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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Independence Day of the Dominican Republic, Finland and Portugal, the National Day of the Central African Republic and the United Arab Emirates, and the Great Union Day of Romania this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: New phase of digital control as President Xi orders overhaul of cyberspace governance

(ms) The Chinese government is signaling a new phase of digital governance after President Xi Jinping used a high-level Political Bureau study session on November 28 to issue his most sweeping instructions in years on tightening control of the domestic internet. Analysts say the speech marks the beginning of a long-term restructuring of China's digital environment, one that blends ideological discipline, heightened platform obligations and the deep integration of artificial intelligence into state supervision.

During the study session — the 23rd collective meeting of the current Politburo — Xi warned that cyberspace governance is "a crucial task concerning national

development, security, and the vital interests of the people." While Beijing has conducted annual "clean cyberspace" campaigns before, the new directive carries a different tone: it calls for establishing a *permanent, systematic* mechanism that eliminates the ad-hoc, campaign-style governance of previous years.

Observers in Beijing and Hong Kong note that the timing is significant. With the 21st Party Congress approaching in 2027, Xi's remarks are widely read as a mandate to stabilize the online environment well in advance. The leadership remains acutely aware of how online mobilization influenced public sentiment in the past, and experts say the Party aims to prevent any spontaneous digital coordination that could translate into real-world pressure.

A major portion of the instructions focused on China's internet companies. Xi urged platforms, content creators and multi-channel networks to "assume social responsibility," signaling that companies such as Tencent, ByteDance and Bilibili will face stricter scrutiny of algorithms, content ecosystems and the organizational capacity of influencer agencies. Analysts say Beijing's priority is not merely the removal of harmful content, but the dismantling of online networks capable of coordinating political influence.

The speech also elevates artificial intelligence to the center of China's future digital governance model. Xi said new technologies such as AI and big data present both challenges and "new support conditions," a phrase interpreted by policy specialists to mean that algorithmic supervision, predictive moderation and unified sentiment-monitoring systems will become standard tools of state oversight.

At the same time, Xi called on China's propaganda organs to adapt to a more competitive information landscape, instructing state media to produce content that is not only ideologically correct but also engaging and influential across digital platforms. The directive reflects frustration among officials that official narratives often lose out to commercial influencers in shaping online discourse.

Internationally, Xi urged China to play a more active role in shaping global cyber norms and to strengthen its cross-border communication platforms. The goal, analysts say, is to extend China's preferred model of state-centric internet governance while improving the country's ability to project narratives abroad.

Taken together, the November 28 speech signals a strategic shift: the window for a relatively pluralistic Chinese internet has narrowed further, and a

comprehensive, AI-enabled regulatory architecture is set to define China's digital space ahead of the next political cycle. [Chinese Government in Chinese]

China: State media warns of officials using "collective decisions" to conceal corruption

(ms) An official commentary published on November 26 by *Banyuetan*, a magazine run by the state news agency Xinhua, has warned that some local officials are manipulating collective decision-making procedures to conceal corruption. The article, titled *"Beware Collective Decision-Making Becoming a Corruption Invisibility Cloak,"* describes how certain cadres have adapted to tighter oversight by staging sham votes, orchestrating pre-arranged outcomes, and using procedural formalities to disguise personal gain as group consensus. [Banyuetan in Chinese]

The commentary cites several anonymized cases uncovered by disciplinary inspectors, including a town Party secretary who, after earlier punishment for rule violations, instructed subordinates on how to vote before convening "collective" meetings to approve projects tied to his personal interests. Inspectors also found a three-person "corruption partnership" within a state-owned grain enterprise, where managers used majority voting to pass fraudulent grain-trade contracts and divert funds to a private firm. Other examples involved a hospital director who prearranged procurement discussions to favor a preferred supplier, a water-bureau chief who bypassed review procedures to award a river project to relatives, and a village Party secretary who staged a "collective decision" on a land lease after securing personal benefits from the contractor.

The *Banyuetan* article frames these cases as symptoms of a deeper governance problem. Under Xi Jinping, Beijing has strengthened procedural requirements such as *san zhong yi da* (三重一大), a long-standing internal control mechanism designed to curb the discretion of powerful local leaders. The framework requires collective deliberation and recorded decision-making for three major items—major policy decisions, important personnel appointments and removals, and major project approvals—and one large item, the use of significant financial resources. In practice, it obliges Party committees and government departments to hold formal meetings, document individual opinions, conduct legality and integrity reviews, and secure majority approval before moving forward. These rules are intended to limit unilateral action, deter abuse of

office, and ensure that sensitive decisions are subject to institutional oversight. However, the commentary warns that some officials now treat these mechanisms as a "formalistic shield," fabricating compliance through scripted meetings, falsified minutes, choreographed voting, and engineered unanimity that masks prearranged outcomes and entrenched personal interests.

Analysts note that the focus on procedural manipulation suggests a new phase in China's anti-corruption drive. After more than a decade of enforcement, corruption has become more covert and coordinated, shifting from overt personal misconduct to orchestrated group behavior. The article calls for stricter enforcement of deliberation procedures, improved documentation of individual opinions, and greater use of digital "sunshine decision-making" platforms to detect irregular voting patterns. [South China Morning Post]

China: Bitcoin mining Rebounds despite 2021 ban

(ms) Bitcoin mining activity in China has surged back to significant levels four years after Beijing banned the industry, according to miners and new market data. Hashrate Index estimates China accounted for about 14 percent of global bitcoin mining at the end of October, making it the world's third-largest source despite the prohibition.

The revival is driven by cheap electricity in energy-rich regions such as Xinjiang and Sichuan, a glut of underused data-center capacity, and rising bitcoin prices that have made mining more profitable. Several miners told Reuters they restarted operations where local power is inexpensive and enforcement inconsistent.

Rig manufacturer Canaan has seen its China sales rebound sharply, with more than half of revenue in the second quarter coming from the mainland—up from under 3 percent after the 2021 crackdown.

Analysts say the rebound signals both economic pressures on local governments and a subtle softening in China's stance toward digital assets, even though mining remains officially illegal. [Reuters]

China: New gas-storage buildout advances Beijing's push for energy self-sufficiency

(ms) PetroChina and state pipeline operator PipeChina have set up two new natural gas storage companies in northeast and northwest China, corporate registry data showed on November 27. The firms—Liaohe Gas Storage and Xinjiang Gas Storage—were registered this week with a combined capital of more than 25.6 billion yuan (USD3.6 billion). PetroChina expects the new assets, together with another facility in southwest China, to add nearly 11 billion cubic meters of working gas-storage capacity.

The move highlights Beijing's effort to close a long-recognized gap in China's energy system. Despite being the world's largest natural gas importer, China's storage capacity remains under six percent of annual consumption, far below the 15–20 percent typical in many OECD countries. This leaves the country vulnerable to winter surges, industrial demand fluctuations, and external supply shocks.

Expanding storage has become a central element of China's broader drive for energy self-sufficiency, as global LNG price volatility, sanctions-related disruptions, and regional shortages have underscored the need for stronger domestic buffers. The new ventures also align with China's ongoing natural gas reform, which began with the creation of PipeChina in 2019 to separate transport infrastructure from upstream production and improve system-wide coordination.

PetroChina's planned acquisition of several storage companies from its parent, CNPC, further reflects Beijing's strategy of consolidating strategically important assets under major state entities. The latest investments signal China's continued push to build a more resilient and internally secure energy supply chain. [OilPrice.com] [Reuters]

China: Eight-month factory contraction underscores deepening economic strains

(ms) China's factory activity contracted for an eighth straight month in November, according to official PMI data released on November 30, marking the longest slump on record and reinforcing concerns that the country's post-pandemic recovery is losing momentum across multiple sectors. The manufacturing PMI came in at 49.2, below the 50-point threshold signalling contraction, while the non-manufacturing index

slipped to 49.5 — its first dip into negative territory in almost three years, driven by weakness in real estate and household services.

The data offer an early snapshot of an economy still grappling with subdued domestic demand, faltering investment and a deepening property-market crisis. Fixed-asset investment fell 1.7 percent in the January–October period, widening sharply from earlier months, as cautious investor sentiment and ongoing failures of major developers weighed on construction and manufacturing activity. Retail sales growth also eased for a fifth consecutive month in October — the longest soft patch since the country's COVID-19 lockdowns — underscoring household reluctance to spend despite government appeals to boost consumption.

External conditions have provided little relief. Exports unexpectedly contracted earlier in the quarter, while shipments to the United States remain weak even after last month's temporary trade truce between presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping. Details of the deal — including provisions on rare earth shipments — remain unsettled, and Beijing is also managing renewed frictions with Japan, adding further uncertainty for exporters.

Despite mounting evidence of slowdown, policymakers are signalling that major stimulus is unlikely, as the country appears on track to meet its "around 5 percent" growth target for 2025. Since late September, Beijing has already deployed roughly USD 216 billion in additional stimulus through bond reallocations and new funding for policy banks, but officials emphasise that long-term priorities remain industrial upgrading and technological self-sufficiency.

Economists warn, however, that the headwinds are increasingly structural. The property sector continues to drag down growth even after emergency measures, while weak consumption and debt-laden local governments constrain domestic demand. Analysts expect fourth-quarter growth to be the slowest since late 2022, when China ended zero-COVID controls. Without deeper reforms to address supply–demand imbalances and revive household confidence, the current downturn risks becoming entrenched — complicating Beijing's strategic pivot toward a more consumption-driven economy. [Financial Review] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2] [The Economist]

China: New white paper repeats "minimum deterrence" despite ongoing

expansion of nuclear forces

(ms) China released a new defense white paper on November 27 outlining its positions on arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation, repeating its declared long-standing commitments to maintaining its nuclear arsenal at what it describes as the "minimum level required for national security." The document, titled *China's Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation in the New Era*, reiterates Beijing's no-first-use policy and pledges not to threaten non-nuclear states. Yet the release comes amid China's significant expansion and diversification of its nuclear forces in recent years. [Full White Paper]

China's arsenal has grown from roughly 300 warheads in 2020 to an estimated 600 today, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The Pentagon's 2024 report similarly assessed that China exceeded 600 operational warheads by mid-2024 and is on course to continue expanding through at least 2035. Additionally did China's 80th Victory Day parade in September publicly displayed a full nuclear triad—including new intercontinental ballistic missiles, the JL-3 submarine-launched ballistic missile, and an air-launched ballistic missile deployed on the H-6N bomber—indicating a more capable and diversified deterrent than previously acknowledged. [Arm Control Association] [CSIS]

Against this backdrop, the new white paper presents China as a responsible actor committed to strategic stability. It states that Beijing "has long exercised extreme restraint" in the size and development of its nuclear arsenal and "will not engage in any nuclear arms race with any country." It argues that China's modernization aims only to maintain a credible second-strike capability in a shifting security environment.

The paper strongly criticizes developments in the United States without mentioning it by name. It warns that "some countries" have promoted deterrence policies in the Asia-Pacific that endanger global stability, and it opposes the deployment of U.S. offensive missiles in the region. The document singles out the planned "Golden Dome" missile defense system as an attempt to pursue "absolute security," saying it would pose "a serious threat to outer-space security." Beijing adds that any action harming China's core interests will prompt "firm countermeasures."

The white paper also highlights China's investment in missile and missile-defense systems, saying these capabilities are required to safeguard sovereignty given the country's "vast territory and complex security

environment." It stresses that such systems are not directed toward any specific state or region.

While the document emphasizes continuity in China's stated nuclear doctrine, the scale and speed of its modernization—as documented by external assessments—underscore the widening gap between China's declared minimum-deterrence posture and its growing strategic capabilities. [South China Morning Post]

China: Military–industrial revenues contract as anti-corruption purge disrupts procurement

(ms) China's major defense firms recorded a sharp contraction in arms revenues in 2024, according to new data released on December 1 by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The decline — roughly 10 percent year-on-year — stands in stark contrast to record global growth in the arms sector and marks the first significant setback for China's military–industrial base in over a decade.

SIPRI attributes the slump to the ongoing corruption crackdown inside the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which has roiled procurement pipelines and led to the postponement or cancellation of major contracts. The campaign intensified in 2023–24, followed by purges of high ranking military personal, including He Weidong, China's former second-highest-ranking officer and vice-chair of the Central Military Commission. Analysts say the purge has introduced new layers of caution and disruption across the chain of command, complicating President Xi Jinping's push to accelerate military modernization.

The downturn was most visible at key state-owned defense conglomerates. NORINCO, China's main land-systems producer, saw revenues fall 31 percent, while aerospace giants AVIC and CASC also posted declines amid leadership reshuffles and delays in aircraft and missile deliveries. The drag was severe enough to make Asia–Oceania the only region in SIPRI's global Top 100 ranking to register a revenue decrease.

The contraction comes despite Beijing's steadily rising defense budget and expanding military ambitions, including new carrier groups, hypersonic systems, and the world's largest coast guard fleet. SIPRI analysts warn that timelines for sensitive capabilities — including missile forces, space and cyber programs — may face uncertainty as investigations continue.

However, the institute notes that China's military modernization remains structurally well funded, with long-term political commitment intact. The near-term effect, it concludes, is likely to be program delays, elevated costs, and tighter procurement controls, rather than a strategic reversal. [Reuters] [SIPRI]

China–Hong Kong: Fire tragedy triggers 2019-like crackdown on dissent and "Anti-China Forces"

(ms) The deadly Tai Po fire in Hong Kong, which has now claimed at least 151 lives and left dozens injured, has rapidly escalated into a citywide political crackdown, as both Hong Kong authorities and mainland Chinese state organs move to suppress public criticism and reassert narrative control. While emergency crews continue rescue and recovery operations, the political response has unfolded with unusual speed, revealing a coordinated campaign across law enforcement, online platforms, and state media reminiscent of the tactics deployed during the 2019 protest movement.

Soon after residents and volunteers began sharing videos and questioning construction safety standards, Chinese state outlets and Hong Kong officials jointly warned that "anti-China forces" were exploiting the tragedy to "undermine social stability." Behind the public messaging, police units operating under the National Security Department (NSD) initiated arrests and detentions tied to online discussion of the fire. Among the confirmed cases, CUHK student Miles and former district councillor Cheung Kam-hung were both arrested by the NSD, reportedly for circulating or engaging with commentary deemed destabilizing. Volunteer "Ah Ching", who assisted victims at the scene, was taken in for CID questioning related to a separate dispute but was not arrested; however, her detention added to the climate of intimidation. [Hailey Cheng via Twitter]

These are the only verified individuals named publicly, but activists and community organizers report receiving warning calls, account inquiries, or silent visits—suggesting a broader sweep that authorities have not acknowledged. The Chinese central government's involvement is visible not only through the NSD's actions but also through synchronized moves by mainland platforms: Weibo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and even major Hong Kong–based social media accounts have seen mass takedowns of posts calling for accountability, independent investigations, or better regulation of scaffolding and netting

practices. Keywords such as “Tai Po truth,” “safety oversight,” and “official responsibility” now return only state-approved content. Several pages tracking fire safety incidents were abruptly deindexed overnight, a pattern consistent with direct coordination between mainland cybersecurity regulators and Hong Kong authorities.

Users report sudden surges of unknown accounts joining neighborhood WhatsApp and Telegram groups, along with infiltration-style behavior that strongly mirrors the digital surveillance methods deployed in 2019—but now equipped with more sophisticated monitoring tools and a far broader legal mandate due to expanded national security legislation. Posts questioning the official narrative have begun disappearing within minutes, and accounts critical of the government face shadow bans or temporary suspensions. Mainland state media ran near-identical editorials accusing “external black hands” of spreading rumors—an unmistakable echo of earlier campaigns targeting political dissent.

The combined effect is a rapidly tightening information environment in which discussion of the tragedy itself is allowed, but any criticism of regulatory failures, government preparedness, or official communication is treated as a national security issue. Analysts say the speed and severity of the response point to a deliberate political operation rather than routine moderation, with Beijing intent on preventing any resurgence of grassroots mobilization or public sympathy networks that emerged organically during the 2019 unrest. The fire has thus become more than a public safety disaster; it has triggered one of the most aggressive clampdowns on online discourse in Hong Kong in recent years, reinforcing Beijing’s direct role in shaping, policing, and limiting the boundaries of acceptable speech within the city. [Bloomberg] [Hong Kong Free Press] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Ruling coalition secures House of Representatives majority as three independents join LDP

(dql) The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party (JIP), have gained a slim majority in Japan’s 465-member House of Representatives. This comes after three independent lawmakers, formerly of JIP, joined the LDP’s parliamentary group, giving the coalition the minimum 233 seats needed.

The three legislators had left JIP over dissatisfaction with its leadership. JIP only joined the ruling coalition in October to support LDP leader Sanae Takaichi's premiership following Komeito's 26-year exit from the coalition. The LDP-Komeito bloc had lost its Lower House majority in the October 2024 election and its Upper House majority in July.

The strengthened coalition arrives at a critical time, as Prime Minister Takaichi's government prepares to advance a supplementary budget this session and the full fiscal 2026 budget in the next. Despite the Lower House majority, the coalition remains short in the Upper House and is seeking additional independents to secure a firmer legislative position. [The Asahi Shimbun] [The Mainichi]

Japan: Ruling coalition moves to cut Lower House seats

(dql) The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party (JIP), have agreed to reduce the number of House of Representatives seats, cutting both single-seat constituencies and proportional representation seats. The plan, part of broader political reforms, will reduce the lower chamber by roughly 10 percent—25 single-seat and 20 proportional representation seats out of 465.

The decision follows opposition concerns over proportional representation and is intended to secure smoother passage of the reform bill, which the parties plan to submit by December 17. The measure will automatically take effect if further electoral reform negotiations stall within a year.

The ruling coalition holds a slim majority in the lower house but remains a minority in the upper house (see article above), making cooperation with opposition parties essential for passing legislation. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Prime Minister Takaichi stands firm on Taiwan remarks amid opposition criticism

(dql) Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi stood by her earlier comments suggesting that a crisis in Taiwan could involve Japan, as she faced sharp questioning from opposition leaders in their first Diet debate on November 26 since assuming office in October. The

comment made in early November has triggered a rapid deterioration of ties with China. Since then, Beijing has launched a series of retaliatory measures to pressure Takaichi into retracting her remarks (see article in this edition, AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4).

When pressed by main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party leader Yoshihiko Noda about whether her remarks had harmed Japan–China relations, Takaichi avoided acknowledging responsibility for the latest development in Sino-Japanese ties, insisting that she had merely provided a sincere and specific answer to a pointed parliamentary question. She emphasized that the government's official stance on Taiwan—maintaining only unofficial ties and not recognizing its legal status—remains unchanged.

Takaichi also reaffirmed Japan's adherence to its longstanding "three non-nuclear principles," denying claims that she had ordered a review of them as part of the upcoming overhaul of key security documents. Her comments contrasted with earlier ambiguity during a Budget Committee session, where she avoided explicitly reaffirming the principles. China voiced fierce opposition to what it saw as "a major negative policy shift, which sends a dangerous signal to the international community." [The Asahi Shimbun] [Kyodo News] [SCMP]

First articulated by Prime Minister Eisaku Sato in 1967, the "three non-nuclear principles," are a cornerstone of Japan's post-World War II security and arms policy. They stipulate that Japan will not possess nuclear weapons, will not produce them domestically, and will not permit the introduction of nuclear weapons into its territory, including from allied countries.

Japan: High Court rules same-sex marriage ban constitutional

(ay) The Tokyo High Court ruled on November 28 that Japan's failure to recognize same-sex marriages is constitutional, marking the first high court decision to uphold the current legal framework after five other high courts previously found the ban unconstitutional.

The ruling overturned a 2024 district court judgment that had deemed the system to be in a "state of unconstitutionality." Eight plaintiffs, including a transgender man, had argued that the Civil Code and Family Registration Act unlawfully exclude them from marriage, seeking JPY 1 million (USD 6,400) in damages per person.

In its decision, the court acknowledged the difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ individuals and noted that public understanding of family has diversified since the postwar era, including acceptance of same-sex common-law partnerships. However, it concluded that it remains "logical" under the Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman, citing the traditional role of "reproductive unions" in sustaining society.

All six related cases will now proceed to the Supreme Court for a unified ruling. Nationwide, 541 municipalities covering about 93 percent of Japan's population issue non-binding partnership certificates that do not provide legal rights such as inheritance or joint taxation. [The Japan Times]

Amnesty International called the ruling a "significant step backwards for marriage equality," and urged the government "to be proactive in moving towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage." [Amnesty International]

Japan: Government finalizes extra budget to finance stimulus package

(ay) On November 28, the cabinet approved an additional JPY 18.3 trillion (USD 117 billion) budget for this fiscal year to support Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's large-scale stimulus program (see AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4), marking one of the biggest supplementary packages since the pandemic.

