietnam amid push for closer maritime cooperation

(ms) A Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy task group conducted a four-day visit in Vietnam's Cam Ranh Port starting on November 21, marking a continued effort by both countries to strengthen military diplomacy and reduce tensions in contested areas of the South China Sea.

The group—composed of the amphibious dock landing ship *Changbaishan*, the training vessel *Zheng He*, and the comprehensive training ship *Xiangqianjin-1*—was escorted into port by a Vietnamese naval vessel, a symbolic gesture highlighting growing operational cooperation. More than 100 representatives from the Chinese embassy, overseas Chinese communities, and Vietnam's Navy Region 4 attended the welcoming ceremony, where commanders from both sides exchanged greetings.

During the visit, Chinese officers and cadets participated in courtesy calls, joint seminars, and friendly sports activities with Vietnamese counterparts.

Beyond ceremonial diplomacy, the port call reflects a broader diplomatic effort. Despite overlapping maritime claims and periodic confrontations in the South China Sea, Beijing and Hanoi have recently intensified communication channels to prevent escalation. High-level talks this year focused on crisis-management mechanisms, hotline upgrades, and commitments to "not complicate the situation" in disputed waters.

The naval visit aligns with that agenda: both countries frame these exchanges as confidence-building measures designed to manage friction while expanding practical cooperation in search-and-rescue, fisheries management, and maritime safety. [China Military] [Long Mekong]

Vietnam delegation visits Cambodia to strengthen Party cooperation and people-to-people solidarity

(hn) A Vietnamese Party delegation led by Triệu Tài Vinh visited Cambodia from November 19–21 to strengthen ties between the Communist Party of Việt Nam (CPV) and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and deepen political trust and people-to-people solidarity.

The delegation held working sessions with the CPP's Propaganda and Education Commission and Mass Mobilization Commission, sharing experience in communication, ideological work, countering misinformation, and community outreach. Both sides emphasized cooperation in political training, mass mobilization, ethnic and religious affairs, and border-area solidarity.

United States preliminarily slashes anti-dumping duties on Vietnamese honey in latest review

(hn) The US Department of Commerce has issued a preliminary decision significantly reducing anti-dumping duties on Vietnamese raw honey.

For the review period of June 2023 to May 2024, two mandatory Vietnamese exporters received dumping margins of 6.72 percent and 21.55 percent, while 12 others were assigned a separate rate of 14.14 percent —far lower than the 100–157 percent rates from the previous review. Companies not qualifying for separate rates will continue facing the national rate of 60.03 percent. Because Vietnam is still treated as a non-market economy, the US used surrogate-country pricing in its calculations.

Related parties may submit briefs or request a hearing, and a final determination is expected within 120 days, which will set future duty and deposit rates. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnam]

EU set to upgrade ties with Vietnam to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

(hn) The EU says it is ready to upgrade relations with Vietnam to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as the two sides mark 35 years of diplomatic ties. EU Ambassador Julien Guerrier highlighted that the upgraded partnership will expand cooperation in trade, investment, science and technology, semiconductors, raw materials, and other future-focused sectors, with an announcement expected in the coming months.

On climate action, both sides are working toward net-zero emissions by 2050 through the EUR 15 billion (USD 17.3 billion) JETP, supporting major renewable projects such as the Bản Vẽ hydropower plant and Cà Mau offshore wind farm. Guerrier said reforms are needed to attract private investment and that EU companies can support Vietnam with advanced, clean technologies.

Security cooperation is also expanding amid regional tensions, with joint peacekeeping efforts and collaboration on maritime and cyber security.

Under the Global Gateway Initiative, the EU plans major support for energy, modern transport and

digital infrastructure as Vietnam aims to become a developed nation by 2045. [Vietnamnews]

In parallel, Vietnam has been strengthening ties with individual EU member states to support this upgrade—most notably through Deputy Foreign Minister Le Thi Thu Hang's visit to Malta, the first by a Vietnamese government representative. During meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Ian Borg and other senior officials, Malta reaffirmed its strong backing for elevating EU–Vietnam relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership and offered to act as a gateway for Vietnam into the EU market, while encouraging deeper Vietnam–ASEAN–Malta engagement. Both sides discussed expanding cooperation in trade, education, science and technology, and maritime affairs—including seafarer training, ocean research, and support for Vietnam in meeting EU standards and lifting the IUU yellow card. [Maritime Fair Trade]

Czech Republic and Vietnam deepen strategic partnership and cooperation across trade, education, and anti-corruption

(hn) Czech Senate President Milos Vystrcil concluded a five-day official visit to Vietnam from November 18 to 22, during which he paid tribute to President Ho Chi Minh, met with top Vietnamese leaders, and discussed strengthening the Strategic Partnership between the two countries. [Vietnamlawmagazine]

During the official meeting with Vietnamese State President Luong Cuong on November 20, both leaders highlighted growing political trust, expanding trade—reaching USD 2 billion in 2024—and opportunities to deepen cooperation in investment, defense, science and technology, education, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. They emphasized legislative coordination, multilateral collaboration, and support for international law, including the East Sea issue. Vystrcil also announced Czech humanitarian aid of about 3.5 billion VND for central Vietnam. [Vietnamplus1]

General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, To Lam emphasized strengthening cooperation across multiple areas: economy, trade, investment, defense, science, education, culture, tourism, and emerging sectors like clean energy, renewable energy, and digital transformation. He also called for enhanced legislative coordination to create favorable legal frameworks for

cooperation. [Vietnamplus2] [People' Army Newspaper]

Meanwhile, a Vietnamese delegation led by Nguyen Thanh Hai visited the Czech Republic from November 18–20 to exchange experience and promote bilateral cooperation in anti-corruption and public sector integrity.

The delegation met with the Czech Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, discussing Vietnam's anti-corruption efforts and learning about the Czech model, which emphasizes transparency, strong legal frameworks, judicial independence, whistleblower protection, and international cooperation. Both sides highlighted ongoing agreements on prisoner transfer and mutual legal assistance, and expressed willingness to expand collaboration in combating corruption and serious economic crimes. The delegation also engaged with the Vietnamese Embassy in the Czech Republic. [Vietnamplus3]

Slovakia–Vietnam bolster defense ties during official visit

(hn) Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Robert Kalinak's official visit to Vietnam from November 18–20, 2025 strengthens cooperation in defense training, industry, and peacekeeping as the two countries celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations. [Vietnam]

In talks with Vietnamese Defense Minister General Phan Van Giang, both sides affirmed their commitment to deepening traditional friendship and expanding collaboration under the 2015 defense cooperation MoU.

Vietnam proposed enhancing delegation exchanges, establishing new cooperation mechanisms, and having Slovakia appoint a Defense Attaché in Hanoi. The countries aim to boost training exchanges, including language studies and defense courses, and expand cooperation in peacekeeping, defense industry, cybersecurity, mine action, and addressing war legacies. Vietnam also seeks continued Slovak support within the Vietnam-EU framework and invited Slovak leaders to the 2026 Vietnam International Defense Expo.

Symbolic activities such as wreath-laying highlighted the long-standing friendship, and both sides expressed confidence that the visit would make defense

cooperation more substantive and effective. [Vietnameconomic news]

Vietnamese Prime Minister concludes Middle East and Africa tour, attends G20 Summit

(hn) Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh concluded official visits from November 16–24 to Kuwait and Algeria, as well as attending the G20 Summit and conducting bilateral activities in South Africa. [Arabtimesonline] [People's army newspaper1]

During his three-day visit to Kuwait from November 16–18, Chinh met with the Emir, held talks with the Kuwaiti Prime Minister, met the Crown Prince, and witnessed the signing of multiple cooperation documents. Notably, both prime ministers agreed to upgrade bilateral relations to a Strategic Partnership, opening new opportunities for collaboration. The visit emphasized strengthening and expanding the Nghi Son Refinery project and encouraged greater Kuwaiti investment in Vietnam, including strategic projects and agricultural production for export. The two sides also committed to broadening cooperation in areas such as science and technology, digital transformation, cybersecurity, renewable energy, education, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. [Voice of Vietnam1]