The package—30 percent larger than last year's extra budget—will be financed largely through JPY 11.7 trillion (USD 75 billion) in new government bonds, reflecting continued reliance on debt despite longstanding concerns over fiscal sustainability. [NHK]

The stimulus totals JPY 21.3 trillion (USD 137 billion) and includes JPY 2.7 trillion (USD 17.3 billion) in tax cuts and JPY 8.9 trillion (USD 56.9 billion) in measures to ease living costs, such as JPY 20,000 (USD 130) cash handouts per child and subsidies for electricity and gas bills. Higher-than-expected tax revenue, projected to exceed JPY 80 trillion (USD 511 billion) for the first time and JPY 2.88 trillion (USD 18.4 billion) above initial estimates, will partially offset the need for new borrowing.

The package also allocates JPY 6.4 trillion (USD 41 billion) for strategic investments in shipbuilding, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence. Total bond issuance for the fiscal year, including the

supplementary budget, is expected to reach JPY 40.3 trillion (USD 257.5 billion), remaining below last year's JPY 42.1 trillion (USD 269.2 billion).

In addition, the supplementary budget boosts defense spending by over JPY 1 trillion (USD 6.4 billion), bringing total fiscal 2025 defense-related outlays to about JPY 11 trillion (USD 75.9 billion), or 2 percent of GDP—two years ahead of the original schedule.

A key allocation of JPY 122.2 billion (USD 782 million) will enhance operational readiness of aircraft and vessels, including construction of two Mogami-class frigates (USD 73.6 million), two upgraded Mogami-class vessels, and four Taigei-class submarines (USD 39.3 million).

The Defense Ministry emphasized that this advance allocation allows manufacturers to begin production sooner, accelerating delivery schedules. Japan plans to commission all 12 upgraded Mogami-class frigates by fiscal 2032, while the Taigei-class submarine program is expected to produce approximately 12 vessels. The funding is intended to secure the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's operational readiness in a rapidly changing regional security environment. [Naval News]

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has prioritized reaching the NATO-recommended 2 percent target earlier than planned, signaling Japan's commitment to a stronger defense posture amid regional security concerns. However, analysts note that including supplementary budgets—traditionally intended for emergency spending—may overstate the achievement, and using outdated GDP figures inflates the ratio. They also highlight that stable funding plans, including tax measures and government bonds, remain unresolved. [Nikkei Asia]

Takaichi said the government would continue efforts to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio while maintaining economic support. [Reuters]

The budget still requires parliamentary approval. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party have agreed to start parliamentary deliberations on December 8. Committee hearings are set for December 9–10, with the LPD and its coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party, aiming to pass the budget by December 11. [Nippon.com]

Japan: Self-Defense Force to procure new anti-landing craft missile systems

(ay) Japan will acquire a next-generation anti-landing craft missile system in fiscal 2026 as part of a broader effort to strengthen coastal defence capabilities across the country's southwestern islands. According to the 2026 budget request, the Self-Defense Forces will procure eleven units of the Multi-Purpose Missile System Kai, designed to destroy enemy landing craft, amphibious assault vehicles and armored units. The new system succeeds the Type 96 and other legacy short-range anti-landing craft missiles, expanding engagement range and enabling simultaneous targeting of multiple high-speed landing platforms.

The procurement forms part of a multi-layered area-denial architecture that includes upgraded Type 12 surface-to-surface missiles and forthcoming cruise and hypersonic systems. The budget request also advances the Synchronized, Hybrid, Integrated and Enhanced Littoral Defense concept, under which the government plans to introduce up to ten types of unmanned systems for counter-amphibious operations. [USNI News]

Japan has accelerated deployment of coastal defence forces and missile bases near Taiwan in response to what it describes as a "severe and complex" security environment. This includes last week's announcement of the plan to deploy a medium-range surface-to-air missile unit on Yonaguni Island, just 110 km east of Taiwan. [Army Recognition]

Japan: Landfill work for controversial relocation of U.S. military base begins

(dql) Japan has begun landfill work in Okinawa's Oura Bay to facilitate the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from the densely populated city of Ginowan to the less inhabited Henoko coastal area. The project, agreed with the United States in 1996, marks the first full-scale landfill operation following prior seawall construction and seabed reinforcement.

The relocation faces persistent local opposition, with many Okinawans calling for the base to be moved entirely outside the prefecture due to noise, pollution, and incidents involving U.S. personnel. The central government insists the move is necessary to mitigate safety risks while maintaining the deterrent effect of the Japan-U.S. security alliance. Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki urged continued dialogue, whereas Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi emphasized the plan's urgency and pledged to communicate with residents. [The Mainichi]

Japan: New disaster management agency to be launched

(dql) Japan plans to establish a Disaster Management Agency on November 1 next year, with two regional hubs to follow in or after fiscal 2027. One hub will focus on preparedness for earthquakes along the Japan and Chishima Trenches, while the other will target megaquake risks along the Nakai Trough. Over 30 municipalities have applied to host a regional hub.

The agency, under the Cabinet, will serve as a government-wide command center overseeing pre-disaster planning, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery. It will have authority to issue recommendations to other ministries, consist of four departments, and expand staffing.

The initiative, championed by former Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, was reaffirmed by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in her October Diet policy speech. Legislation to establish the agency is expected to be submitted in the next ordinary Diet session. [The Asahi Shimbun]

Mongolia: Parliament approves five-year development guidelines for 2026-2030

(fs) The parliament approved the Five-Year Development Guidelines for 2026-2030 on November 28, adopting the policy framework “New Trust - Bold Reform.”

The guidelines set out ten national objectives under eight strategic directions, which are human development; social development and shared national values; economic and infrastructure development; environment and green economy; government efficiency and governance; regional development; national competitiveness; and science, technology, and artificial intelligence.

The plan aims to raise productivity, diversify processing industries, improve the business environment, and reduce state involvement in markets while strengthening fair competition and investor protection. It also seeks to narrow regional disparities, balance population migration, and improve access to quality health and education services. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Phased tobacco tax increases considered to curb consumption

(fs) Parliament of Mongolia reviewed on November 27 a draft amendment to the Law on Tobacco Control that would raise excise taxes on tobacco products incrementally through 2030.

The government argues that increased revenue will support school lunches, nutrition initiatives, and education programs. Mongolia's tobacco-control framework, first established in 1993 and updated several times, already includes bans on smoking and advertising in public places, sales restrictions near schools and mandatory health warnings.

The proposed amendment would expand regulation to cover electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco, and other nicotine and non-nicotine delivery systems. Officials rejected claims that higher taxes fuel counterfeit markets, citing a drop in counterfeit purchases from 13 percent to 6.3 percent after customs duty increases in 2017.

The Ministry of Finance projects that average retail prices will rise from USD 1.22 in 2026 to USD 4.28 in 2030. Tobacco use remains widespread, with 28.4 percent of the population smoking in 2024 and rising e-cigarette use among teenagers. [GoGo]

North Korea: Officials ordered to boost mineral exports as sanctions suppress state revenues

(sm) North Korean trade officials have reportedly intensified their efforts to expand overseas sales of high value minerals, including palladium and rhodium, in a bid to secure greater foreign currency revenue. Trading units affiliated with the munitions industry have approached potential buyers across the border, offering monthly quantities of rare metals despite stringent sanctions that prohibit such exports by international actors.

The outreach suggests that Pyongyang is seeking to revive or broaden existing mineral-based revenue channels at a time when broader trade flows remain constrained, and domestic resource extraction faces persistent shortages. [Daily NK]

North Korea: New missiles showcased

(dql) North Korea highlighted new long-range air-to-surface and air-to-air missiles — closely resembling the German-Swedish Taurus missile — at a military event on November 28, marking the 80th anniversary of its air force, signaling both technological ambitions and possible diplomatic aims. [Rodong 1]

State media reported that leader Kim Jong-un announced the military would soon be equipped with "new strategic assets" to strengthen the country's nuclear deterrent. Some analysts suggest the display also aims to pressure Russia for advanced fighter jets, though Moscow's capacity to deliver is uncertain. [Rodong 2]

The event marked the first public appearance in three months of Kim's young daughter, Ju-ae, who received formal salutes from air force pilots. Analysts interpret her presence as part of a gradual process of grooming her for future leadership, though she remains in the early stage of succession planning.

North Korea has been modernizing its military with missile tests, reconnaissance and combat drones, and airborne early warning aircraft, some possibly influenced by Russian technology. A major parade next year is expected to unveil further advancements in nuclear and conventional weapons. [SCMP] [Reuters]

North Korea: Rise in nuclear warhead

(sm) According to a report of the South Korean government-funded Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA) North Korea's nuclear stockpile may already be significantly larger than commonly estimated, suggesting that the country could possess as many as 150 warheads at present.

The assessment draws on estimates of Pyongyang's uranium and plutonium-based production capabilities indicating that the regime has steadily expanded fissile-material output despite international pressure. It's noted in the report that this trend appears consistent with North Korea's stated ambition to advance its tactical and strategic nuclear capabilities.

The projection warns that North Korea's arsenal could grow to roughly 240 warheads by 2030 and surpass 400 by 2040 if current production trajectories continue. Such rapid expansion would mark a major shift in the region's strategic balance and potentially enable Pyongyang to diversify its deployment options and strengthen both deterrence and coercive capabilities. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Parliament approves arrest motion for opposition lawmaker

(dql) The National Assembly has approved the arrest motion for opposition People Power Party (PPP) legislator Choo Kyung-ho in connection with former President Yoon Suk Yeol's 2023 martial law declaration. The motion passed 172–4 with two abstentions. All 107 PPP lawmakers boycotted the ballot reflecting heightened partisan polarization.

The special counsel investigating Yoon's martial law attempt alleges Choo obstructed parliamentary proceedings by changing internal meeting locations to delay the vote on lifting martial law, claiming this amounted to aiding insurrection.

Choo — former floor leader of the PPP and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance from 2022 to 2023 under Yoon — and his party deny wrongdoing, calling the charges politically motivated and a misuse of special counsel powers, aimed at destroying the opposition and establishing one-party rule.

The ruling Democratic Party, on the other side, framed the motion as necessary for judicial accountability, while Justice Minister Jung emphasized lawmakers' constitutional duty to counter unlawful martial law.

Political analysts warn the move could push the PPP into a harder-line stance, potentially alienating moderate voters and complicating the party's positioning ahead of next year's local elections, with leadership pressure likely if approval ratings fall. [The Korea Herald] [Korea JoongAng Daily]

South Korea: Former President Yoon faces multiple trials over death of Marine and drone operations

(dql) Former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol is facing multiple high-profile legal cases that highlight alleged abuses of authority during his administration, spanning both military and diplomatic affairs.

Indictment for shielding ex-defense minister

Former President Yoon Suk Yeol and several top officials have been indicted for allegedly orchestrating the appointment of ex-Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup

as ambassador to Australia in 2024 to shield him from investigation over a Marine's death.

The indictment claims Yoon pushed the transfer through the foreign and justice ministries, including lifting Lee's travel ban, while coordinating a diplomatic reshuffle to disguise the move.

The probe stems from the 2023 death of Cpl. Chae Su-geun, in which eight Marine officers were suspected of negligence. The special counsel alleges Yoon acted to protect himself after reacting angrily to the initial investigation report, which Lee had approved but later blocked from police referral.

Five other former officials, including the national security and justice ministers, were also indicted for their roles. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2]

Trial opens for Yoon over Pyongyang drone operation linked to martial law attempt

In addition, a new trial opened on December 1 for Yoon and three former senior defense officials over their alleged roles in a drone operation targeting Pyongyang last year. Prosecutors claim the uncrewed aerial vehicles were flown into North Korean airspace in October 2024 to provoke a hostile reaction that could justify declaring martial law.

The trial involves charges of general espionage, abuse of authority, and obstruction of official duties, with life imprisonment possible under the Criminal Act.

Evidence cited by prosecutors includes internal memos suggesting an intent to exploit instability and falsify documents, as well as confirmation from South Korea's Defense Intelligence Agency that drones entered North Korean airspace. North Korea publicly condemned the flights and responded with its own cross-border leaflet and waste balloon campaigns. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Government removes two senior defense officials over role in 2024 martial law attempt

(mo) The defense ministry announced on December 1 that it has removed two senior officials — the ministry's legal affairs director and its inspector general — for their handling of disciplinary measures involving a key figure in last year's failed martial law attempt, intensifying the government's push to identify and punish all involved.

Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back approved the personnel action as part of follow-up measures related to the illegal December 3, 2024, martial law declaration made under former President Yoon Suk Yeol. The ministry said it will conduct a broader internal probe and enforce “strict punishment,” while cooperating with the government’s constitutional compliance task force.

The decision centers on Kim Sang-hwan, the Army’s top legal affairs officer at the time, who boarded a bus that left Army headquarters in Gyeryongdae for Seoul early on December 4 under orders from Park An-su, the main commander overseeing Yoon’s martial law operation. The bus, carrying 34 Army staff officers from major to major general, returned within 30 minutes. [Maeil Business News]

The ministry initially gave Kim a 10-day suspension, but Prime Minister Kim Min-seok overturned the penalty and ordered a reassessment. Authorities later replaced it with a demotion, leading Kim — who retired last month — to leave the military as a colonel, instead of a brigadier general. The remaining 33 officers are also expected to face heavy disciplinary action.

Ahead of the first anniversary of the crisis, the government has expanded its review across ministries to determine which officials were involved and what penalties they should face. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

South Korea: Main opposition party divided over martial law apology as ruling party pushes new special counsel

(mo) South Korea’s political tensions are rising ahead of the first anniversary of the December 3 martial law attempt, as the ruling Democratic Party (DP) moves to consider launching a second, comprehensive special counsel investigation, while the main opposition People Power Party (PPP) remains split over whether to issue a public apology for its ties to former President Yoon Suk Yeol.

DP lawmaker Jung Chung-rae said the new special counsel would seek to consolidate unresolved cases tied to the Marine’s death, allegations involving former first lady Kim Keon-hee, and the insurrection probe itself, arguing that the full truth has yet to be uncovered. President Lee Jae Myung echoed the narrative by warning that failure to confront lingering elements of the “insurrection” could allow similar crises to recur.

Meanwhile, the PPP is embroiled in internal discord: party leader Jang Dong-hyeok rejected calls for an apology, saying there was "nothing to cut off" from the past, while younger lawmakers argue the party must cross the "river of martial law" by acknowledging responsibility to regain public trust. [The Korea Herald]

With conservative voter support slipping in recent polls, more than 30 first- and second-term PPP legislators are expected to issue an independent, forward-looking statement on December 3 if party leadership does not act. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Ruling party Supreme Council members resign to run in June local elections

(dql) Several top figures in South Korea's ruling Democratic Party are stepping down from leadership positions to contest high-profile local races next year, triggering internal leadership elections.

Party officials confirmed that three Supreme Council members—lawmakers Jeon Hyun-heui (Seoul mayoral hopeful), Han Jun-ho, and Kim Byung-joo (Gyeonggi gubernatorial hopefuls)—are expected to submit resignation letters to comply with party rules.

Despite the departures, the party will not shift to emergency leadership, as at least five resignations are required to trigger such a move. The resulting vacancies will prompt a mid-January internal election, conducted through a vote split between the Central Committee and dues-paying party members.

The resignations come amid heated competition for key local posts. In Seoul, over ten candidates are reportedly vying for the Democratic Party's mayoral nomination. In Gyeonggi, former Justice Minister Choo Mi-ae is widely expected to challenge incumbent Kim Dong-yeon, alongside bids from Han Jun-ho and Kim Byung-joo. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Ruling party, government agree on tightening cybercrime penalties

(mo) The ruling Democratic Party and the government have agreed to push amendments to the Electronic Financial Transactions Act to sharply strengthen penalties for cybercrime following recent hacking incidents, including introducing a penalty surcharge of

up to 3 percent of total sales for major data breaches and a compulsory performance fine of up to USD 37,000 for failure to follow corrective orders.

A separate proposal under the Personal Information Protection Act would allow surcharges of up to 10 percent of sales in severe hacking cases. Lawmakers also settled a major policy issue on digital assets by endorsing a stablecoin consortium model in which banks must hold at least 51 percent ownership, combining financial institutions with private issuers under the forthcoming Basic Act on Digital Assets.

While the Bank of Korea supports bank dominance to ensure stability, industry players warn of potential barriers to entry. The ruling camp plans to accelerate legislative review early next year, while also consulting opposition lawmakers on broader capital-market reforms and financial relief measures for low-income households. [The ChosunBiz]

South Korea: Ruling party introduces special bill to secure U.S. tariff cuts

(dql) South Korea has moved quickly to codify its massive U.S. investment pledge in order to unlock tariff benefits and formalize bilateral commitments made at the recent leaders' summit.

On November 26, the ruling Democratic Party (DP) submitted a Special Act on Managing Korea–US Strategic Investments, designed to implement Seoul's USD 350 billion investment pledge and ensure U.S. tariff cuts on Korean automobiles apply retroactively to November 1. The bill follows the November 14 strategic investment memorandum and enables Washington to lower car and parts tariffs from 25 percent to 15 percent. Seoul immediately notified the U.S. Commerce Department and requested expedited publication in the Federal Register.

The legislation establishes frameworks for strategic investments, including a Korea–US strategic investment fund, a temporary management corporation, and safeguards such as an annual remittance cap and requirements for commercially reasonable project selection.

However, the main opposition People Power Party criticized the bill for vague standards, potential taxpayer liability, and weakened safeguards compared to the memorandum. The party argues the investment arrangement should undergo National Assembly

ratification as it may impose substantial financial obligations.

The government counters that ratification could lock South Korea into unfavorable terms while negotiations with Washington are ongoing. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Korea Zinc emerges as key strategic minerals supplier to U.S

(mo) Korea Zinc — one of the largest zinc smelters in the world — is positioning itself as a global "resource security corporation" by supplying U.S. markets with strategic minerals dominated by China, starting with antimony exports that began in June and target 100 tons this year and 240 tons in 2026.

Antimony, critical to ammunition, defense electronics and fire-resistant alloys, has seen prices surge to around 50,000 USD per ton amid Chinese export controls, as China still accounts for nearly 59 percent of global production and more than 76 percent of past U.S. supply.

Korea Zinc, the only domestic producer, currently makes about 3,600 tons annually at its Onsan Smelter and is expanding shipments to help stabilize global supply chains. The company will also begin supplying the U.S. with germanium from 2028 under an agreement with Lockheed Martin, after investing 103 million USD to build a facility capable of producing 10–12 tons per year.

Germanium prices have climbed to roughly 5,000 USD per kilogram following China's export restrictions. Korea Zinc's leadership says the moves aim to build a resilient strategic-minerals supply chain to support economic security goals for both South Korea and the United States. [The ChosunBiz]

South Korea: Government-industry working group established to deploy Nvidia GPUs

(mo) A government–industry working group has been established — including Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor Group, SK Telecom and Naver Cloud — to accelerate the rollout of a nationwide AI infrastructure expansion centered on Nvidia GPUs. The group, chaired by Second Vice Science Minister Ryu Je-myung, convened on November 27 to review strategies for

deploying up to 260,000 Nvidia Blackwell GPUs, which Nvidia unveiled for the South Korean market last month. [MLex]

Executives from the participating firms discussed coordinated approaches to scaling the country's AI ecosystem and agreed to hold regular meetings to synchronize investment and deployment plans.

Nvidia's supply commitment is expected to boost Korea's installed AI GPU capacity from roughly 65,000 units to more than 300,000, positioning the country as one of the world's largest AI computing hubs outside the United States [The Korea Times] [TechInAsia]

South Korea: First private-led rocket launch conducted

(mo) South Korea carried out its first rocket launch led entirely by a private company, marking a major milestone in its transition toward a commercial, industry-driven space program. The Nuri rocket lifted off from Naro Space Center on November 27, with all satellites successfully separating about 15 minutes later.

The launch forms part of a 1.8 billion USD national program that will include six missions through 2027. Nuri—South Korea's first fully homegrown launcher—was handed over this year to Hanwha Aerospace, which acquired exclusive rights to its technology from the Korea Aerospace Research Institute for 18.0 million USD.

The launch is strategically significant as Seoul seeks to raise its share of the global space economy from 1 percent today to 10 percent by 2045, amid intensifying space competition in Asia and North Korea's claims of its own satellite capabilities. Analysts say the private-sector pivot is essential to accelerate innovation and keep pace with Japan and China, though Korea's space program continues to face leadership turnover and delays — including a two-year slip in the Korean Positioning System project.

Hanwha plans to build a full value chain spanning launch vehicles, satellites and data services, while the government is advancing wider partnerships with LIG Nex1 and LG Corp. [Bloomberg]

South Korea: Massive data breach affecting 34 million users

(mo) South Korean online platforms launched emergency security audits after Coupang — one of South Korea's largest online retailers — disclosed that the personal data of 33.7 million customers — nearly its entire user base—had been compromised, a sharp revision from the 4,500 cases initially reported.