From November 18–20, PM Chinh and the Vietnamese delegation officially visited Algeria. During this visit, both countries agreed to elevate bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership, strengthening political trust and cooperation in multilateral and bilateral frameworks. Discussions focused on accelerating a goods trade agreement, promoting trade and investment, and enhancing collaboration in strategic sectors including oil and gas, textiles, and agriculture, while exploring other mutually beneficial areas. Several cooperation agreements were signed in education, urban development, debt settlement, and judicial collaboration. [Voice of Vietnam2]

The visit, running from November 21–24, Chinh and a high-level Vietnamese delegation continued to participate in the G20 Summit and bilateral activities in South Africa which marks the first Vietnamese prime ministerial visit to South Africa in 21 years. At the G20 Summit, Chinh presented proposals on sustainable development, peace, and cooperation, and held meetings with more than 30 foreign leaders and heads of international organizations to further strengthen bilateral ties. [People's army newspaper1] [People's Army Newspaper2]

Throughout the nine-day working trip, comprising around 80 engagements, the Prime Minister met with top leaders, delivered policy speeches, worked with government and business communities, visited socio-economic sites, and participated in economic forums. [People's army newspaper1]

Australia and Vietnam deepen economic partnership and expand trade cooperation

(hn) Vietnam and Australia reaffirmed their strong economic partnership during the second Trade Ministers' Dialogue in Melbourne on November 19, agreeing on measures to boost trade and investment.

Co-chaired by Vietnamese Minister Nguyễn Hồng Diên and Australian Minister Don Farrell, the meeting highlighted rapid growth in bilateral trade and the complementary nature of both economies. The two sides discussed expanding cooperation in priority sectors such as agriculture, education, tourism and trade promotion, and welcomed new market access for Vietnamese grapefruit and Australian blueberries while aiming to open markets for additional products.

They also emphasized collaboration under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, focusing on sustainable mineral supply chains, climate and energy transition, and investment opportunities in energy and critical minerals. Both ministers reaffirmed support for a rules-based global trading system, committed to advancing WTO reforms ahead of the 2026 Ministerial Conference, and stressed the importance of digital trade and free trade agreements including AANZFTA, RCEP and CPTPP. [Vietnamnews]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

26 November 2025 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

A new multilateralism. How are the UN and other global organizations adapting to a new world?

This livestream event will bring together leading experts to discuss how the UN can remain effective amid rising geopolitical tensions and intensifying great-power competition. It will explore concrete options for renewing multilateral institutions, from reforming global bodies and strengthening representation to ensuring fairer approaches to trade, technology, and development. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

26 November 2025 @ 1:00-2:15 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

Iraq's 2025 Elections: What comes next?

This webinar will unpack the mixed results of Iraq's 2025 parliamentary elections, which revitalized voter engagement but failed to produce a decisive winner, ushering in a tense government formation process. Experts will examine how elite negotiations may reshape Iraq's power dynamics, governance trajectory, and foreign policy at a time of fragile stability. The discussion will also explore what these shifts could mean for citizens' daily lives, from public services to economic conditions and trust in state institutions. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

27 November 2025 @ 4:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

How corruption threatens war effort in Ukraine, and what is the remedy?