Under privacy law, Coupang could face fines of up to 3 percent of revenue, like the 91.7 million USD penalty imposed on SK Telecom after its April breach, while rival e-commerce companies tightened inspections and internal controls amid concerns of systemic weaknesses despite Coupang's heavy technology spending.

Experts said the scale of the breach points to fundamental flaws in internal controls rather than underinvestment. Civic groups issued a joint statement demanding full transparency on the cause and scope of the leak, detailed consumer compensation plans, and stronger safeguards against secondary damage such as voice phishing or identity theft, while also urging the government to conduct a thorough investigation and impose strong administrative measures to prevent recurrence. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said on December 1 that the massive customer data breach was a "wake-up call" for stronger digital privacy protections and ordered the government to prepare measures to increase fines and penalties for similar incidents. [Reuters]

South Korea: Arirang 7 Satellite successfully enters orbit

(mo) Arirang 7, South Korea's latest multipurpose satellite, has successfully entered orbit following its launch aboard a Vega-C rocket from the Guiana Space Centre in French Guiana, the Korea AeroSpace Administration confirmed on December 2. The satellite was deployed 44 minutes after liftoff, which occurred at 2:21 p.m. local time on December 1 (2:21 a.m. December 2 in Korea), with launch services provided by France-based Arianespace.

Also known as the Korea Multipurpose Satellite 7, Arirang 7 carries an ultra-high-resolution electro-optical camera and an infrared sensor, enabling detailed Earth observation. The satellite is expected to deliver high-quality imagery for environmental monitoring, disaster response analysis, and urban heat island studies, strengthening South Korea's remote-

sensing and space-based observation capabilities. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Auditors accused of leaking classified military information in border incident investigations

(dql) Seven auditors from South Korea's state-run Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI), including former chief Choe Jae-hae and Commissioner Yoo Byung-ho, are accused of leaking classified military information during audits of sensitive border incidents.

The leaks involved the 2020 killing of civil servant Lee Dae-jun by North Korean forces and the 2018 dismantling of border guard posts under an inter-Korean agreement. Press releases issued in 2022 and 2023 reportedly disclosed information without undergoing the mandatory confidentiality review under the Military Secret Protection Act.

The internal BAI task force found strong evidence linking the leaked materials to media reports and noted that some officials may have obstructed internal investigations or abused authority. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Government suspects North Korea-linked hacker group behind major crypto heist

(mo) South Korean authorities suspect the North Korea–linked Lazarus Group is behind the recent USD 30.6–37 million crypto heist at Upbit, the country's largest digital-asset exchange, according to government and industry officials.

This comes after Upbit suffered its biggest security breach in six years on November 27, losing 30.1 million USD after hackers transferred Solana-linked assets from its hot wallet to an unauthorized address. Operator Dunamu said it will fully compensate users and has suspended deposits and withdrawals.

Investigators believe hackers did not infiltrate Upbit's servers, but instead compromised or impersonated administrator accounts, a method consistent with Lazarus' previous operations.

Officials and cybersecurity experts say the hack aligns with North Korea's urgent need for foreign currency, adding that Lazarus is known for laundering funds

through multiple exchanges, making transactions untraceable. [Yonhap] [Coin Desk]

Taiwan: Opposition blocks special defense budget

(dql) Lawmakers from the opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), have blocked a bill authorizing a special defense budget of NTD 1.25 trillion (USD 40 billion) during a legislative meeting on December 2.

The proposed budget, approved by the Cabinet last week, is aimed at funding major defense initiatives, including weapons procurement and joint development programs with the U.S. for the 2026-2033 period. [Reuters]

The KMT, supported by the TPP, called for postponing the bill's consideration, insisting that President Lai Ching-te should explain its necessity to the Legislature. In response, ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators criticized the opposition, accusing them of attempting to hinder Taiwan's defense expansion in favor of China's interests. DPP lawmakers also argued that Lai had already expressed willingness to brief the Legislature in accordance with constitutional procedures.

The Cabinet condemned the opposition's actions, claiming that their demands violated the constitutional separation of powers and calling the move "regrettable." The Cabinet also emphasized the need to bolster Taiwan's defense capabilities in the face of increasing Chinese aggression in the region.

In addition to the defense budget, other proposed bills were also blocked, including amendments to the Act Governing the Allocation of Government Revenues and Expenditures, and legislation regulating lawmakers' visits to China. [SCMP] [Focus Taiwan]

The opposition's move to block Taiwan's defense budget underscores a deepening partisan divide the DPP on the side and the KMT and TPP on the other, amplified by the fact that the KMT and TPP hold the majority in Taiwan's Legislature.

Taiwan: KMT proposal on Chinese Spouses' eligibility for public office sent to committee

(acl) On November 28, an amendment proposal put forward by the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) to allow China-born spouses of Taiwanese citizens to run for and hold public office without first renouncing their Chinese citizenship was referred to a legislative committee for review.

The amendment bill follows recent cases in which China-born local officials married to Taiwanese nationals were removed from office after failing to prove they had relinquished their People's Republic of China (PRC) nationality, including one individual who had lived in Taiwan for nearly 30 years.

The amendment exempts Chinese spouses with household registration in Taiwan from Article 20 of the Nationality Act, which requires Republic of China (ROC) nationals holding a foreign nationality to renounce it within a year of assuming public positions or face removal.

According to the bill's explanatory note, the Nationality Act regulates the acquisition, loss, restoration, and revocation of ROC nationality but does not clearly define its applicability to mainland Chinese residents, creating inconsistencies with the cross-strait relations act. KMT lawmakers argue this ambiguity has led to misapplication of Article 20.

Because Beijing considers Taiwan part of China, Chinese spouses in Taiwan cannot obtain documentation proving they have renounced PRC citizenship. Although PRC law states that Chinese nationals automatically lose citizenship upon naturalizing abroad, China does not recognize Taiwan as a foreign state, making such documentation unobtainable.

In response, President Lai Ching-Te — who doubles as leader of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) — urged lawmakers not to advance the proposal, warning that removing the expectation of "single allegiance" for immigrants from China would raise public concern and undermine social harmony and national security.

The DPP caucus similarly argued that allowing individuals who "still hold PRC nationality" to serve in public office would create "irreconcilable loyalty conflicts," noting that elected officials must swear an oath to uphold the constitution and pledge loyalty to Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan] [South China Morning Post]

Taiwan: Senior Kuomintang member resigns amid controversy over pro-unification video

(yl/dql) Ho Ying-lu, a member of the Central Standing Committee of the main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), resigned from the party after controversy over a video clip in which she appeared in a Mao Zedong shirt and called for Taiwan's "return to the motherland" and rapid unification.

The KMT had earlier suspended her pending disciplinary review. Ho, reportedly the only China-born member of the party's highest decision-making body who came to Taiwan in 1997, defended her stance as "peaceful unification" and questioned the party's ambiguity over references to "Chinese people." [Focus Taiwan]

The controversy surrounding Ho Ying-lu has exposed the Kuomintang's ongoing struggle to define its position on relations with China. Her pro-unification messaging, combined with recent moves by top KMT figures — including newly elected KMT leader Cheng Li-wen's participation in events linked to people involved in Chinese espionage cases and public calls for a shared "Chinese nation" — has intensified public debate about the party's stance. These incidents unfold as Taiwanese society grows more focused on safeguarding sovereignty, making the KMT's next steps particularly consequential. [Vision Times]

Taiwan: Opposition lawmakers to defend local government funding changes as Cabinet seeks reconsideration

(acl) On November 27, Kuomintang (KMT) lawmakers vowed to uphold recently passed amendments allocating more tax revenues to local governments, following the Cabinet's request for a reconsideration.

The KMT, which together with the second opposition party — the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) — commands the majority in Parliament, criticized the Cabinet for unveiling its own draft amendments to the Act Governing the Allocation of Government Revenues and Expenditures, accusing the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of attempting to "bury" the revisions passed by the opposition-controlled Legislature on November 14.

The party also accused the Cabinet of political maneuvering, arguing that it could have submitted its

own amendment earlier rather than waiting until after the bill's passage to introduce an alternative.

At a news conference the same day, the Cabinet argued that the Legislature's amendments would place significant fiscal pressure on the central government, requiring an additional USD 8.43 billion in borrowing next year and exceeding the statutory debt ceiling. Cabinet officials also said the changes infringe on the executive branch's authority to draft the national budget, limit the central government's ability to adjust subsidies to local governments, and hinder the smooth implementation of government policies. [Taipei Times] [Taiwan News]

Under Taiwan's political system, the executive branch may order the legislature to reconsider bills deemed difficult to execute. Pending President Lai Ching-te's approval, this would mark the Cabinet's eighth such request in just over a year. The previous seven were rejected by KMT and TPP, underscoring the deep partisan polarization between ruling and opposition parties in Taiwan political landscape. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Government plans expanded long-term care program to support aging society

(acl) On November 27, Deputy Health Minister Lue Jen-Der outlined Taiwan's Long-Term Care 3.0 program, which the Ministry of Health plans to roll out in 2026 to meet rising demand as Taiwan enters super-aged society status, with adults 65 and older now exceeding 20 percent of the population.

Lue said the expanded program will further integrate hospitals, community care providers, and home-based medical services to create a seamless care system. Average wait times for post-discharge long-term care have dropped from 51 days in 2017 to four days, and the government aims to shorten this to two days by 2026 and eliminate delays entirely by 2030. Next year's long-term care budget is expected to rise to USD 3.5 billion, pending legislative approval. Lue warned that if the budget remains stalled, key initiatives — such as raising annual subsidies for disabled individuals — could be delayed. [CNA, in Chinese]

The new framework will expand home healthcare, provide transportation to medical facilities, increase subsidies for care institutions, raise financial support for moderately to severely disabled seniors, promote assistive technology, and encourage more middle-aged workers to return to the care workforce. For those with

medical needs, services such as home visits and family physician care will be covered through the National Health Insurance system. [Focus Taiwan][Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Trade chief says U.S. “very likely” to grant stacking relief during legislative hearing

(yl) Taiwan’s top trade negotiator Yang Jen-ni said Taipei and Washington have entered the final stage of Section 232 tariff talks, with Taiwan *“very likely”* to secure stacking-relief, ensuring any future tariff adjustments would not be added on top of the current 20 percent levy imposed in August. She also indicated Taiwan may receive MFN-like treatment within the U.S. national security investigation covering semiconductors and related products, adding that U.S. officials have praised Taiwan’s “proactive and pragmatic” negotiating approach.

Yang rejected foreign media reports claiming the U.S. is seeking Taiwanese commitments to train American semiconductor workers. Economics Minister Kung Ming-hsin clarified that such training is managed independently by TSMC and other Taiwanese firms operating in the U.S. Taiwan and the U.S. have completed five in-person negotiation rounds, with the sixth expected soon and hopes to finalize the agreement by year-end. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Government proposes special budget for “T-Dome” air-defense network

(yl) President Lai Ching-te unveiled an eight-year NTD 1.25 trillion (USD 40 billion) special defense budget to build a multilayer “T-Dome” air-defense system, integrating expanded missile-defense interceptors, new surveillance radars, and AI-enabled decision-support tools.

The package also covers unmanned systems, precision-strike munitions, and anti-armor weapons, with cooperation from the U.S. expected to accelerate procurement and tech integration. The government estimates the program will generate over NTD 400 billion (USD 12. 7 billion) in domestic output and create around 90,000 jobs. Lai said the plan reflects defense needs and is unrelated to the recent Xi-Trump call. [Focus Taiwan]

Raymond Greene, Direct of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) — the de-facto US embassy in Taiwan — called the special budget a “major step” toward strengthening deterrence and maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait, saying enhanced military readiness is essential for safeguarding Taiwan’s democracy and enabling constructive cross-strait conditions.

He reaffirmed U.S. support for Taiwan’s defense modernization, noting that advanced capabilities and asymmetric systems raise the cost and uncertainty of any potential use of force by Beijing. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: First Formosat-8 satellite launched

(acl) On November 29, the first satellite in Taiwan’s Formosat-8 constellation project was launched aboard a SpaceX rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California. The satellite, named the Chi Po-Lin satellite, is the first of eight planned for the Formosat-8 constellation and will capture ground imagery at a 1-meter resolution, sharpening to 0.7 meters after processing. It is designed to help support disaster management and national security and will collect data multiple times per day.

The satellite has an 84 percent domestic component rate and was jointly developed by 33 Taiwanese companies, government agencies, universities, and research institutions.

President Lai Ching-te called the launch a major milestone for Taiwan’s space industry, saying the government will continue working with academia and industry to develop the next generation of medium and low-orbit communications satellites and strengthen Taiwan’s presence in the global space and aerospace sectors.

Similarly, National Science and Technology Council Minister Wu Cheng-Wen said the Chi Po-lin satellite demonstrates Taiwan's growing space capabilities and is expected to support new applications and value-added services in aerial imagery, creating significant opportunities for domestic tech firms.

The Formosat-8 constellation is scheduled for full deployment in 2031, and will support disaster management, national security and international collaboration, according to the Taiwan Space Agency. [Focus Taiwan][Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Court detains China-born citizen in probe over alleged Beijing-linked election interference

(dql) A New Taipei court has ordered the incommunicado detention of Xu Chunying, a China-born Taiwanese citizen, on suspicion of taking money and directives from China to influence Taiwan's elections — a case that directly touches on concerns over Beijing's covert political interference.

Prosecutors believe Xu may have violated the Anti-Infiltration Act by allegedly assisting figures from the opposition Taiwan People's Party (TPP), including former party leader and presidential candidate Ko Wen-je and former Taipei deputy mayor Vivian Huang, though they have not publicly presented evidence detailing her actions.

Authorities raided multiple locations, questioned several suspects and witnesses, and imposed travel bans on others involved. The TPP urged due process and warned against politicizing the investigation.

The case also revives past controversy around Xu's nationality status — a legal grey zone shaped by China's refusal to recognize Taiwan's sovereignty, which complicates the renunciation of Chinese citizenship for naturalized Taiwanese seeking public office (see article in this edition). [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Indigenous submarine "Narwhal" faces testing delays and safety scrutiny

(yl) Taiwan's first domestically built submarine Narwhal continues to undergo sea-acceptance trials in Kaohsiung as part of its formal handover process to the Navy. The vessel completed harbor tests earlier this year and is now conducting open-sea evaluations, including a fourth sea trial last week in deeper waters near Xiaoliuqiu, steps required before moving on to shallow- and deep-dive tests.

Under the original schedule, the submarine was to finish testing in September and be delivered in November, but Defense Minister Wellington Koo has said meeting the deadline remains challenging. A delay would trigger a contractual fine of roughly NTD 190,000 (USD 6,500) per day.

The program also drew attention after media reports alleged the submarine went to sea without a functioning anchor. The shipbuilder CSBC

acknowledged the anchor system was being adjusted and would be reinstalled, but denied the situation posed safety risks, dismissing additional rumors about watertight-door issues as false. The company said each testing phase is overseen by a professional team that includes foreign technical advisers. Once the prototype is delivered, the Navy plans to procure seven additional submarines from CSBC under a budget of NTD 284 billion (USD 9.26 billion). [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2]

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

Bangladesh: New corruption verdict deepens legal cascade against ousted ex-prime minister

(mml/lm) Bangladesh's ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina is facing a rapidly intensifying series of legal setbacks, with multiple convictions delivered in close succession following her recent death sentence. Hasina, removed from office in August 2024 during a student-led uprising and now residing in India, remains accused in more than 550 cases across the country. The latest rulings continue to build pressure on her political circle, including close family members and senior former officials.

The legal escalation began on November 17, when the International Crimes Tribunal-1 — a domestic special court that tries offences such as genocide and crimes against humanity — sentenced Hasina to death in a case linked to last year's July unrest. Prosecutors later

signaled they may seek to convert remaining life-term components of that judgment into additional capital sentences. [The Daily Star 1]

Ten days later, on November 27, a Dhaka special court convicted Hasina again. In three corruption cases heard together, the court sentenced her in absentia to a combined 21 years' rigorous imprisonment for alleged irregularities in securing state-owned land under the so-called Rajuk Purbachal New Town Project. Rajuk is Dhaka's capital development authority and oversees major urban projects, including land allocation.

The court found that Hasina had abused her authority to obtain plots for herself and close relatives who, according to case records, did not qualify under project rules. Her son Sajeeb Wazed and daughter Saima Wazed each received 5-year sentences in related cases, and 19 former Rajuk and Housing Ministry officials were also convicted, with one defendant acquitted. [The Daily Star 2] [Al Jazeera]

On December 1, the same special judge issued another ruling in a separate Purbachal land-allocation case, convicting Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana and her niece Tulip Siddiq, a British member of parliament. Hasina received a 5-year sentence, Rehana seven years and Tulip two years. 14 additional former officials were also sentenced to five years. Tulip, who remained in the United Kingdom, criticized the verdict as "flawed" and "farcical," saying she had never been given an opportunity to respond to the charges. British media noted that the United Kingdom has no extradition treaty with Bangladesh, making it unlikely she would be required to return. [The Daily Star 3] [The Daily Star 4]

The December 1 verdict marks Hasina's fourth set of convictions in less than two weeks, following the death sentence and the three corruption rulings on November 27. Two more Purbachal-related corruption cases involving Hasina, Rehana, Tulip, Azmina Siddiq and Radwan Mujib Siddiq are still pending before the same court, with judgments expected in January. Proceedings continue to draw significant international attention, particularly given the political sensitivities surrounding Hasina's removal from office and her current stay in India. [The Daily Star 5] [The Daily Star 6]

Amid these developments, state-appointed defence lawyer Z I Khan Panna, a senior Supreme Court advocate, announced his withdrawal from two enforced-disappearance cases before the International Crimes Tribunal-1. He said Hasina "has no confidence

in the court," explaining why he chose to step aside after having initially expressed willingness to represent her. [The Daily Star 7]

Bangladesh: Election authorities advance preparations as political climate grows increasingly polarized

(lm) Bangladesh's election preparation is inching closer to a critical stretch, with the Election Commission (EC) steadily advancing its timetable for a national election and constitutional referendum expected in early February 2026.

The EC has intensified internal coordination, holding an extended meeting on November 30 with senior officials from more than 30 ministries and state agencies to review logistics, electricity supply, security planning and the readiness of polling stations across the country. The meeting follows months of consultations with 47 political parties — including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party — along with civil society groups, journalists and domestic observers. Election Commissioner Md Anwarul Islam Sarkar said the formal election schedule will be announced in the second week of December, with the polls expected in mid-February before Ramadan. He told reporters that extensive authority had been granted to returning officers, police and the armed forces to prevent irregularities, stressing that an entire constituency's polling could be cancelled if unrest occurs. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

While the EC moves forward with its preparations, the political climate around the major parties is becoming more brittle. Survey data released by the US-based International Republican Institute (IRI) indicates strong public engagement and shifting political alignments. If elections were held next week, 33 percent of respondents said they would vote for the BNP – the main opposition and historical archrival to the ousted Awami League – while about 29 percent expressed support for Jamaat-e-Islami – Bangladesh's largest Islamist party and a former BNP ally. The study also shows considerable demand for accountability regarding the former Awami League government, with 41 percent strongly supporting the suspension of the party's registration. Public confidence in the interim government remains high, with nearly 70 percent approving of the performance of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. At the same time, 67 percent said past elections were rigged, underscoring the challenge

of rebuilding trust ahead of the upcoming vote. [The Daily Star 3]

The NCP – a student-led party that emerged in the aftermath of the 2024 uprising – sharpened its rhetoric as the political climate grows more contentious. At a prayer gathering in Dhaka, the NCP's convener alleged that one party was "playing the Liberation War card", while another was "using the religion card", and claimed that both were trying to obstruct the reform process. Although he did not name either group directly, his remarks clearly correspond to the messaging styles associated with BNP and Jamaat. He argued that these tactics risked confusing voters and insisted that those "openly" and "secretly" opposing reforms were acting against the public interest. [The Daily Star 4]

Jamaat-e-Islami's leadership, speaking at a rally in Khulna, also expressed doubts about the credibility of the election environment. The party's ameer warned that individuals aligned with rival political groups were "displaying the arrogance of power without being in power" and argued that repeated attacks on opposition rallies, including women's events, pointed to a breakdown of order. He criticized references by some commentators to the 1972 Constitution and described them as attacks on the political legacy of the late president Ziaur Rahman, the founder of the BNP. He insisted that a referendum must be held to give the July reform charter legal authority before the national election and warned the interim government that "history will not forgive" a failure to do so. Other speakers at the rally portrayed the July uprising that removed the former government as an irreversible turning point. [The Daily Star 5] [The Daily Star 6]

Bangladesh: Major pre-election reshuffle of local administration and police forces

(lm) Bangladesh's interim authorities have initiated one of the most extensive administrative reshuffles in recent years as the country moves toward national elections expected in early 2026. The changes affect both district-level and sub-district-level officials responsible for day-to-day governance and election preparation.

The government has replaced or transferred police superintendents in all 64 districts and reassigned large numbers of field administrators. District police superintendents are the top law-enforcement officials at the district level, while deputy commissioners are the chief civil administrators who also serve as

returning officers during national elections. According to coverage in Dhaka-based media, fifty new deputy commissioners have now been posted.

At the sub-district level, the authorities have implemented widespread changes involving Bangladesh's upazila nirbahi officers, the chief executives of the country's sub-districts (upazilas), which serve as the primary units of local administration. A government gazette in mid-November ordered 158 of these officers to move to new posts by November 30, following a separate decision to install new officers in 166 sub-districts across the eight administrative divisions. A subsequent gazette on December 1 added 77 further appointments, bringing the total number of recent changes to 243. Officers who did not report to their new assignments by the specified deadlines were to be released from their current posts. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star 1]

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has strongly questioned the timing and intent of the reshuffle, arguing that replacing district and sub-district officials before the election schedule is announced risks shaping the administrative environment to favor a particular political actor. BNP leaders say the "manual lottery" used to assign police postings lacked credibility and claim that officers with perceived political loyalties had been predetermined. They warn that assigning inexperienced or politically aligned officials to constituencies with sensitive polling centers could increase risks around election security and the management of voting procedures. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: High Court questions new rule limiting coalition election symbols

(lm) Bangladesh's High Court has opened a legal review of a controversial change to the country's election law that would prevent political alliances from fielding candidates under a shared symbol. The court acted after receiving a writ petition that challenges the legality of a recent amendment to the Representation of the People Order (RPO), the central legal framework governing national elections.

The amendment, issued through an ordinance on November 3, requires every registered political party to contest national elections using its own symbol, even when participating in an electoral alliance. This represents a major departure from long-standing practice. Under the previous rules, coalition partners—

especially smaller parties with limited organizational reach—could nominate candidates under the symbol of a larger alliance member, a system that often served as the glue of Bangladesh's coalition politics by enabling unified branding and simplified voter recognition.

The petitioner argued that the new rule restricts political freedoms and disrupts established coalition-based campaigning. After reviewing the petition, a High Court bench issued a rule asking the government and the Election Commission to explain within ten days why the provision should not be declared unconstitutional. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Hospitalization of key opposition leader casts uncertainty over political transition

(lm) Bangladesh's political transition has entered a period of heightened uncertainty as Khaleda Zia — the chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and a former prime minister — remains in critical condition in a Dhaka hospital.

Zia, who has been one of the country's most influential opposition leaders for decades, has been receiving intensive treatment at Evercare Hospital since November 23 for a severe lung infection affecting both her heart and lungs. Doctors describe her condition as "very critical," although she continues to respond to ongoing care. Her medical status is politically sensitive, given that she was jailed for corruption in 2018 under the previous government led by her archrival – ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina – and barred from travelling abroad for treatment until the change of government in 2024. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2] [Al Jazeera]

Against this backdrop, the interim government has designated Zia a "very very important person" (VVIP), a status normally reserved for heads of state or government. The designation, issued through an official notification under the Special Security Force Act 2021, places her under the protection of the Special Security Force (SSF), an elite protective unit mandated to provide physical security, gather threat-related intelligence, arrest without warrant when necessary, and use firearms depending on the situation. [The Daily Star 3] [The Daily Star 4]

Zia's hospitalization has also revived attention around her son Tarique Rahman, the acting chairperson of the BNP and the party's most prominent political figure

outside the country. Rahman has lived in the United Kingdom since 2008 after facing multiple legal cases, but senior BNP officials say preparations are underway for his possible return. The interim government has publicly indicated that it is prepared to facilitate this, with the Foreign Affairs Adviser stating that a one-time travel pass could be issued "within a day" should Rahman choose to come back. Rahman wrote on social media that he "longs to come home and be by [his] ailing mother's side," though he added that the decision is not entirely his. [The Daily Star 5] [The Daily Star 6]

His potential return – anticipated for some time – has triggered debate over his eligibility for the national elections expected in February 2026. The Election Commission confirmed that he is not currently on the voter roll — a legal prerequisite for contesting elections — because he left Bangladesh before the introduction of biometric voter lists in 2008. While formal enrollment for the 2026 polls closed on October 31, the Election Commission noted that it has discretionary authority under the Voter List Act 2009 to add names at any time, though it has not indicated whether it intends to use this power in Rahman's case. Officials also emphasized that there is no legal barrier preventing him from returning to Bangladesh. [The Daily Star 7]

Bangladesh: Launch of new small-party reform alliance delayed as negotiations continue

(lm) A planned announcement of a new political alliance involving several of Bangladesh's small reform-oriented and newer opposition parties has been postponed, as participating groups continue internal negotiations ahead of the expected 2026 national election. The initiative is being coordinated by the National Citizen Party, a student-led party that emerged earlier this year from the aftermath of last year's uprising and that since has established itself as a notable actor in the current political landscape.

Leaders involved in the talks said the delay came after one prospective member — the Gono Odhikar Parishad, a movement-based opposition group — requested more time to finalize its position. Other parties already committed to the initiative include the Amar Bangladesh Party, a reform-focused organization, along with two additional small platforms seeking to establish a joint political space in the interim period following the dissolution of parliament in August 2024. Discussions are also ongoing with the

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, a long-standing left-leaning party.

Organizers say the alliance, expected to be called Gonotantrik Songskar Jote (Democratic Reform Coalition), is intended to function both as an electoral vehicle and as a longer-term cooperation framework among these smaller parties. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Fragmented former third force advances rival strategies as 2026 election approaches

(lm) Bangladesh's once-influential political group founded in 1986 by former military ruler HM Ershad — known today as the Jatiya Party, historically the country's third-largest political force — is undergoing renewed fragmentation and parallel consolidation as competing factions position themselves ahead of the expected February 2026 election.

A faction led by senior figure Anisul Islam Mahmud, which formally broke away again in August, has moved decisively toward building a broad centrist alliance. Mahmud and his associates met this week with fifteen smaller parties and reached agreement to launch a coalition that will be called the Nationalist Democratic Alliance, with a liaison committee already under formation. The group is also courting other breakaway camps aligned with long-standing Ershad-era figures such as Anwar Hossain Manju and Mostafa Jamal, reflecting an effort to reunite strands of a political family that has split repeatedly since the fall of the Awami League government in 2024.

Mahmud's camp argues that Bangladesh is entering a "critical period" marked by uncertainty over whether the now-ousted Awami League will contest the polls and by continued polarization between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party. The group says a coordinated centrist bloc rooted in Bangladeshi nationalism, the spirit of the Liberation War, liberal democratic principles and inter-religious coexistence could emerge as a viable "third force" in the shifting post-Awami League landscape. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

In sharp contrast, the faction led by GM Quader — Ershad's younger brother and political successor, and previously the most influential leader of the old party structure — has chosen to operate independently. Quader's camp is preparing to field candidates in all 300 constituencies, has already finalized nominations

for key seats in the Rangpur heartland, and plans to announce several “surprise” contenders, including former senior officials, once the election schedule is released. Senior figures from the faction have also held contacts with BNP leaders during hospital visits to Khaleda Zia, signaling open communication channels even as they confirm that they will contest alone. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: New probes claim political manipulation of security forces under ousted ex-government

(lm) Bangladesh’s interim government has received two major investigative reports that cast a sharply critical light on the now-ousted Awami League (AL) administration, alleging far-reaching political interference in the security sector during the 15 years of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s rule from 2009 to 2024.

The most prominent finding concerns the 2009 mutiny at the then–Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) headquarters in Pilkhana, where 74 people—mostly army officers—were killed after BDR personnel turned on their commanders during an annual gathering. BDR, now known as Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), is the country’s paramilitary border force. The incident remains one of the deadliest internal security crises in Bangladesh’s history and has long been the subject of political and institutional controversy.

A National Independent Investigation Commission appointed by the current caretaker administration has now concluded, after an 11-month inquiry, that the mutiny was deliberately enabled in ways that weakened the military’s ability to respond. In its public briefing, the commission named several senior AL figures—including Hasina, then-MP Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh (described as the “key coordinator”), former ministers and party leaders, former military intelligence officials, and the then army chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed—as bearing responsibility for decisions or actions that prevented a timely army intervention.

According to the inquiry, repeatedly superseded officers were used to execute parts of the plot and long-standing grievances within the BDR were exploited. The commission further states that army units initially prepared to intervene were subsequently withdrawn on political instruction, creating what it describes as a “deliberate vacuum in command”. Additional findings include alleged involvement of

ruling-party activists, significant intelligence failures, and unexplained cross-border movements by Indian nationals during the crisis. It recommends structural reforms across the army, border guard, police, and intelligence services. [The Daily Star 1]

Families of officers killed in the mutiny have publicly urged the interim government to publish the full report without delay and prosecute everyone named. At a press conference in Dhaka, relatives said they welcomed the submission of the report but expressed frustration that not all names had been disclosed. Some said they had faced pressure or threats during earlier testimony before investigators and called for stronger protection measures. [The Daily Star 2]

A second investigation, also submitted this week, examines alleged abuses against armed-forces officers during the now-ousted Awami League government. The committee reviewing appeals from retired and dismissed officers found evidence of enforced disappearances, fabricated militancy cases, politically motivated dismissals, and retaliation against officers who criticized the government's handling of the 2009 Pilkhana mutiny. Six officers were forcibly disappeared for years; one retired officer was killed after being framed; the spouses and even the child of an accused officer were detained without trial; and several officers who questioned the 2009 events were later punished through the Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh assassination-attempt case—a 2009 case involving an alleged attempt on the life of a senior AL politician and relative of Sheikh Hasina, which the committee describes as fabricated.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, after receiving both reports, said the findings reveal a pattern of abuses against the army, navy, air force and other state officials that was "far beyond imagination" and pledged redress. The government is preparing to provide normal retirement, reinstatement in select cases, withheld arrears, and other remedies for 145 recommended officers across the services. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Long-pending legal appeals over Chattogram Hill Tracts council deepen uncertainty around the peace accord's implementation

(lm) Nearly three decades after Bangladesh signed the Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord, the legal status of one of its core institutions — the CHT

Regional Council, an administrative body overseeing the country's three hill district councils — remains unresolved. Two key appeals challenging the legality of the council have been pending before the Supreme Court for around 14 years, preventing legal clarity on a central element of CHT self-governance.

The dispute originates from an April 2010 High Court ruling that declared the CHT Regional Council Act of 1998 unconstitutional. The bench held that the council's structure undermined the unitary character of the Bangladeshi state, which is considered a "basic feature" of the constitution. This ruling has remained suspended since 2011, when the Supreme Court stayed the verdict and allowed both parties to file appeals. The council, established in 1999 as part of the peace-accord architecture intended to address longstanding ethnic, administrative, and land-rights grievances in the CHT, has operated under the stay order ever since.

The government and the CHT Regional Council submitted their appeals in 2011, arguing that the body is a statutory authority designed to support the three hill district councils and that its legal basis constitutes constitutionally permissible affirmative action for historically disadvantaged groups in the region. Petitioners opposing the council claim instead that it functions as "a kind of mini-state within the republic" and therefore violates the constitution's unitary framework.

Despite the significance of the case, the appeals have seen no substantive progress. The Attorney General noted that the matter remains near the bottom of the Supreme Court's hearing list, making an imminent hearing unlikely. One of the original petitioners, now serving as the chief prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal, said he cannot take further action before the upcoming general election due to workload constraints.

The last procedural movement occurred in March 2018, when the appeals briefly appeared on the court's cause list before being adjourned. Lawyers involved say that any eventual hearing will likely be lengthy, given the deep political, historical, and constitutional sensitivities surrounding the CHT peace-accord framework.

The prolonged legal limbo has added to wider concerns among analysts and rights groups that the implementation of the 1997 peace accord remains incomplete, with core governance structures still lacking definitive constitutional resolution. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Interim government establishes Supreme Court Secretariat

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has created, for the first time, a fully separate administrative secretariat for the judiciary through the new Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, published by the law ministry on November 30. Enacted by presidential directive, the reform is presented by the Supreme Court as a long-awaited step toward strengthening judicial independence after years of debate over executive influence.

The ordinance grants the chief justice full administrative and financial authority over the new secretariat, including control over all expenditures approved in the national budget. It also establishes a Supreme Court Secretariat Commission to guide judicial administration. The commission is chaired by the chief justice and includes the law minister or the relevant government adviser, a nominated judge of the Appellate Division, the chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, and the attorney general.

To begin operationalizing the new structure, the chief justice has appointed a secretary to head the secretariat. The position carries the rank and privileges of a senior secretary and functions as the administrative head of both the Supreme Court Registry and the new secretariat, with responsibility for personnel management and support for the supervision of lower courts and tribunals.

Under the ordinance, the secretariat must prepare annual income-and-expenditure statements for courts under its jurisdiction as well as a separate financial plan for the Supreme Court three months before each fiscal year. Crucially, the Supreme Court and its secretariat do not require prior government approval to spend funds allocated to them, a provision the judiciary has framed as key to meaningful institutional autonomy. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Court rebukes anti-graft agency as new ACC Ordinance faces criticism for weak oversight

(lm/mml) Bangladesh's anti-corruption framework came under renewed scrutiny over the past days as a Dhaka special court sharply criticized the Anti-

Corruption Commission (ACC) for filing a corruption case without verified evidence, while a newly approved ACC reform ordinance drew immediate criticism for weak accountability provisions.

In a detailed verdict delivered on October 22, Special Judge Mohammad Abdullah Al Mamun acquitted former diplomat Mohammad Khairuzzaman—formerly Bangladesh's High Commissioner to Malaysia—after finding that the ACC had prosecuted him using unauthenticated photocopies rather than original documents. The court described the investigation as displaying "a serious lack of professionalism and diligence," noting that neither the original charge sheet submitted in 2022 nor a supplementary one filed in May 2025 contained admissible evidence. It warned that such negligence erodes public confidence in anti-corruption enforcement. Khairuzzaman had been accused of misappropriating BDT 15.8 million (about USD 130,000) during his posting in Malaysia from 2007 to 2009, but the court found no substantiation. [The Daily Star 1]

In separate but related updates, the government has approved the final draft of the Anti-Corruption Commission Ordinance 2025, intended to bolster the ACC's institutional capacity. The draft expands the commission from three to five members, requires that at least one or two commissioners have information-technology expertise to address digital corruption risks, mandates semiannual publication of ACC work reports, and obliges investigation officers to file asset declarations.

A previously proposed external oversight body—widely viewed as essential for improving transparency and curbing political influence—was removed from the final draft. The government argued that such a body could create new opportunities for misconduct. [The Daily Star 2]

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) criticized the ordinance for sidestepping core reforms, warning that without an independent review mechanism, the ACC may remain vulnerable to political pressure and public mistrust. Analysts note that the ACC has for years faced accusations of shielding powerful actors while disproportionately targeting political opponents. Reports also indicate that at least seven advisers opposed the external-oversight model despite earlier political consensus, raising doubts about the government's commitment to meaningful anti-corruption reform. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: New trafficking and human-rights ordinances expand state oversight and legal powers

(lm) Bangladesh's Advisory Council has approved a new trafficking ordinance that expands the state's powers to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, marking the latest step in an ongoing overhaul of the country's legal framework. The newly approved measure broadens the definition of trafficking to include organ trafficking, an issue affecting communities in northern Bangladesh, and authorizes the use of asset-freezing and bank-account seizures against suspects with court approval. It also targets the use of online platforms in recruitment and exploitation.

This approval follows earlier government action taken through the draft Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Ordinance 2025, which proposed replacing the 2012 law, introduced sharply higher penalties—including the option of the death penalty for members of organized trafficking networks—and brought migrant smuggling under the law for the first time. [AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4]

An accompanying amendment strengthens the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) by designating it as the National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, empowering it to conduct independent inspections of detention centers and monitor compliance with human-rights standards. The government has committed to providing the NHRC with financial and institutional support to carry out these expanded responsibilities. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: New ordinance introduces death penalty and command-responsibility rules for enforced disappearance

(lm) Bangladesh has enacted a new legal framework on enforced disappearance, introducing some of the harshest penalties in the region and extending liability to senior officials through a strict command-responsibility clause. A government gazette issued on December 1 formally promulgated the *Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance 2025*, which criminalizes enforced disappearance as a standalone offence and makes all related crimes non-bailable and ineligible for out-of-court settlement.

Under the ordinance, denying, concealing, or unlawfully depriving a person of legal protection constitutes enforced disappearance and carries a minimum sentence of ten years' imprisonment and a fine of BDT 5 million (USD 41,000). If a victim is found dead or remains permanently untraceable, the law prescribes the death penalty and a fine of up to BDT 10 million (USD 82,000). Destroying evidence or operating a secret detention facility is punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment and fines of up to BDT 2 million (USD 16,400).

The law introduces a wide-reaching doctrine of command responsibility, making senior officers of security forces—and civilian superiors with direct oversight—criminally liable if they order, plan, support, knowingly ignore, or fail to prevent an enforced disappearance committed by subordinates. Defenses based on national security, political instability, emergency circumstances, or superior orders are explicitly barred.

The National Human Rights Commission is given lead authority to investigate cases under the ordinance and must continue searches for missing persons until their fate is confirmed, issuing quarterly updates to families. Investigators are required to complete probes within 90 days, with a possible 30-day extension; delays beyond this threshold trigger departmental disciplinary action. Special tribunals will handle prosecutions, and investigators must obtain tribunal approval before detaining suspects for interrogation. [The Daily Star]

Bhutan: Parliament opens winter session

(lm) Bhutan has opened the winter session of Parliament with an extensive policy agenda in both chambers, offering a clear view of current domestic priorities and the direction of external economic and infrastructure cooperation.

The National Assembly began its Fourth Session by setting out a workload that includes four new bills, three international conventions, reports from the Anti-Corruption Commission, several committee reports, and eleven follow-up reviews. A joint sitting later in the session will reconsider an audit report and two bills that require further deliberation.

A major development referenced in the opening addresses was the recent deepening of cooperation with India. During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit earlier in November—held as part of celebrations marking the seventieth birthday of

Bhutan's former monarch—the two governments announced plans to link Bhutan to India's railway network and to establish a new immigration checkpoint near the southern town of Gelephu. Both sides also formally inaugurated the 1,020-megawatt Punatsangchhu II hydropower project, one of the largest joint infrastructure projects between the two countries and central to Bhutan's electricity export strategy. Three additional agreements were signed covering renewable energy, public health cooperation, and the development of mental-health institutions.

The National Council, Bhutan's upper house, opened its Thirty-Sixth Session at the same time. It will review major sectoral reports on healthcare, economic performance, climate-resilient watershed management, and the implementation status of resolutions from its previous session. The Council will also examine several international agreements, including a maritime transport cooperation framework involving seven regional states, a legal-assistance convention under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and a new free-trade agreement between Bhutan and Thailand, which policymakers expect to expand Bhutan's access to Thai and broader Southeast Asian markets.

In addition, the Council will deliberate amendments to the Penal Code, while a joint sitting of Parliament later in the session will discuss an audit report on school water and sanitation facilities and amendments to laws on the National Assembly and dispute resolution. [Kuensel 1] [Kuensel 2]

Bhutan: Upper house flags rising corruption cases, systemic gaps, and questions over improved international ranking

(lm) (lm) Bhutan's upper house, the National Council, has raised concerns that rising corruption reports, structural integrity gaps, and persistent capacity constraints are putting increasing pressure on the country's anti-corruption system. According to the Council's Good Governance Committee, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) received 364 reports in FY 2023–2024—a year-on-year increase that highlights expanding vulnerabilities in procurement, public finance, licensing, and contract oversight. Ministries, gewog administrations (village-level bodies), and dzongkhags (district authorities) accounted for most of the complaints, with Thimphu reporting the highest

numbers. Abuse of function, embezzlement, and bribery remained the dominant categories.

Of the 364 reports, 168 required follow-up, including 39 full investigations, while the ACC processed 61 cases overall during the year. Courts ordered restitution totaling BTN 57.57 million (USD 690,840) and mandated the return of land, with 485 individuals implicated across cases. The ACC has improved case-processing speed, yet lawmakers warned that progress risks being undermined by severe staffing shortages—particularly in digital forensics, financial investigations, and intelligence analysis. High turnover and the ACC's difficulty attracting specialized talent were flagged as long-term threats to enforcement capability. Several MPs also noted that cases have remained pending with the Office of the Attorney General since 2019, weakening the chain between detection and prosecution.

The upper house emphasized that preventive controls remain underdeveloped, arguing that reactive investigation alone will not reduce future corruption risk. The Good Governance Committee recommended more robust integrity education, expanded risk-mapping tools, behavioral-insight approaches, and stronger oversight in high-risk sectors. It also called for greater resources for the ACC, the Royal Bhutan Police, the Office of the Attorney General, the Judiciary, and local governments to build specialized investigative capacity.