This online panel will examine Ukraine's largest corruption scandal since the start of President Zelenskyy's tenure, involving an alleged USD 100 million graft scheme at the state-owned Energoatom and the political fallout now unfolding in Kyiv. Speakers will assess what this means for Zelenskyy's domestic

standing, the credibility of Ukraine's anti-corruption framework, and the willingness of international partners to provide essential financial support. The discussion will also explore the role of international illicit finance, the prospects for genuine accountability, and whether Russia may seek to exploit the crisis for strategic gain. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

28 November 2025 @ 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (GMT+7), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Southeast Asia Climate Outlook Survey (2020-2024): Understanding Regional Attitudes towards Climate Change

This webinar will launch the latest Southeast Asia Climate Outlook Survey, offering a five-year perspective on how climate awareness, energy transition attitudes, and views on climate governance have evolved across the region. As extreme weather, food insecurity, and rising energy costs heighten public concern, the seminar will unpack how Southeast Asians assess their governments' performance, their willingness to support stronger emissions-cutting measures, and the growing rural–urban divide in climate vulnerability. Experts will also discuss the media's influence on climate perceptions, the alignment between personal and public climate action, and opportunities for regional and international cooperation to accelerate a just climate transition. For more information and registration, visit [ISEAS].

2 December 2025 @ 1:00-2:15 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

What does Russia want in the Black Sea region?

This hybrid event will explore how Russia's expanding military and political footprint in the Black Sea is reshaping regional security at a time when the Kremlin seeks to project power, pressure Europe, and strengthen its position in the war against Ukraine. With Odesa and Ukraine's coastline central to the balance of power—and as US engagement wanes—the session will assess the rising strategic burden on Europe, Turkey, the UK, and NATO. Speakers will examine Russia's long-term objectives, the implications for regional actors, and the steps Europe and NATO can take to reinforce deterrence and protect the Black Sea

from further destabilization. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

2 December 2025 @ 3:00-4:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

One year of Syria's transition: Progress, challenges and prospects

This webinar will assess Syria's first year under the transitional government formed after the collapse of the Assad regime, examining its early governance efforts, accountability initiatives, and the profound political, economic, and security challenges still facing the country. It will explore how Syrians view the new authorities, the obstacles to restoring national cohesion amid ongoing territorial fragmentation, and the prospects for meaningful justice and international engagement. The discussion will also consider what these developments mean for Syria's long-term stability and reconstruction. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

Recent Book Releases

Beatrice Heuser, ***Flawed Strategy: Why Smart Leaders Make Bad Decisions***, Polity, 208 pages, published March 25, 2025. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs].

Jiani He, ***Ruling the Mongols of Manchuria: Language, Literacy and Power in Late Qing Borderlands***, Amsterdam University Press, 364 pages, published April 17, 2025. For a review, see [LSE].

Calls

The **Oxford Programme in Asian Laws (OPAL) of the University of Oxford and the Faculty of Law, Thammasat University**, invite paper proposals for the ***3rd International Forum on Asian Laws: "Identity of Asian Laws,"*** to be held on July 30-31 at Thammasat University. The deadline for abstract submission is January 15, 2026. For more information, see [University of Oxford].

The **European Centre for the Study of Hate** invites paper proposals for the ***international conference "Challenging Hate: A Human Rights Approach,"*** to be held on May 28-29, 2026, at University of Limerick. The

deadline for abstract submission is December 5, 2025. For more information, see [University of Limerick].

The Responsible AI Forum, to be held in Munich, Germany, on May 19-20, 2026, invites paper proposals. The deadline for abstract submission is December 12, 2025. For more information, see [Ieai].

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].

Jobs and Positions

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Representative in Namibia**. The deadline for application submission is December 13, 2025. For more information, see [FAO].

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** seeks a **Head of the Department of Legal Matters/Principal Secretary of the Court**. The deadline for application submission is December 11, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

The **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** seeks a **Legal Officer (Climate and Private Sector)** - Rome, Italy. The deadline for application submission is December 11, 2025. For more information, see [IFAD].

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** seeks a **Head of the Department of Legal Matters / Principal Secretary of the Court**. The deadline for application submission is December 11, 2025. For more information, see [ICJ].

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** seeks a 2025 Research Analyst. The deadline for application submission is December 31, 2025. For more information, see [IMF].

The **Center for Reproductive Rights** seeks a **Senior Legal Adviser – Europe.** The deadline for application submission is November 30, 2025. For more information, see [Center for Reproductive Rights].

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