Alongside these concerns, the Council questioned why Bhutan's score on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index increased from 68 to 72 between 2020 and 2024, elevating the country to 18th globally and third in Asia. Lawmakers asked the ACC to clarify which "vulnerable sectors" drove the improvement and how these findings align with domestic indicators showing mixed trends and persistent public distrust. Members pointed to discrepancies between international assessments and national perceptions, including census-based corruption-perception data that remain unpublished. The Good Governance Committee defended the CPI methodology but acknowledged that rising case reports and uneven public confidence require deeper scrutiny. The final report is scheduled for adoption on December 23. [Kuensel 1] [Kuensel 2]

Bhutan: Lawmakers revisit disability-rights reservations after international objections

(lm) Bhutan's lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, has reopened its reservations to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) after several states and the European Union formally objected to Bhutan's initial submission.

Bhutan originally ratified the CRPD during the previous parliamentary term with reservations on several articles relating to mobility rights, family life, employment, and political participation. These reservations were transmitted to the United Nations in March 2024.

In response to the objections, the government set up a multisector task force in June 2025 to review the reservations. After consultations through August, the task force submitted its recommendations to the Cabinet, which approved the proposed amendment and forwarded it to parliament as required.

The Assembly's Women, Children and Youth Committee—one of its standing committees responsible for social policy—will now prepare an amendment for a third reading on December 5. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Pandemic hotel payments and questions over concessional loan fairness prompt renewed scrutiny

(lm) Bhutan is facing renewed public scrutiny over its COVID-19 pandemic-era financial support and its ongoing economic recovery loans, with official figures showing that hotel operators and small farmers received substantial government assistance while concerns persist about financial strain and fairness.

Government records confirm that the hotel sector was a major beneficiary of public funding during the COVID-19 response, with 274 hotels nationwide used as quarantine facilities, which were compensated at fixed daily rates approved by the Ministry of Health. The national budget for fiscal year 2022–2023 reports BTN 1,747.56 million (USD 20.97 million) spent on quarantine logistics and food, while the Prime Minister's Office separately recorded BTN 871 million (USD 10.45 million) in payments for quarantine centers serving 134,233 individuals up to March 2022.

These figures have resurfaced as hotel operators continue to report low occupancy and financial distress while seeking further government support. The tourism and hotel sector also benefited from nearly five years of loan deferments under Royal Monetary

Authority relief measures from April 2020 to June 2025. By March 2025, deferred loans across all sectors totaled BTN 29.62 billion (USD 355.44 million), with hotels and tourism accounting for BTN 11.72 billion (USD 140.64 million). Some observers cited in local reporting questioned whether continuing appeals for assistance amount to rent-seeking, while hotel operators said much of the revenue earned during quarantine operations was used to repair rooms damaged during disinfection. [Kuensel]

At the same time, fairness concerns have emerged around Bhutan's concessional recovery loans. The government's Economic Stimulus Programme—a concessional loan scheme intended to support post-pandemic economic activity—has so far largely benefited smallholder farmers, with most loans below BTN 1 million (USD 12,000). By late November, 1,864 loans had been disbursed across all twenty dzongkhags, Bhutan's administrative districts. While the Finance Minister described early impacts as positive, he acknowledged that questions over loan approvals led the government to request an investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission, a process still under way. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Government pressed to explain rising youth unemployment and feasibility of 13th Plan targets

(lm) Bhutan's National Assembly on December 2 witnessed renewed scrutiny of the government's labor-market strategy after new National Statistics Bureau data showed youth unemployment rising to 17.8 percent. The opposition questioned whether current measures are sufficient to reverse the trend and whether the government's flagship commitments under the 13th Five-Year Plan—97.5 percent overall employment and 60,000 people trained—remain achievable.

The Minister of Industry, Commerce and Employment attributed the rise partly to 3,200 new graduates entering the labor market and short-term fluctuations in job availability. The minister reiterated that the government's priority is workforce preparation and job-matching, and reported that about 8,000 of the roughly 12,000 registered youths had been placed in employment this year, with around 80 percent joining the private sector and more than 1,300 taking overseas opportunities. However, the ministry acknowledged a backlog of over 4,400 unemployed youths, underscoring persistent structural pressures and a

school-to-work transition gap that continues to shape Bhutan's youth labor market. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Government resolves majority of regulatory barriers, launches deeper second-phase reform

(lm) Bhutan's government reported that it has resolved 118 out of 210 regulatory obstacles previously identified as major barriers to business activity. The findings were presented at a stakeholder meeting reviewing the implementation of the Comprehensive Business Regulatory Review, the country's most extensive regulatory audit to date.

The original 18-month review, ordered in early 2024, mapped 235 issues—later consolidated to 210—across licensing, taxation, labor rules, access to finance, land and infrastructure, and public-service delivery. Of these, 59 issues are still being addressed by relevant agencies, while 26 require Cabinet-level decisions.

The government also launched Phase II of the reform drive, shifting from issue-specific fixes to broader systemic changes. This phase has catalogued 955 regulatory instruments—including laws, rules, guidelines, notifications, and internal procedures—that affect business operations. Work has begun to streamline, harmonize, or remove overlaps within this corpus without weakening essential safeguards.

Authorities expect the second phase to take significantly longer but anticipate that roughly half of the 955 items can be resolved within the coming months. [Kuensel]

India: Parliamentary winter session opens amid opposition protests

(dql/ppms) The winter session of Parliament began on December 1 in turmoil as opposition parties stalled proceedings in both the Lower House (Lok Sabha) and the Upper House (Rajya Sabha), demanding a debate on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and calling for discussions on national security following the November 10 Delhi Red Fort blast that killed (see AiR No. 45, November/2025, 2, article in this edition).

In the Upper House, newly appointed Chairperson Chandrapuram Ponnusami Radhakrishnan of the

ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rejected multiple opposition notices—triggering a walkout—while emphasizing adherence to parliamentary rules.

In the Lower House, repeated disruptions and slogan-shouting led to two adjournments before the House was suspended for the day. [The Tribune 1]

Prime Minister Narendra Modi criticized opposition parties for using Parliament as a platform for "drama" and slogan-shouting, appearing to target them over their recent electoral defeats, particularly in Bihar where the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured a decisive victory (see AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3), He urged lawmakers to focus on policy and governance rather than protests, stressing the importance of debate and giving first-time MPs a chance to speak.

Modi's remarks sparked a strong response from opposition leaders. Congress, Trinamool Congress, and other parties condemned Modi's comments, arguing that raising issues like the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and air pollution is not "drama" but part of their democratic duty. [The Telegraph]

Controversial SIR exercise in West Bengal

During the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal — set to elect all 294 members of its Legislative Assembly in March–April 2026 — officials have identified approximately 1,553,000 deceased voters, digitized 645,000 enumeration forms, and distributed 765,000 forms. Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal is set to chair a virtual review meeting with the State's District Election Officers to monitor progress.

The SIR exercise has coincided with reports of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants leaving India via West Bengal's borders. BJP leaders, including Suvendu Adhikari, have accused the Trinamool Congress (TMC) of obstructing the Election Commission's efforts and alleged attempts to include ineligible foreign nationals in the voter lists. [News On AiR]

The exercise has drawn sharp political ire, with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of the Congress Party alleging that exercise is a "thinly-veiled" National Register of Citizens (NRC) and is intended to question the citizenship of long-term residents.

Conversely, BJP leaders, including Union Minister Giriraj Singh, have accused the Chief Minister of deliberately supporting the inclusion of "Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators" and sabotaging the SIR to retain a favorable voter base.

Amid this tension, the ECI issued directives to District Electoral Officers (DEOs) to ensure the completion of polling station rationalization by this month. The Supreme Court has sought a reply from both the ECI and the West Bengal government regarding the challenges to the SIR's legality, particularly concerning procedural flaws and the heavy workload placed on Booth Level Officers (BLOs), which the opposition coalition (INDIA bloc) has cited as the cause of recent stress-related deaths among BLOs in Gujarat, demanding an immediate halt to the process. [Indian Express] [Economic Times]

In its response, the ECI has rejected allegations of large-scale voter disenfranchisement in West Bengal during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, calling claims “highly exaggerated” and politically motivated. In an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, the EC emphasized that the exercise is a routine, constitutionally mandated process aimed at ensuring the accuracy and integrity of voter lists, citing Article 324 of the Constitution and provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

According to the ECI, 99.77 percent of electors received pre-filled forms and 70.14 percent of forms have been returned, demonstrating the process is largely inclusive and carefully managed. The panel also clarified that Booth Level Officers (BLOs) follow strict procedures, including multiple visits to households, and that voters temporarily away can submit forms via family members or online.

The affidavit responds to a PIL filed by TMC MP Dola Sen challenging SIR orders from June 24 and October 27, which the EC rejected as “arbitrary” and unconstitutional. Meanwhile, an NGO has petitioned the Supreme Court over concerns that migrants from Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) could be at risk of exclusion from the voter list in West Bengal. The Supreme Court, led by CJI Surya Kant, will hear the matter along with connected cases on December 9. [The Tribune 2]

The dispute highlights the sensitive intersection of electoral integrity, migration, and citizenship in West Bengal—a key battleground state. How the SIR process is perceived and implemented could affect public trust in elections, especially among vulnerable migrant communities, and may have wider implications for the credibility of future state and national polls. [BBC]

India: Delhi Police file First Information Report against Sonia, Rahul Gandhi in money laundering case

(dql) In a major development in the decade-old National Herald case, the Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) registered a fresh First Information Report (FIR) against Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and six others, including Sam Pitroda, Suman Dubey, and entities like Young Indian (YI), Dotex Merchandise Pvt Ltd, and Associated Journals Ltd (AJL). The FIR, lodged on October 3, follows a complaint from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and invokes charges of criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust, and dishonest misappropriation of property under the Indian Penal Code.

The case alleges that Young Indian, controlled by Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, acquired AJL assets worth over USD 222 million) for a nominal sum of USD 55,500, thereby allegedly defrauding AJL shareholders and the All India Congress Committee (AICC). The FIR claims that loans totaling (USD 10 million) extended by AICC to AJL were effectively converted into shares favoring Young Indian, diluting AJL shareholder value. The FIR also cites alleged irregularities involving bogus donations, fake advance rent, and inflated advertisement revenue.

The Rouse Avenue Court has deferred the decision on whether to take cognizance of the ED chargesheet to December 16, observing that the accused have a right to be heard. [The New Indian Express]

Opposition Congress leaders condemned the FIR, calling it politically motivated, while asserting that no actual money was misappropriated and that Young Indian operates as a not-for-profit entity holding AJL shares. Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh strongly criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing them of pursuing a "mischievous politics of harassment, intimidation, and vendetta" against the party's leadership in the National Herald money laundering case. Posting on X, Ramesh called the case "completely bogus." [Asia News Network] [Jairam Ramesh, X]

The FIR marks a significant escalation in legal proceedings against senior Congress leaders, potentially influencing the party's political positioning ahead of upcoming elections.

BJP accuses Congress of using foreign-based social media accounts to target Modi and BJP

Further adding to the tensions between BJP and Congress Party, the ruling party has accused its rival and its allies of using social media accounts created or operated from foreign locations—including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore, Ireland, Thailand and the United States—to push anti-India and anti-BJP narratives. BJP Patra claimed that several X (formerly Twitter) accounts linked to Congress leaders and state units appeared to originate outside India, a detail revealed by a recently introduced platform feature.

According to the BJP, these accounts were involved in coordinated campaigns questioning the Election Commission, alleging “vote theft,” and criticizing the BJP, the RSS, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. BJP also alleged that the account of Congress media head Pawan Khera showed a US location and that several Congress-linked accounts changed or hid location information after the feature became available. [The Tribune]

India: Constitution Day marked by official focus on 'duties' amidst calls to address constitutional contradictions

(ppms) Marking the 76th anniversary of the adoption of India’s constitution on November 26, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to balance their constitutional rights with duties, emphasizing that fulfilling these responsibilities is essential for social and economic progress and positioning the focus on duties as a necessary step toward achieving the national goal of building a "Viksit Bharat” (Developed India).

However, this governmental emphasis on duties drew strong criticism from legal and political commentators, with some arguing that the celebration occurs amid a persistent tension between the Constitution’s guarantees of equality and contemporary realities.

Civil society voices warned that prioritizing duties risks politically overshadowing the fundamental rights and the ongoing struggle for genuine equality that the document’s principal architect, Dr. Ambedkar, had fought to guarantee, particularly concerning the abolition of caste-based discrimination and ensuring a democracy rooted in social justice. [Economic Times] [Times of India] [DD News] [The Wire] [Countercurrents]

India: Unions launch nationwide protests against new labor codes

(dql) On November 26, trade unions across India staged coordinated protests to oppose the country's newly implemented labor codes, which the government describes as the most significant reform of workplace regulations in decades (see AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4). Demonstrations took place in multiple states—including Kerala, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal—as well as in New Delhi. Participation was strong in sectors such as public enterprises, coal, transport, and parts of manufacturing, though banks and financial markets operated normally.

The four labor codes, enacted five years after parliamentary approval, consolidate 29 existing laws governing wages, industrial relations, social security, and workplace safety. Key provisions allow firms with up to 300 employees to lay off workers without prior approval and formalize fixed-term employment. The government argues the reforms will streamline compliance, expand social-security coverage to gig workers, establish a national minimum wage, and attract investment.

Ten major unions—mostly linked to opposition parties—denounce the reforms as weakening job security, collective bargaining, and workplace protections. Some opposition-led states, including Kerala and Karnataka, have signaled they will delay implementation pending further consultation.

Union leaders said the November 26 protests mark the beginning of a sustained campaign seeking withdrawal of the codes. [Reuters] [BBC]

India: Amnesty criticizes 2025 Immigration Order for granting broad powers and threatening human rights

(ppms) India's Immigration and Foreigners Order, 2025, adopted in September, has drawn strong criticism from Amnesty International, which argues the new framework grants the government broad, unchecked powers that conflict with international human rights standards. While New Delhi describes the overhaul as modernization, Amnesty warns it threatens fundamental freedoms, especially for foreigners, journalists, and refugees.

According to Amnesty, the Order allows officials to block foreigners from leaving the country on vague

national-interest grounds, restricts freedom of expression by requiring prior approval for producing films and digital content, and limits access to work by imposing government clearance for jobs in sensitive sectors. The group also highlights provisions enabling detention and deportation without due process, putting vulnerable communities such as Rohingya refugees at risk of refoulement.

The Order further expands the role of foreigners' tribunals, shifting the burden of proof onto individuals and weakening procedural safeguards.

Amnesty is urging the government to repeal the Order and ensure any immigration regime adheres to international norms of legality, necessity, and proportionality. [Amnesty International]

India: Supreme Court seeks response on public interest litigation to ban female genital mutilation

(dql) The Supreme Court has issued notices to the central government and other authorities on a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking a ban on female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, primarily practiced among the Dawoodi Bohra community — a religious denomination within Shia Islam. The petition, filed by NGO Chetna Welfare Society, argues that FGM is not an essential religious practice, violates the rights of children, and poses severe health risks.

The NGO noted that no specific Indian law currently bans FGM, though the act can fall under sections of the Indian Penal Code related to causing hurt and provisions of the POCSO Act regarding non-medical touching of minors. [The Tribune] [The Times of India]

India: Kerala State Assembly introduces "Right to Disconnect" bill for private sector employees

(ppms) Kerala's state assembly has proposed the Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025, which would grant private-sector employees the statutory right to disengage from work-related digital communications outside official hours. If passed, Kerala would be the first Indian state to legislate such a right, aligning with countries like France and Australia.

The bill aims to combat burnout and the “always-on” culture intensified by remote and hybrid work. It allows employees to ignore emails, calls, texts, or video messages after working hours unless they explicitly agree to work overtime, with protections against retaliation. Enforcement would be overseen by district-level grievance committees and Employee Welfare Committees.

Grounded in Article 21 of India’s Constitution and Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the legislation frames digital disengagement as essential for labor welfare, occupational health, and work-life balance, signaling a potential national shift in employment norms. [India Briefing]

India: Government seeks major supplementary budget to boost defense and subsidy support

(dql) The government has requested parliamentary approval for INR 414.55 billion (USD 4.62 billion) in net additional spending for the current fiscal year, part of an INR 1.32 trillion (USD 14.7 billion) supplementary outlay.

Key allocations include INR 41.03 billion (USD 457 million) for defence procurement, INR 125 billion (USD 1.39 billion) to compensate state-run oil companies for cooking-gas subsidies, and INR 110 billion (USD 1.23 billion) in extra fertilizer subsidies. Another INR 75.25 billion (USD 839 million) will cover higher imported-urea costs.

These additions come on top of the INR 50.65 trillion (USD 564 billion) budget for the fiscal year ending March 31. The proposals will undergo committee review, but approval is expected given the ruling party’s majority. [Reuters]

India: GDP growth hits six-quarter high of 8.2 percent on manufacturing and services surge

(ppms) India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for the second quarter (July–September) of the fiscal year 2025-26 accelerated to an unexpected 8.2 percent, marking a six-quarter high and significantly surpassing both analysts' and the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) forecasts. The robust performance, following 7.8 percent growth in the previous quarter,

was primarily driven by a surge in the industrial and service sectors.

The Gross Value Added (GVA) of the economy, which is a key measure of output, rose to 8.1 percent for the quarter. This expansion was spearheaded by: Manufacturing, which saw its GVA grow by 9.1 percent, and the Services sector, which expanded by over 9 percent for the second consecutive quarter, with the "Financial, Real Estate & Professional Services" component hitting 10.2 percent growth. Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE), a proxy for consumer demand, rose by 7.9 percent, boosted by factors such as low food inflation and recent GST rate cuts, while Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF)—a measure of investment—increased by 7.3 percent.

Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran has since revised the full-year GDP growth forecast for FY 2025-26 upward, stating it will now be at least 7 percent. The stronger-than-expected data comes just ahead of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting and is widely viewed as reducing the likelihood of an imminent interest rate cut, despite headline retail inflation being at a record low.

Economists, however, cautioned that the nominal GDP growth (8.7 percent)—which affects tax revenue calculations—remains a concern, with a need for high growth in the remaining fiscal months to meet budgeted tax targets. [Indian Express]

India: Cabinet approves USD 800 million scheme to boost strategic rare earth magnet production

(ppms) The government has taken a major step toward securing critical technology supply chains, with the Union Cabinet approving an INR 7,280 crore (USD 815.3 million) scheme to incentivize the domestic production of rare earth permanent magnets (REPMs).

The new scheme is designed to establish an integrated REPM manufacturing capacity of around 6,000 metric tons per annum (MTPA) by offering sales-linked incentives and subsidies to manufacturers.

This first-of-its-kind initiative is strategic, as REPMs—powerful magnets made from rare earth elements—are essential components in high-growth, critical sectors such as electric vehicles (EVs), wind turbines, aerospace, and advanced electronics. It is a direct response to India's heavy reliance on imports, particularly from China, a dependency that created

supply chain vulnerabilities following recent export restrictions imposed by Beijing.

By localizing production, New Delhi aims to enhance self-reliance, ensure long-term resilience for the domestic automotive and clean energy sectors, and position India as a key global player in the high-value magnet market.

Industry leaders, including the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), have welcomed the policy as a forward-looking intervention that addresses a critical gap in the advanced mobility ecosystem. [CNA] [Economic Times] [Business Standard]

India: Apple challenges new antitrust penalty rules

(dql) Apple has filed a legal challenge in the Delhi High Court against India's updated antitrust penalty rules, which allow the Competition Commission of India (CCI) to calculate fines based on a company's *global* turnover rather than only its India revenue. The rule change, introduced in 2024, significantly raises Apple's potential financial exposure — up to an estimated USD 38 billion — if the CCI ultimately finds it guilty of abusing market dominance.

The challenge comes amid an ongoing CCI investigation sparked in 2022 after Match Group and several Indian startups accused Apple of anti-competitive practices in its iOS app ecosystem. A CCI investigative report last year alleged "abusive conduct," which Apple denies. The regulator has not yet issued a final ruling or penalty. Apple's 545-page court filing seeks to have the global-turnover provision declared unlawful. [Reuters]

Apple's business in India is growing rapidly. The company recorded its highest-ever quarterly shipments of 5 million iPhones in Q3 2025 and is expected to sell about 15 million units this year, positioning it among India's top five smartphone brands. Apple's exports from India hit a record USD 12.8 billion in 2024, a 42 percent increase from the previous year, reflecting its strategy of diversifying manufacturing away from China. [CNBC]

Apple's petition highlights rising regulatory friction between major tech multinationals and India's increasingly assertive competition regime. The case will test New Delhi's ability to enforce tougher antitrust penalties without deterring foreign investment, at a

time when India is positioning itself as a key global tech and manufacturing hub. A ruling upholding global-turnover penalties could set a powerful precedent influencing how international firms assess regulatory risk in India. [Punjab Khabarnama]

India: Indigenous defence R&D boosted with 148 new projects and startup initiatives

(dql) Minister of State (MoS) for Defence Sanjay Seth has unveiled that the defense ministry's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) — India's premier agency responsible for the research, design, development, and production of technology and systems for the country's defence and security — has sanctioned 148 new technology projects over the past three years, alongside increased budget allocations and incentives for defence innovation.

The department's expenditure rose from approximately USD 2.30 billion in 2022-23 to USD 2.76 billion in 2024-25, with a projected USD 2.99 billion for 2025-26. An additional USD 5.6 million has been allocated to the Technology Development Fund (TDF) to support public and private industries, particularly MSMEs and startups.

Under TDF, 26 technologies have been successfully developed, and two systems were launched via the PSLV mission. DRDO is introducing a new policy to streamline collaboration with startups, while 25 percent of the defence R&D budget is now accessible to industry, startups, and academia. Seventy projects under the 'Make in India' framework have received Approval-in-Principle, and DRDO has established a network of 2,000 industries for manufacturing systems and sub-systems at zero technology transfer fee.

Fifteen DRDO Industry Academia-Centres of Excellence (DIA-CoEs) are driving research in 82 strategic areas, supported by extramural research initiatives to strengthen India's defence technology ecosystem. DRDO has also opened 24 world-class R&D test facilities to industry via the Defence Testing Portal, promoting transparency and collaboration. [The Tribune]

India: Supersonic missile tested, advanced indigenous stealth frigate delivered

(dql) The Indian Army successfully carried out a BrahMos supersonic cruise missile launch from a test range in the Bay of Bengal on December 1. The launch, executed by a BrahMos unit of the Southern Command and the Tri-Services Andaman & Nicobar Command, demonstrated high-speed flight stability and precise target engagement.

The Southern Command chief, Lt Gen Dhiraj Seth, called the test a key step in enhancing the Army's long-range strike capability. Developed jointly by India and Russia, the BrahMos missile has been part of India's armed forces since 2007 and can be deployed from land, sea, sub-sea, and air platforms. Its range now exceeds 500 km, allowing for precision strikes on high-value targets. [WION]

Meanwhile, the Navy has received the advanced stealth frigate 'Taragiri', the fourth ship of the Nilgiri-class (Project 17A). The delivery on November 28 marks a significant step toward self-reliance in warship design and construction.

'Taragiri' features cutting-edge capabilities, including BrahMos missiles, MFSTAR radar, MRSAM surface-to-air missiles, anti-submarine rockets and torpedoes, and close-in weapon systems, making it a versatile multi-mission platform for modern maritime challenges. The remaining three ships of Project 17A are expected to be delivered by August 2026. [The Tribune]

Project 17A (P17A) is the country's Navy program for building advanced stealth frigates designed and constructed indigenously to enhance India's maritime capabilities.

India: Delhi Police foil Pakistan-backed terror module behind Punjab grenade attack

(dql) Delhi Police have dismantled a Pakistan-backed terror module led by gangster-turned-terrorist Shahzad Bhatti, who is currently based in Pakistan. Three key operatives were arrested from Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, and police seized a semi-automatic pistol, live cartridges, and mobile phones with incriminating evidence.

The module was linked to the November 25 grenade attack outside Gurdaspur's City police station, carried out on Bhatti's instructions. Investigations revealed that Bhatti coordinated attacks remotely via encrypted platforms and social media, recruiting young Indians

by luring them with money and the appeal of gangster glorification. The arrested operatives had conducted reconnaissance and facilitated the grenade attack under Bhatti's guidance.

Police continue to track other associates of the module. [The Tribune] [The Times of India]

In a related development, Punjab Police have arrested four suspects involved in the grenade attack recovering a P-86 hand grenade and two pistols. The suspects—Pradeep Kumar, Gurdit, Naveen Chaudhary, and Kush—were linked to Pakistan-based gangster Shahzad Bhatti and Zeeshan Akhtar, with coordination from their US-based handler Amandeep Singh (Aman Pannu).

Police investigations indicate that Pannu recruited agents for terror plots in Punjab, some of which were thwarted. [Devdiscourse]

India: Enforcement Directorate conducts first-of-its-kind anti-narcotics money laundering operation in Mizoram

(dql) The Enforcement Directorate (ED) carried out unprecedented searches in Champhai, Mizoram—a town bordering Myanmar—under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, targeting drug-related financial networks. Raids were simultaneously conducted in Aizawl and Champhai (Mizoram), Sribhumi (Assam), and Ahmedabad (Gujarat).

The probe follows a First Information Report (FIR) registered by Mizoram Police under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act after the seizure of 4.724 kg of heroin valued at over USD 170,000 from six individuals. Financial analysis revealed connections between Mizoram-based and Gujarat-based firms involved in supplying pseudoephedrine tablets and caffeine anhydrous—key precursors for methamphetamine production.

Investigations indicate that these precursors are transported from India to Myanmar through porous borders, processed into methamphetamine there, and smuggled back into India, primarily via Mizoram. Further links were found between Mizoram firms and Kolkata-based shell entities that procured caffeine anhydrous consignments.

The ED also uncovered narco-hawala operators with bank credits totaling USD 6.4 million across Assam,

Mizoram, Nagaland, West Bengal, Tripura, and Delhi. [The Tribune 1]

In a separate move, the ED carried out coordinated searches across ten states as part of a money-laundering investigation into alleged bribery involving academic approvals for certain medical colleges.

The ED probe is based on a Central Bureau of Investigation FIR filed in June, which alleged that government officials — including those in the National Medical Commission (NMC) — accepted bribes to share confidential inspection-related information with key personnel of certain medical colleges and middlemen. [The Tribune 2]

India: Over 10,000 Bangladeshis apprehended amid heightened border vigilance

(dql) The Border Security Force (BSF) Eastern Command has reported that it apprehended 10,263 Bangladeshis over the past year while they attempted to cross the Indo-Bangladesh border — a sign of increased anti-infiltration efforts.

In the same period, the Eastern Command seized narcotics worth approximately USD 42.1 million, other contraband valued around USD 19.0 million, and 51.4 kg of gold — worth about USD 7.5 million. [The Tribune]

India: Far-left radical group members surrender

(dql) In Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, 37 Naxalites surrendered to police and officials of the Central Reserve Police Force — India's largest paramilitary force.

The surrender is part of the "Poona Margem" initiative, aimed at rehabilitation and social reintegration, offering instant assistance of USD 560 per cadre along with training, agricultural land, and other support.

Naxalites are members of far-left radical groups in India, primarily inspired by Maoist ideology, that aim to overthrow the government through armed struggle. The movement traces its roots to Naxalbari, a village in West Bengal, where a peasant uprising against

landlords began in 1967, giving the movement its name.

Over 508 Maoists in Dantewada alone have quit violence in the past 20 months, while more than 2,200 Naxalites nationwide have surrendered in the last 23 months. [The Tribune]

India: Government order of mandatory pre-installation of state cybersecurity app on all smartphones faces backlash

(dql) The government has ordered smartphone manufacturers to pre-install a state-run cybersecurity app, Sanchar Saathi, on all new devices and prevent users from deleting it. The directive, issued privately to major companies including Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Vivo, and Oppo, gives them 90 days to comply. Existing devices must receive the app via software updates. The app is intended to combat cybercrime, spoofed numbers, and phone fraud, and has reportedly helped recover over 700,000 lost or stolen phones. [DW]

The mandate has drawn sharp criticism from privacy advocates and opposition politicians. The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) described it as an alarming expansion of state control over personal devices and said it may challenge the order in court. [IFF]

Opposition Congress Party leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K.C. Venugopal, and Randeep Surjewala, described the directive as unconstitutional, labeling the app a “snooping” tool that turns India into a surveillance state. They argue it infringes on the right to privacy, a fundamental part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution and demanded immediate rollback and parliamentary debate. Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury has filed an adjournment motion to discuss the matter in the Upper House. [Deccan Chronicle]

Apple has indicated it does not plan to comply, citing its policies against pre-installing third-party or government apps.

Separately, India’s telecom regulator ordered major messaging apps, including WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat, and Signal, to tie each account to the user’s SIM card and enforce regular logouts for web sessions to curb fraud. [DW]

Maldives: Record 2026 budget approved as government cites improving reserves and stable economic outlook despite high-risk rating

(lm) The Maldives approved a record MVR 64.2 billion (approximately USD 4.17 billion) state budget for 2026 on November 25, marking the largest annual spending plan in the country's history. Parliament passed the bill by 74–12 following its submission on October 30. The sharp expansion from the MVR 56.6 billion (approximately USD 3.68 billion) budget for 2025 is driven largely by the government's obligation to meet USD 1.1 billion in debt repayments falling due next year.

Under the approved framework, expenditure is set at MVR 49.9 billion (approximately USD 3.25 billion), including MVR 39.9 billion (approximately USD 2.6 billion) in recurrent spending—62 percent of the total—and MVR 9.3 billion (approximately USD 604 million) in capital spending, a 31.7 percent increase from last year. Debt servicing is budgeted at MVR 12.9 billion (approximately USD 838 million). Revenue and grants are projected at MVR 40.4 billion (approximately USD 2.62 billion), leaving a deficit of MVR 8.8 billion (approximately USD 572 million), equal to 7.1 percent of GDP. [The Sun 1]

The domestic budget deliberations coincided with a revised assessment from Moody's—an international credit rating agency that evaluates the creditworthiness of governments and corporations—which on November 27 upgraded the Maldives' economic outlook from negative to stable while keeping its sovereign credit rating at Caa2, a high-risk speculative grade often described as "junk." The stable outlook signals that the agency does not anticipate a further downgrade in the medium term.

Moody's attributed the outlook revision primarily to improved foreign-exchange buffers. Official reserves reached USD 859 million in October 2025—equivalent to roughly three months of imports—up from USD 364 million in September 2024. The Sovereign Development Fund also expanded sharply, from USD 15 million last year to USD 126 million by early November 2025. [The Sun 2]

Finance Minister Moosa Zameer said the revised outlook reflects growing international confidence in the government's reform program, pointing to stronger dollar liquidity, improved revenue performance, and stricter budget execution under

President Mohamed Muizzu's administration. [The Sun 3]

However, Moody's stressed that the underlying fiscal position remains fragile due to large external financing needs, reliance on volatile tourism-driven foreign-exchange earnings, and continuing exposure to global shocks. The unchanged Caa2 rating leaves the Maldives far below regional peers such as India (Baa3) and Bangladesh (Ba3), underscoring persistent structural vulnerabilities despite short-term stabilization. The government projects GDP growth of 5.3 percent in 2026.

Maldives: Parliament accelerates sweeping governance overhaul as President Muizzu ratifies abolition of atoll councils

(ss/lm) The Maldives is entering a decisive phase of institutional restructuring as the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) uses an extended parliamentary sitting—now prolonged until December 4—to advance major changes to the decentralization framework, local-council structure, and political-accountability rules. The extension was approved on November 26 by 55 votes to 7 after Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla argued that additional time was required to finalize pending legislation. [The Sun 1]

A central pillar of this agenda is the abolition of atoll councils, a key administrative tier introduced under the 2008 "Green Constitution." Parliament adopted the constitutional amendment on November 25 with 75 votes in favor and 12 against, and President Mohamed Muizzu ratified it on December 1, completing the transition. The change removes all constitutional and statutory references to atoll councils and ends elections for their members. Current atoll councils will remain in office until new councils assume their mandates after the next local council elections. [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

Follow-on legislation moved swiftly: on November 27, lawmakers passed changes to the Local Council Election Act and the Decentralization Act removing all references to Atoll Councils and ending future elections for their members. The revised framework reshapes local government by reducing council size based on population, with three councilors on islands with fewer than 2,000 residents and five on larger islands. Women's Development Committees—local community bodies mandated to advance women's

participation in development and island-level decision-making—will be resized accordingly, with chairpersons directly elected.

On the same day, Parliament also approved an amendment enabling the government to obtain project permits directly from the Local Government Authority if island or city councils do not act within a reasonable period. The new clause, which passed with 56 votes, further centralizes decision-making in development approvals. [The Sun 4]

These structural changes have raised concerns among employees working under the soon-to-be-abolished Atoll Councils. Minister of Local Governance Adam Shareef Umar addressed the issue during the Kaaf Forum—a multi-day dialogue platform initiated by the Male' Atoll Council to facilitate discussions between local councils, the ministry and the Local Government Authority. He said staff "have no reason to fear losing their jobs or positions." He added that the decentralization system remains anchored in the "Green Constitution," the commonly used term for the 2008 Constitution, which expanded rights protections and introduced the legal basis for a decentralized governance model. [The Sun 5]

Beyond the local governance reforms, Parliament continued work on a series of additional amendments. On November 25, lawmakers removed an earlier proposal that would have required constituency referendums to determine whether MPs who leave or are expelled from their parties should lose their seats. The final version restores automatic disqualification and passed with 75 votes to 12, reinforcing the strict anti-defection rules reintroduced in November 2024. [The Sun 6

Separately from the government's reform package, an opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) lawmaker has introduced a constitutional amendment that would require 30 percent of parliamentary seats to be reserved for individuals under the age of 35. The proposal would allocate 28 seats to younger members in the current 93-seat legislature and is framed as an effort to strengthen policy influence for younger Maldivians. [The Sun 7]

Maldives: Parliament overhauls benefits for former leaders

(lm) The Maldivian Parliament has approved sweeping changes to state-funded benefits for former presidents and vice presidents, a reform that coincided with

former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom publicly rejecting allegations that he ever used such funds.

On December 1, MPs voted unanimously (68–0) to abolish the MVR 175,000 (USD 11,375) monthly office-expense allowance for former presidents—one of the most criticized elements of the benefit structure introduced in 2009. The revised bill also bars former presidents from receiving financial perks while serving a second presidential term or holding any other state role, and removes state-funded security for those residing abroad. A new emergency clause empowers the government to revise allowances without parliamentary consultation during periods of economic stress.

In parallel, Parliament introduced—also with unanimous support—a new MVR 30,000 (USD 1,950) monthly allowance for former vice presidents, in addition to state-funded medical care at home and overseas. Eligibility requires completing a full five-year term and having no criminal conviction, which makes Faisal Naseem—who served a complete term under the previous administration—the only qualifying former vice president. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

The restructuring comes amid a rising political debate over the use of state-funded entitlements. After ruling PNC parliamentary group leader Ibrahim Falaah suggested that former leaders had benefited extensively from public funds, Yameen issued a strong rebuttal, stating that neither he nor his wife had ever billed Aasandha (the national health-insurance scheme) and that he had "not taken a single rufiyaa" for office operations or political party activities. He said he did not oppose cutting presidential allowances and added pointedly that such reductions would affect sitting President Mohamed Muizzu more than himself. [The Sun 3]

Maldives: Judicial oversight system faces mounting turmoil amid leadership resignations and new misconduct complaints

(ya/lm) The Maldivian judiciary is undergoing a period of heightened instability as misconduct cases, internal resignations, and political questions over judicial independence converge around the work of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), the constitutional body overseeing judicial appointments and discipline.

The most consequential case concerns Criminal Court Judge Hussain Faiz Rashad, whose dismissal is now under active parliamentary review. On December 1, the Parliament's Judiciary Committee began examining the JSC's request to remove Faiz after an inquiry concluded he violated constitutional and statutory requirements in ordering the release of Ali Anwar Mohamed, a suspected ringleader in a major 2019 drug-trafficking operation involving 70 kilograms of narcotics seized from an Iranian vessel.

Faiz had released Anwar after his initial five-day remand expired, citing procedural lapses by police, including execution of a search warrant after the arrest and failure to recover evidence. Anwar subsequently fled to Sri Lanka before being denied entry and deported back to the Maldives. The JSC suspended Faiz in October and concluded in November that his conduct constituted legal and constitutional violations, prompting its recommendation for dismissal. This case follows a separate 2021 suspension related to leaked audio—later determined not to match his voice. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2] [the edition]

At the Civil Court, separate tensions have emerged after employees lodged complaints with the JSC against two sitting judges, prompting new investigations into workplace grievances and judicial conduct. A previous complaint involving the Chief Judge of the Civil Court remains unresolved. Meanwhile, the commission has also continued inquiries into other members of the judiciary. [The Sun 3]

That strain is most visible within the JSC itself. The commission has experienced a series of internal disruptions, including the resignation of its chair on October 26 and the subsequent resignation of its vice-president – who had been elected to that position as the President's representative on October 23. These shifts follow months of controversy surrounding the JSC's decision to suspend three Supreme Court judges earlier this year; two were later removed by Parliament after the commission recommended their dismissal.

Against this backdrop, former Prosecutor General Ahmed Muizzu has intensified calls for structural reform of the JSC. The Prosecutor General is the state's chief prosecutor responsible for managing criminal prosecutions. Muizzu argues that the JSC should be chaired by a Supreme Court justice rather than a politically aligned member, noting that past chairs have often been connected to governing parties. He questioned the government's decision to proceed with broader constitutional amendments before addressing what he described as long-standing political influence

within the commission, and urged a shift toward judicial leadership of the body. [The Sun 4]

Maldives: Opposition party faces escalating leadership crisis as failed interim chair bid highlights entrenched factional divides

(lm) The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) is undergoing one of its most protracted leadership crises in years, with efforts to stabilize the party after the resignation of chairperson Fayyaz Ismail instead exposing deeper fractures between rival factions. The turbulence has unfolded in several stages over the past week, beginning with Fayyaz's departure, followed by a disputed attempt to appoint an interim chair, and culminating in public appeals for unity from senior figures.

Fayyaz resigned on November 24 after informing the party's National Assembly that persistent internal rivalries had made party governance increasingly untenable. In his letter, he said divisions between factions aligned with former presidents Mohamed Nasheed and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih had paralyzed decision-making, and that the situation worsened after he announced his intention to run in the MDP's 2028 presidential primary. He urged structural reform of the party's leadership framework, arguing that diffuse authority had contributed to dysfunction [see AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4]. His resignation triggered an urgent meeting of the Executive Committee the same day, which resolved to convene the National Council to appoint an interim chair and schedule a full leadership election. [The Sun 1]

The National Council meeting held on November 28 to select an interim chair instead deepened the sense of crisis. The only name formally submitted was that of former Dhidhdhoo MP Abdulla Waheed, proposed by the faction aligned with Nasheed. A separate potential nominee supported by the Solih faction was not submitted after the party's legal director advised that the interim chair must be an elected National Council member. Waheed received 47 votes—one short of the 48 needed—and the meeting broke down amid confusion over the vote count. The controversy escalated when an internal review later concluded that he had actually secured 48 votes, implying he had met the threshold. [The Sun 2]

Waheed withdrew his candidacy on November 30, stating that the inconsistent actions of senior figures

who had encouraged him to run made it impossible to fulfil the role and that stepping aside was necessary for party unity. MDP president Abdulla Shahid subsequently advised deputy chairperson Ibrahim Waheed to restart the interim chair selection process with clear procedures, citing contradictory actions by the secretariat during the vote. [The Sun 3] [The Sun 4]

The conflict is rooted in longer-running tensions. Nasheed recently reiterated criticism of the party's defeats in the 2023 presidential and 2024 parliamentary elections, blaming the outcome on Solih's refusal to consolidate behind a single candidate. Although the breakaway group Nasheed formed in 2023, The Democrats, dissolved in 2025 and re-entered the MDP, the reconciliation has remained fragile. Trust between the camps has not fully recovered, and competing networks within the party continue to shape internal calculations. [AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4]

Public appeals for unity—including a recent statement from Nasheed emphasizing the need for internal cohesion—reflect concern over the party's deteriorating discipline ahead of the next electoral cycle. [The Sun 5]

Meanwhile, new contenders for long-term leadership have begun to emerge. Galolhu South MP Meekail Ahmed Naseem, one of the party's younger legislators, has announced that he will seek the chairpersonship in the upcoming internal election. [The Sun 6]

Maldives: President Muizzu faces integrity challenges

(lm/ya) In the Maldives, President Muizzu is facing integrity-related scrutiny from two distinct directions, with former President Abdulla Yameen publicly accusing the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of shielding the president from scrutiny, while Malé City councillors have called for the cancellation of land-lease contracts issued during Muizzu's tenure as mayor.

At a public event on December 1, Yameen argued that the Anti-Corruption Commission's inaction on complaints submitted against the president reflects structural weaknesses and possible political influence within the body. He claimed that cases involving senior officials are not progressing through the oversight system, despite mounting public concern about the commission's uneven follow-up on politically sensitive matters.

The dispute underscores the increasingly adversarial relationship between Yameen—who left the Progressive Party of Maldives–People's National Congress (PPM–PNC) coalition after the 2023 election to form the People's National Front (PNF)—and the current administration, adding to broader questions about the independence and credibility of state watchdog institutions. [The Sun 1]

Parallel to this, two Malé City councillors have called for the cancellation of land-lease contracts issued while Muizzu served as mayor, citing procedural violations and inconsistencies in plot size, lease duration, and pricing. In a letter to current Mayor Adam Azim, they noted that the council's Standing Orders were amended in June 2023 to require majority approval in a full sitting for any land handover, yet 18 plots were leased thereafter without being submitted to the council for approval. Several of the leases were linked to investment or service obligations that, according to the councillors, remain unfulfilled.

They have requested a full review of all land contracts, public disclosure of compliance with lease obligations, cancellation of leases issued without proper authority, and recovery of plots where commitments were not met. The councillors asked that the issue be included on the agenda of the council's next general meeting. [The Sun 2]

Separately, the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party has challenged the legality and financial prudence of a separate government initiative involving 206 development contracts awarded to 53 companies without competitive tendering. The contracts were issued on November 6 under amended Finance Act provisions that permit the Cabinet to bypass standard procurement requirements.

In a letter to the Bank of Maldives (BML), the opposition argued that BML is assuming serious legal and financial exposure by financing these projects. The party's legal director asserted that several contracted firms lack the technical capacity, financial guarantees, or performance record required for large-scale government work. He warned that financing the contracts may contravene the Banking Act and procurement regulations, and urged BML to suspend disbursements.

The opposition has also requested that the Anti-Corruption Commission launch an investigation into what it described as a "systematically corrupt" process. [The Sun 3]

Maldives: New political appointments revive scrutiny of expanding government posts and ruling-party alignments

(lm) Two new high-profile appointments have renewed scrutiny of the growing number of political posts in President Mohamed Muizzu's administration, as well as the pattern of individuals with recent political alignment to the ruling coalition receiving senior roles.

The government last week appointed Ahmed Shamoon, a lawyer and former coordinator in the Tourism and Environment ministries during Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's administration, as Deputy Minister of Youth—the fifth deputy minister in that ministry alone. Shamoon has been active in the governing coalition for years, having held roles in the Progressive Party of Maldives before joining the People's National Congress (PNC), and he played a visible part in Muizzu's recent presidential and mayoral campaigns. He also unsuccessfully sought a PNC parliamentary ticket in 2024.

The appointment comes at a time when the administration faces persistent criticism over the expanding number of political employees despite Muizzu's public pledge to limit such posts to 700. Official figures published in July listed 922 political employees, including 216 deputy ministers, and the total has continued to rise. [The Sun 1]

Separately, President Muizzu has nominated Ahmed Mahloof, former youth minister under the previous Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) government, as Maldives' ambassador to Japan. Mahloof crossed from the opposition MDP to the ruling PNC in September and acknowledged that he did so in order to take up a government role. His nomination now heads to Parliament's Committee on Foreign Relations, with final approval requiring both committee endorsement and a plenary vote.

Mahloof is a long-time political figure whose career has spanned the Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party, the Progressive Party of Maldives, the MDP, and now the PNC. His tenure as youth minister in the Solih administration was briefly paused due to a suspension related to the MMPRC corruption case, though he later returned to office. He largely withdrew from public politics following the 2023 electoral cycle but re-emerged this year with visible support from the Muizzu government, clearing the path for his ambassadorial nomination. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Prosecutors drop charges against youth protest leaders

(lm) The Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) has withdrawn charges against two prominent participants in the youth-led demonstrations that erupted after a young woman was found severely injured on a rooftop in Malé on April 18. The protests intensified amid allegations of a police coverup linked to influential connections of those implicated in the case.

Both individuals had been arrested during the demonstrations and later released. Charges were filed on June 25 after they declined reprimand agreements: one person had been accused of pushing a police officer when authorities seized a loudspeaker during a May 1 protest, while the other was accused of breaking through a police line during the same incident. The relevant Penal Code provisions carried potential prison sentences ranging from one month and six days to four months and 24 days. [The Sun]

Maldives: Man sentenced to 10 years for online threats against former president

(lm) A Maldivian court has sentenced a 40-year-old man to ten years in prison for repeatedly issuing online threats against former president Mohamed Nasheed. The individual was arrested in August 2021 and charged with three terrorism-related offenses: incitement to terrorism, threatening to carry out an act of terrorism, and supporting a terrorist organization.

Although the combined penalties for the charges amount to 26 years, prosecutors granted a reduced sentence under a plea agreement, resulting in a ten-year term. The case reflects ongoing sensitivities surrounding political violence in the Maldives, where Nasheed survived a life-threatening assassination attempt in May 2021 when an improvised explosive device detonated outside his residence while he was serving as Parliament Speaker. [The Sun]

Maldives: New corruption charges intensify scrutiny of state-owned enterprises amid widening fiscal overruns

(lm) The Prosecutor General's Office has filed corruption charges against two former senior officials of the Maldives' state-owned utility provider—Fenaka Corporation, one of the country's largest government-

owned service companies. The Prosecutor General alleges that the officials abused their positions in the awarding and administration of a 2018 security-camera installation project, including approving payments before the contracted equipment was delivered. [The Sun 1]

The case adds to a broader pattern of governance failures identified in a special audit issued in September, which documented extensive procurement irregularities, payment authorizations without verification, and persistent political misuse of the company. Fenaka has for years been a focal point of corruption investigations, and several additional cases remain open.

These developments come as new fiscal data highlight the systemic strain caused by loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs). According to figures released by the Ministry of Finance on December 1, government spending on SOEs reached MVR 1.7 billion (USD 110.5 million) by November 20. This is MVR 1.3 billion (USD 84.5 million) above the MVR 378 million (USD 24.6 million) allocated in the 2025 budget and MVR 175 million (USD 11.4 million) higher than the same period last year.

Despite repeated audit warnings, many SOEs continue to operate at a loss and collectively carry MVR 54 billion (USD 3.5 billion) in debt. They remain a major employment base, with approximately 36,000 staff, reinforcing their political significance but also the fiscal risk they pose. [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

Maldives: Mounting medicine-supply pressures expose systemic fragilities as Parliament blocks emergency debate and hospitals report disruptions

(lm/ss) In the Maldives, a widening strain on the national medical-supply system has become increasingly visible across hospitals, pharmacies and Parliament, revealing a period of transition in which the government's shift to a new pharmaceutical supply structure is colliding with immediate shortages of essential drugs and laboratory materials.

A key trigger for renewed scrutiny came when an opposition lawmaker asked the Parliament's Social Affairs Committee to investigate alleged shortages at the Indhira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH) after an 18-year-old mental-health patient was turned away for a scheduled blood test due to a lack of required

materials. The lawmaker said IGMH had run out of reagents for lithium testing and petri dishes, and claimed that the country had also exhausted medicine needed for blood transfusions for stroke patients, describing this as part of a wider shortage already affecting patients with chronic illnesses. Later the same day, the CEO of the Male' Group of Hospitals acknowledged that the laboratory had temporarily run out of the equipment needed for one specific test but attributed the disruption to a supplier-side delay. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

These hospital-level shortages coincide with growing national concern over access to essential medicines. Parliament last week rejected an emergency motion seeking debate on the issue, despite reports of patients visiting multiple pharmacies without success and parents struggling to secure treatment for children. The motion, submitted by an opposition member, warned that recent adjustments to the Aasandha scheme – the Maldives' universal health-insurance scheme – had contributed to instability in the supply chain, but the ruling majority blocked the debate by 36–11. [The Sun 3]

In Parliament, the health minister rejected claims that patients were being forced into hardship, insisting that Aasandha remains structured to prevent financial vulnerability. He acknowledged, however, that this year's MVR 1.86 billion (USD 121 million) allocation has already been spent. Despite earlier proposals to reform the scheme, the government has not introduced immediate changes, instead focusing attention on supply-chain restructuring through the newly established State Pharmaceutical and Medical Supply Corporation.

The new corporation, established in September, is being positioned as the central actor for long-term stabilization and eventual domestic capacity building. Officials say the transition from the State Trading Organization will take roughly three months, during which STO will continue importing medicines. The government has also signaled ambitions to move beyond procurement toward developing laboratories and potential manufacturing lines, arguing that reducing import dependence is essential to breaking recurring cycles of shortages. [The Sun 4] [The Sun 5]

Maldives: Committee pushes to suspend senior police leadership over alleged breaches of professional standards

(ya/lm) The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament has recommended the suspension of seven senior officers of the Maldives Police Service—including Commissioner of Police Ismail Naveen—after reviewing alleged breaches of professional standards linked to an audit of the state-run Blue Housing Project, a large public housing development whose financial management has been under parliamentary investigation. The committee's closed-door meeting examined a special audit report pointing to irregularities in the project and subsequently endorsed disciplinary action against top police officials, arguing that lapses in handling related cases required accountability at senior levels.

Among the officers identified, Assistant Commissioner Mohamed Dawood has faced the most serious allegations. A sub-committee of Parliament earlier claimed that large sums of money entered Dawood's personal account between 2023 and 2024, enabling the purchase of assets valued at MVR 14.6 million (USD 0.95 million). Dawood denies the allegations and maintains he is being framed by the force's Professional Standards Command. He was removed from his position as head of Hulhumalé police on November 1 and replaced by another senior officer. [The Sun 1]

The PAC's recommendation has prompted an immediate challenge from former Home Minister Umar Naseer, who argues that the committee has no legal authority to recommend suspensions and that responsibility for investigating such misconduct lies with the Anti-Corruption Commission. He contends that the committee's intervention reflects systemic governance weaknesses and warns that repeated allegations against senior officers have damaged public confidence in the police. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: New bill aims to classify mosque vandalism as a terrorism offense amid rise in incidents

(lm) A member of Parliament has submitted a bill to amend the Anti-Terrorism Act so that vandalism of mosques is formally treated as a terrorism offense, following a series of recent attacks on places of worship across the Maldives. The proposal seeks to add a new clause to the section defining terrorism offenses, arguing that repeated acts of desecration violate the sanctity of mosques and undermine respect for religion.

Several mosques have been vandalized in recent weeks, including the Umar al-Farooq Mosque in Addu City's Hithadhoo district, the Furqan Mosque, and Masjid al-Sultan Hassan Izzudheen in Malé. [The Sun]

Maldives: Health minister rejects claims linking crime to anti-tobacco policies

(ya) Health Minister Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim dismissed suggestions raised in Parliament that the recent uptick in crime is connected to the government's tightened anti-tobacco measures. Responding to questions, he characterized the claims as "backward thinking" and reiterated that the administration remains committed to implementing a generational tobacco ban, expanding cessation clinics across all islands and strengthening enforcement through the Tobacco Control Board. Nazim argued that the policy targets long-term public-health outcomes and non-communicable-disease prevention, not crime trends. [The Sun]

Nepal: President's Office defends appointment of former chief justice to head interim government

(lm) The Office of the President has submitted a written response to the Supreme Court defending both the appointment of former chief justice Sushila Karki as prime minister and the dissolution of the House of Representatives following the Gen Z protests of September. The reply argues that the actions were constitutionally justified under "extraordinary circumstances" after youth-led protests forced then-prime minister KP Sharma Oli to resign and left political parties unable to form a government.

The President's Office maintains that the September 12 appointment was an unavoidable step taken to preserve peace, security and administrative order, asserting that Articles 61(3) and (4) obligated the President to promote national unity and uphold the constitution. It says the interim administration was formed after written recommendations from Oli and in consultation with political actors, with the mandate to conduct elections within six months.

The response—filed as part of 17 writ petitions before the constitutional bench—asks the Supreme Court to dismiss demands to reinstate the dissolved House, arguing that doing so would contradict the current

"constitutional needs" and political conditions. Citing the doctrine of necessity, the President's Office insists that no other constitutional alternative existed at the time and that all steps taken aligned with the spirit and principles of the constitution. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear the cases on December 8. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Supreme Court orders Madhesh chief minister to seek confidence vote within 24 hours

(lm) Nepal's Supreme Court on December 1 ordered Madhesh Province Chief Minister Saroj Kumar Yadav to table a proposal for a vote of confidence within 24 hours of receiving the verdict, ruling that his earlier appointment under Article 168(3) had been made without sufficient consideration of whether a government could be formed under Article 168(2). The court noted that 73 provincial assembly members—representing a clear majority—had formally requested adherence to the procedure laid out in clause (2).

The ruling states that Yadav's government will continue if he secures the assembly's confidence, but that the authorities must immediately initiate the process for appointing a new chief minister under Article 168(2) if he fails to do so. The court emphasized the need for swift resolution of the dispute over government formation and instructed the relevant institutions to act without delay. [The Kathmandu Post]

As of the time of reporting, it was not yet clear whether Yadav had complied with the order or formally sought the confidence vote.

The December 1 decision follows weeks of constitutional breakdown in Madhesh Province. Yadav's appointment on November 10 had been widely contested after the province head administered his oath late at night under Article 168(3) while a seven-party majority was still negotiating a coalition under Article 168(2). The move sparked protests in Janakpur, legal petitions at the Supreme Court and severe institutional fragmentation inside the provincial assembly, including parallel claims to procedural authority, rejected dismissals of lawmakers and an unprecedented outdoor session convened by the deputy speaker amidst lawmakers being blocked from entering the chamber. [AiR No. 46, November/2025, 3]

Nepal: Election field expands as security forces mobilize early for March 2026 polls

(lm/ec) Nepal's pre-election environment is entering a decisive phase as parties, institutions, and security agencies move simultaneously into election mode. With registration now closed, the Election Commission has recorded an unprecedented 120 parties seeking to contest the March 5, 2026 elections, more than one third of which were registered only after the September Gen Z uprising.

All 14 parties represented in the dissolved House have applied to contest the elections and are now joined by a wide range of new actors, including Gen Z leaders, business figures, lawyers, former lawmakers and regional organizers. Analysts note that this surge reflects both democratic openness and deep frustration with established elites, creating opportunities for new forces but also carrying the risk of post-election instability if coalition practices remain weak. [The Kathmandu Post1]

In parallel, the state has begun one of the largest and earliest security deployments in Nepal's recent electoral history. On the recommendation of the Karki cabinet and the Security Council, President Ramchandra Paudel authorized Nepali Army mobilization almost 100 days before the vote. The integrated plan foresees about 325,000 personnel from the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and temporary police, with roughly 79,000 army personnel remaining deployed throughout the process. The early mobilization is tied to lingering security concerns after September's unrest. Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal informed Parliament that 723 weapons looted during the protests have been recovered and that nearly two thirds of the 14,554 escaped prisoners and detainees have returned to custody, figures the government uses to justify its heightened security posture. [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Sushila Karki has intensified outreach to party leaders in an effort to stabilize the electoral environment. She has spoken separately with second-tier CPN-UML leaders and with the chair of the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party to encourage full participation. Yet the CPN-UML continues to question whether elections can proceed while its legal challenge to the September 12 dissolution of the House remains pending at the Supreme Court and while senior figures, including former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, continue to face movement restrictions imposed by the commission investigating protest-related deaths. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Nepal: Interim government presses to finalize Gen Z agreement amid ongoing youth mobilization

(lm) The Gen Z movement has reasserted itself as a decisive political force ahead of Nepal's March 2026 elections, pushing for formal recognition of the September uprising and renewing street mobilization as negotiations with the interim government move into a critical phase.

Nepal's interim government and representatives of the Gen Z movement are advancing negotiations on a formal political agreement that would define the September 8–9 uprising as a political movement rooted in frustration with the country's democratic process, weak representation, and eroding trust in state institutions. The draft, prepared jointly by several Gen Z networks and submitted on November 11, also affirms their acceptance of the federal republic, proportional inclusion, and secularism while proposing broader reforms reflecting diverse views within the movement. The only outstanding conceptual dispute concerns whether the lethal crackdown on September 8—where 19 people were killed—should be formally described as a "massacre," a term objected to by the Prime Minister's Office but defended by youth representatives.

With the substance of the agreement largely in place, Gen Z leaders accuse the government of delaying finalization. Prime Minister Sushila Karki, dissatisfied with the slow pace, has now instructed officials to complete the final draft by Monday and indicated she is prepared to take full political responsibility for any repercussions. Gen Z actors say they expect the agreement to be endorsed by the Cabinet immediately thereafter, arguing that all major parties except the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) of ousted ex-Prime Minister Oli have already been consulted privately. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

At the same time, Gen Z activists have resumed street mobilization in ways that continue to intersect with the wider political process. In Kathmandu, a group of more than 60 activists attempting to enter Singha Durbar to deliver a memorandum accusing the interim government of nepotistic appointments was stopped by police and instead affixed the document to the main gate. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

In Dhangadhi, security forces were deployed as Gen Z groups rallied near "Gen Z Road" for nearly two hours

ahead of CPN-UML leader Mahesh Basnet's visit, part of a pattern of confrontations between youth activists and UML events. The protest followed an earlier incident in Itahari in which two individuals threw ink at Basnet's vehicle, and a violent clash in Simara days earlier that left six activists injured, led to flight suspensions at the local airport and the destruction of CPN-UML welcome structures [see AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4]. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: Former coalition parties enter election season weakened by constitutional dispute and deep internal fractures

(lm) Nepal's political landscape continues to reorganize rapidly following the September "Gen Z" uprising that toppled the Nepali Congress–Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) coalition and brought an interim administration under Prime Minister Sushila Karki. Yet while many political forces have since consolidated, the very parties ousted from power—the CPN-UML and the Nepali Congress—now approach the March 2026 parliamentary elections from positions of institutional and organizational weakness, marked by constitutional litigation, contested leadership transitions, and intensifying factionalization.

The CPN-UML has opened a dual front of legal and electoral maneuvering. On November 25, the party simultaneously registered for the March 2026 polls while filing a Supreme Court petition challenging the September 12 dissolution of the House of Representatives and demanding the removal of the interim administration led by former chief justice Sushila Karki. The petition argues that appointing a non-MP prime minister without exhausting constitutionally mandated coalition-building procedures violated Articles 76 and 132(2) of the constitution. CPN-UML leaders frame the litigation as a defense of constitutionalism, while observers see it as a strategy to preserve both judicial and electoral pathways after the party's collapse during the youth-led uprising. The Nepali Congress, which initially intended to file a joint petition, could not demonstrate majority support in the dissolved House and is therefore preparing its own separate challenge. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

At the same time, the CPN-UML faces a deepening internal contest as it accelerates delegate selection ahead of its December 13–15 general convention.

Competition for roughly 2,300 delegate seats has intensified across provinces, revealing fractures between the establishment aligned with party chair KP Sharma Oli and a challenger bloc led by senior vice-chair Ishwar Pokhrel, who is backed by former president Bidya Devi Bhandari. Delegate selection has been protracted due to disputes, mixed use of voting and consensus, and intense competition at the district level, with rival groups attempting to secure advantage before the leadership vote.

Leaders close to Oli claim that as many as 80 percent of selected delegates support him, while Pokhrel's allies argue that internal divisions within the Oli camp—particularly in Koshi and Gandaki provinces—could allow an unexpected shift once voting begins. With each constituency required to send at least one young delegate, generational dynamics have added further uncertainty. The coming convention represents the most serious challenge to Oli's authority in years, with the balance of power still unclear as selection processes continue in several districts. [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

The Nepali Congress, for its part, has moved from paralysis toward a tentative resolution, though only after months of internal confrontation. Dissent—initially triggered by the September 8–9 Gen Z protests and exacerbated by violent attacks on senior leaders—led to a prolonged dispute over whether to convene a regular or special general convention before the March elections. The faction led by General Secretaries Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma, joined by senior leader Shekhar Koirala, demanded a special convention before the polls, backed by 54 percent of elected delegates who had formally petitioned for leadership renewal. Party president Sher Bahadur Deuba, barred from seeking another term, sought to delay the regular convention until after the elections so he could retain interim authority over candidate selection. [The Kathmandu Post 5] [The Kathmandu Post 6] [The Kathmandu Post 7] [The Kathmandu Post 8]

After repeated postponements of central committee meetings and several rounds of failed negotiations, a breakthrough emerged earlier this week. Acting party president Purna Bahadur Khadka presented a compromise schedule for a regular general convention to be held from January 10–12, 2026, in Kathmandu.

Deuba, returned from medical treatment in Singapore, intervened directly with leaders who opposed an early convention and secured unanimous endorsement of the January dates. The decision extends the term of the central working committee until mid-February and

schedules lower-level conventions to begin on December 31. While Sharma warned that a special convention would still be required if deadlines slip, party officials said the demand for a special convention has become inactive following the unanimous agreement. [The Kathmandu Post 9] [The Kathmandu Post 10]

Nepal: Fragmented royalist factions add pressure to interim government

(lm) Nepal's political landscape continues to reorganize rapidly following the September "Gen Z" uprising that toppled the Nepali Congress–Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) coalition and brought an interim administration under Prime Minister Sushila Karki. But while most major leftist, centrist and "alternative" forces have consolidated, the country's various pro-monarchy groups—advocating restoration of the Hindu monarchy abolished in 2008—remain fragmented and poorly coordinated. This disunity limits their electoral relevance for the March 2026 polls but continues to present a challenge for the interim government due to frequent mobilization calls and escalating rhetoric. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Businessman Durga Prasai, one of the most visible royalist agitators, has announced talks with Prime Minister Karki on December 8 after earlier discussions with the home minister, as authorities assess his planned demonstrations as potential security risks. Prasai previously led a high-profile pro-monarchy rally in Kathmandu's Tinkune in March that turned violent, left two people dead and collapsed within a day. He has also been detained for inflammatory statements against top officials and later released on a Supreme Court order.

Prasai's demands extend far beyond monarchy restoration. He has called for sweeping financial and administrative concessions, including the removal of thousands of people and companies from bank blacklists; relief for indebted entrepreneurs and transport operators; the release of those detained during the September unrest; the withdrawal of "false" charges; and salary increases for security forces and civil servants. Politically, he demands a referendum on Hindu statehood, the future of federal provinces, and the monarchy. He warned that elections would be "impossible" in March—or even in 2027—if these demands are ignored.

He has also publicly criticized former king Gyanendra Shah and established royalist parties for what he calls

passivity and inconsistency, arguing that neither the symbolic figurehead nor traditional royalist organizations have backed his movement when it mattered.

Other royalist actors, including the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) under Rajendra Lingden, RPP-Nepal under Kamal Thapa, the newly registered Nagarik Bachau Dal linked to Prasai, and the Gen Z Alliance for Monarchy, acknowledge that cooperation is desirable but say that internal disputes and leadership rivalries continue to block unity. An RPP dialogue committee has been formed to explore alliances, but even insiders question its effectiveness. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Alternative political forces accelerate realignment ahead of March 2026 elections

(lm) Nepal's political realignment ahead of the March 2026 parliamentary elections has accelerated, notably marked by the merger of the Bibeksheel Sajha Party, a smaller reformist group, into the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), an anti-establishment party, with the merged entity retaining the RSP name and bell election symbol. The consolidation strengthens the camp of "alternative" politics amid a broader reshuffle following the Gen Z uprising and parliament's dissolution. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

However, the credibility and electoral viability of this "alternative block" remains shadowed by continuing criminal cases against RSP's founding chair, Rabi Lamichhane. Since late 2024, Lamichhane has been arrested multiple times on allegations of cooperative-fund embezzlement, money-laundering, and organized-crime linked to several credit cooperatives across Nepal. As of November 2025, Lamichhane remains in judicial custody pending trial. The High Court recently ordered the submission of original case files from the Supreme Court in response to his appeal for release under bail.

In parallel, the RSP is exploring additional partnerships. Negotiations have resumed with Ujyalo Nepal, a recently registered party backed by interim energy minister Kulman Ghising, after earlier talks stalled over leadership arrangements; both sides now characterize discussions as more positive even if a joint ballot symbol remains unlikely. The RSP has also held exploratory contacts with several emerging groups, including newly formed Madhesh-based parties and NUP-Nepal, while maintaining informal channels with the Janata Samajbadi Party led by Ashok Rai. Party

officials believe the Election Commission's recent extension of the registration deadline has created additional space for alliance-building. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Internally, the RSP is restructuring its political machinery for the election campaign. It has removed all seven provincial in-charges, will replace them with central-level leaders, and has instructed its provincial and district units to intensify preparations. The party has also approved rapid-response teams across municipalities. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: Government moves to curb political control over universities

(lm) Nepal's interim government is preparing a major overhaul of the country's higher education governance in an effort to reverse decades of political interference in university management. The reform centers on removing the prime minister from the position of university chancellor—a role that currently applies to almost all of Nepal's 19 universities and has long enabled political parties to influence executive appointments and academic leadership.

Education Minister Mahabir Pun said the government is finalizing a higher education bill that would replace the prime minister with an academic figure as chancellor, either through an ordinance or by introducing legislation during the current term. A committee led by the chair of the University Grants Commission is drafting the bill.

The proposed reform would mark Nepal's first serious attempt to implement long-standing recommendations, including those from a high-level education commission in 2019, to remove political leaders from university governance. Past governments, including those led by the Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML, and the former Maoist Centre, routinely appointed party loyalists to top posts, contributing to entrenched politicization. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Prime minister's secretariat cut to six staff amid cost-saving and accountability concerns

(ec) Nepal's Prime Minister Sushila Karki has reduced the Prime Minister's Secretariat to just six staff members, according to an official announcement. The

restructuring leaves only a chief advisor, a public-relations advisor, a chief personal secretary, a press coordinator, one section officer responsible for photography, and an honorary public-health expert. The move follows an earlier downsizing that had already cut the secretariat from its sanctioned strength of 66 positions to about 20. [The Himalayan Times] [Nepal News]

The decision comes in the wake of allegations in September that senior secretariat officials had appointed relatives to key posts, including one appointment reportedly granted a rank equivalent to a joint secretary. Youth groups linked to the Gen Z movement—which helped bring the current administration to power—criticized those appointments as inconsistent with the transparency and accountability commitments the government had pledged to uphold. [AIR No. 47, November/2025, 4]

Nepal: High court orders release of former speaker in gold smuggling case

(lm) Nepal's Patan High Court has ordered the release of former speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara after overturning a Kathmandu District Court decision that had placed him in pretrial detention in connection with a high-profile gold smuggling investigation. Mahara, a longtime political figure and former senior leader of the Maoist movement, had been arrested in October by the Central Investigation Bureau of Nepal Police on suspicion of involvement in a gold smuggling network that has drawn significant public and political attention. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Major cuts in external funding threaten sustainability of national immunization program

(ec) Nepal's Health Ministry has warned that the country's immunization system faces disruption after Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance—a global health partnership that finances vaccine delivery in lower-income countries—announced plans to reduce its operational support for Nepal by up to 70 percent. While vaccine supplies will continue, cuts to logistics, cold-chain systems and health-worker training could undermine coverage, especially in rural and mountainous areas where state capacity is limited. The ministry cautions that the shortfall threatens decades of progress in child and maternal health. Nepal is now seeking

alternative bilateral and multilateral partners to prevent gaps in delivery. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: New study links early marriage to heightened risk of domestic and sexual violence

(lm) A new study by the Women Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), drawing on nationwide data from fiscal year 2024–25, reports a strong correlation between early marriage and women's vulnerability to violence. According to the findings, 85.2 percent of survivors had been married before the age of 20.

The study documents 1,279 incidents of violence against women across the seven provinces. Karnali recorded the highest number of cases (419), followed by Koshi (341) and Madhesh (260). Of all cases reported, 72 percent involved domestic violence, 17 percent sexual violence, and 6.5 percent social violence.

The data also show that in rape cases, 91 percent of perpetrators were known to the victim. Provincial variations are significant: Koshi accounted for 36.2 percent of all rape cases, followed by Bagmati (25.5 percent) and Karnali (14.8 percent).

Local officials and rights advocates cited gaps in enforcement, insufficiently functioning women and children units, and economic dependency as factors limiting women's ability to seek protection. They also pointed to entrenched social norms and the absence of a nationwide mechanism for documenting cases as ongoing challenges.

The study additionally notes that women face violence even during crises or emergencies and that low participation in decision-making reinforces their vulnerability. It reports that 98 percent of rape survivors face social stigma or repercussions, and that 16.1 percent of women in WOREC's program districts experienced violence linked to accusations of witchcraft. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: New study finds children's awareness of sexual abuse remains superficial

(lm) A new study by Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN-Nepal), based on qualitative research in

Lalitpur Metropolitan City, finds that Nepali children's awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse remains largely superficial and rarely translates into the ability to recognize, avoid, or report harmful situations.

According to the study, children aged 12–14 were mostly unfamiliar with basic concepts such as "good touch" and "bad touch," while those aged 15 and above recognized the terms but often lacked clarity about what constitutes abusive behavior, coercion, or exploitation. Much of their knowledge was drawn from peers, personal experience, or online content rather than structured guidance.

The findings are based on 22 peer-group discussions involving 169 children (90 girls and 79 boys) aged 12–17, supplemented by interviews with 25 adults, including police officers, local officials, religious figures and other community leaders.

Participants described persistent insecurity in public spaces and, in several cases, in schools, citing incidents of harassment by teachers that only resulted in action once communities intervened. The study also highlights a high reluctance to report abuse due to fear of retaliation or being disbelieved, leaving many children to cope with trauma without support.

Elder siblings—especially sisters—were identified as the most trusted sources of guidance, underscoring gaps in adult-led protection and education. Overall, the findings point to weak prevention and reporting systems, inconsistent school safety, and insufficient adult oversight in Nepal's child-protection environment. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Work begins on key transmission link to boost cross-border power trade

(lm) Nepal has launched construction of the 18-kilometer New Butwal transmission line and its associated 400 kV substation in Sunawal, a core component of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal Compact—an infrastructure grant program funded by the United States that focuses on electricity transmission and road maintenance. The project is designed to strengthen Nepal's high-voltage grid and create a major cross-border interconnection with India, enabling higher volumes of hydropower exports once the line reaches the Nepal–India border.

The transmission line and substation represent nearly USD 50 million in investment and are tied to the 2024 Nepal–India power trade agreement, which foresees

the export of up to 10,000 megawatts of electricity over the next decade. MCC and the Millennium Challenge Account Nepal (MCA-Nepal), which implements the compact, described the launch as a milestone for energy security and for integrating Nepal's growing hydropower capacity into regional grids. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Interim government clears investment plans for two large hydropower projects

(lm) Nepal's interim government has approved investment models for the 1,200-megawatt Budhigandaki reservoir project and the 1,063-megawatt Upper Arun semi-reservoir project, signaling an effort to push ahead with long-delayed hydropower expansion despite the political transition ahead of the March 2026 elections.

Budhigandaki—one of Nepal's largest planned storage projects—will rely heavily on public financing, including state equity, concessional loans and revenue from an existing infrastructure tax, while Upper Arun will depend mainly on domestic institutions and mixed public–private share offerings. Pre-construction work at Upper Arun is already underway.

Both projects are strategically important to Nepal's long-term plan to increase generation capacity, stabilize its grid and supply more electricity to India under the 2024 cross-border power-trade framework. Officials argue that the decisions taken now will commit future governments to advancing the schemes, keeping Nepal's hydropower build-out on track despite political uncertainty. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Police report hundreds of arrests and pending cases linked to September Gen Z protests

(ec) Nepal Police reported on November 27 that 580 people have been arrested and 278 cases registered in connection with the Gen Z protests of September 8–9. The cases include allegations of criminal disturbances, theft and disorderly conduct. Authorities say the protests also led to vandalism, looting and the theft of weapons from police facilities. While some of the stolen arms have been recovered, several hundred remain missing and a number of suspects are still at

large. Police have established district- and provincial-level task desks to trace fugitives, recover remaining weapons and restore public order. [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: Government moves toward appointing new Chief of Defense Forces under expanded powers for the army chief

(lm/as) Pakistan's political system is undergoing a far-reaching restructuring centered on the 27th constitutional amendment, which expands the authority of the military leadership, creates a new constitutional court, and grants lifetime legal immunity to senior state figures. As the government moves to implement these changes—including appointing the country's first Chief of Defense Forces (CDF)—Islamabad has forcefully rejected warnings from the UN human rights chief that the reforms weaken judicial independence and undermine rule-of-law safeguards.

The most consequential shift concerns the creation of the CDF, a post designed to consolidate command over the army, air force and navy. Defense Minister Khawaja Asif said the federal government has formally begun the appointment process and will issue the notification once Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, currently in the United Kingdom for medical check-ups, returns to Islamabad. The new post replaces the abolished Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, which ceased to exist after the retirement of General Sahir Shamshad Mirza on November 27. Under the amendment and changes to the Pakistan Army Act, the army chief automatically becomes the CDF for a five-year term that carries unified operational, administrative and strategic authority across all three services.

In practice, the legal changes give Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, appointed army chief in November 2022, a renewed five-year term that will begin once the CDF notification is issued—extending his leadership until November 2030 and bringing his total tenure to eight years. The amendment also permits a further five-year extension, potentially enabling him to remain in command until 2035. Alongside this restructured command architecture, the amendment grants lifetime immunity from criminal prosecution to the field marshal and the president of Pakistan, marking one of the most significant reconfigurations of Pakistan's civil–military framework in decades. [Arab News 1]

The new constitutional framework has drawn sharp criticism from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who warned that the amendments erode judicial independence, dilute mechanisms for military accountability and weaken the separation of powers. The UN expressed concern that the 27th amendment —adopted quickly and without broad consultation— creates a Federal Constitutional Court that removes constitutional adjudication from the Supreme Court, expands executive influence over judicial appointments and transfers, and provides extensive immunity to senior civilian and military leaders. [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3]

Islamabad has rejected the criticism as unfounded, insisting that constitutional lawmaking is the exclusive domain of Pakistan's elected parliament and that the amendment was passed by a two-thirds majority in full conformity with constitutional procedure. The government argues that the new constitutional court will help reduce the Supreme Court's backlog and speed up the delivery of justice, urging the UN to refrain from commentary it views as based on misinformation or political bias. [Radio Pakistan] [Arab News 4]

Pakistan: Dispute over jailed former prime minister deepens alongside federal warning of possible intervention in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

(lm) Pakistan's long-running political confrontation between the federal government and jailed ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan and his supporters has sharpened on two interconnected fronts as the federal government signals a potential takeover of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province while disputes over Khan's imprisonment intensify. With Khan in jail since August 2023, his detention has become the central fault line in the struggle between Islamabad and Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), whose last remaining power base is the KP provincial government.

The clearest escalation came when State Minister for Law and Justice Aqeel Malik openly stated that the federal government is considering imposing governor's rule in KP, the PTI-run province led by Chief Minister Sohail Afridi. Malik's remarks followed reports that Islamabad is already reviewing potential candidates for a new KP governor, signaling that preparations for emergency rule may be underway. He argued that the Afridi administration has "failed" to maintain law and order, refused coordination with federal authorities,

and created conditions he believes meet the constitutional criteria for intervention.

Under Pakistan's constitutional framework, governor's rule is an exceptional measure reserved for situations of "grave emergency." If invoked, the provincial cabinet is suspended, and all administrative authority is transferred to the governor—effectively sidelining the elected government. Malik emphasized that such a takeover could initially last two months, with the option of extension under constitutional procedures. The warning comes after weeks of confrontation, including PTI-organized protests over restricted access to Khan and intensifying disputes over the province's handling of militancy and internal security. [Arab News 1]

At the same time, the conflict over Khan's imprisonment has intensified. Khan's family says they have been unable to meet him for more than three weeks despite a judicial order allowing regular visits, and his sons told Reuters they have received no independently verified information about his condition for months. One son said the family fears authorities may be concealing "something irreversible," adding that the lack of communication amounts to psychological pressure. They also say Khan's personal physician has been denied access for more than a year, despite repeated appeals. [Arab News 2]

A senior jail official speaking anonymously told Reuters that Khan remains in good health, with no plans for a transfer to a higher-security facility. Pakistan's interior ministry did not comment, while the government has previously rejected online rumors about Khan's death or deteriorating health. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar has described him as "hale and hearty" and said he receives facilities consistent with his status as a privileged prisoner in Adiala Jail. Jail authorities likewise denied allegations that Khan has been secretly moved or is facing critical health complications. [Arab News 3]

Khan, 72, has been imprisoned since August 2023 after multiple convictions he says are politically motivated. These include the Toshakhana case involving the sale of state gifts, a case related to an alleged leak of a diplomatic cable and a separate graft conviction linked to the Al-Qadir Trust. His party maintains that the prosecutions are intended to exclude him from public life and electoral politics. His family says restrictions on communication have intensified their concern, noting that television stations have been instructed not to use his name or image and that the only recent public glimpse of him is a single older court photograph circulating online. His sons said they last saw him in November 2022 after an assassination attempt, a

memory they say now carries added weight amid the current lack of information. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

The dispute has moved into the courts. On November 28, Khan's sister filed a contempt petition with the Islamabad High Court, arguing that prison authorities and senior officials are deliberately violating the court's March 24 order reinstating twice-weekly family visits. She filed the petition alongside Chief Minister Afridi, who has made securing access to Khan one of his central political commitments and recently staged a sixteen-hour sit-in outside Adiala Jail after being denied entry. Afridi has warned of parliamentary disruption if access continues to be blocked. [ETV Bharat]

Pakistan: Lawyers protest as new constitutional court takes up disputed heritage-mining case

(lm) Lawyers in Karachi protested after Pakistan's newly created Federal Constitutional Court unexpectedly agreed to hear a long-running dispute over mining in the Karoonjhar Hills—a set of culturally significant granitic formations in Sindh's Tharparkar district that contain ancient Hindu sites and ecologically sensitive desert terrain. The region has been at the center of opposition from activists and civil society groups since the provincial government issued mining allotments that were challenged on environmental, cultural, and heritage grounds.

Sindh formally designated 21,000 acres of the hills as protected heritage land in 2024, but conflicting court rulings left questions over jurisdiction and the legality of earlier mining allotments. Fresh controversy emerged when an appeal previously pending before the Supreme Court was abruptly listed for hearing before the new constitutional court, established under Pakistan's 27th Constitutional Amendment to handle constitutional interpretation. Critics argue that the court's creation has blurred institutional boundaries and raised concerns about judicial legitimacy.

Protesting lawyers say the dispute should not be moved to the new court and accuse authorities of attempting to circumvent earlier judicial findings. The Sindh government rejects allegations of political manipulation, saying the heritage zone has already been clearly demarcated and that any remaining questions should be resolved through technical environmental and cultural assessments rather than judicial intervention. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government expands crackdown on online misinformation and tightens identity-verification rules

(lm) Pakistan's interior authorities have announced an expanded crackdown on online misinformation alongside sweeping reforms to the national identity-verification system, reflecting Islamabad's effort to combine cyber-regulation, immigration control and internal security management under a more centralized framework.

The interior ministry said it is preparing a large-scale enforcement campaign against what it calls "fake news" circulating on social media, arguing that unverified online reporting is fueling public anxiety. The initiative will involve the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency, the federal body created this year to investigate and prosecute cyber offenses under Pakistan's amended electronic-crimes legislation. Critics, including journalists and rights groups, argue that recent cyber and media reforms risk being used to suppress dissent, but the government says new measures are necessary to prevent disinformation and maintain public order.

Parallel to the cyber crackdown, the National Database and Registration Authority has notified extensive reforms aimed at tightening identity verification as Pakistan continues a nationwide deportation drive targeting foreigners without legal status. The reforms introduce structured review processes for questionable identity records, establish verification boards to conduct inquiries and hearings, and update procedures for verifying and canceling identity documents. They also revise the National Identity Card and Pakistan Origin Card frameworks, clarify eligibility requirements for individuals of Pakistani origin, and define rules for handling cases involving multiple identity cards. The regulator has additionally aligned its procurement regime with national transparency and accountability standards to ensure more secure and auditable acquisitions, particularly for sensitive systems.

The dual policy tracks unfold as Pakistan accelerates the removal of Afghan nationals lacking formal documentation. According to official data, nearly one million people have been repatriated this year, while federal authorities report that deportation efforts are progressing in Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab but face resistance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where refugee camps the federal government has de-notified reportedly remain active. Islamabad links several

recent suicide attacks in Islamabad, Peshawar and Wana to Afghan militants and argues that provincial authorities must cooperate more fully. Afghanistan rejects the accusations and maintains that Pakistan's security challenges are internal matters. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

The UN refugee agency separately urged Pakistan to exempt Afghans with special protection needs from its ongoing deportation policy, warning that forced returns risk exposing vulnerable individuals to harm and would undermine Pakistan's longstanding humanitarian approach toward displaced Afghans. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan: Court summons provincial law secretary over petition alleging harassment of transgender persons

(my) The Peshawar High Court has summoned the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa law secretary after TransAction Alliance and 25 transgender individuals filed a petition alleging harassment, discrimination and forced evictions by police and local authorities. The court asked the provincial law department to respond to the allegations and to explain what measures are in place to protect the rights and safety of transgender persons. [DAWN]

Pakistan: Nationwide immunization campaign reports over 15 million polio vaccinations as final phase begins

(my) Pakistan has concluded a nationwide immunization campaign that ran from November 17 to 29 and targeted more than 50 million children for measles, rubella and polio. Health authorities reported that in the first nine days of the drive more than fifteen million children had already received polio drops across 90 high-risk districts. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Fuel-oil exports reach record level in 2025 and expected to remain steady in 2026

(lm) Pakistan's fuel-oil exports have reached a new high in 2025 after higher domestic taxes discouraged local use and power producers continued shifting toward

alternatives such as coal and solar. Trade-tracking data show that exports have already surpassed 1.4 million metric tons this year, more than 16 percent above the full-year total in 2024, with most shipments heading to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The exported volumes consisted mainly of high-sulfur fuel oil used in marine fuel blends, while smaller amounts were absorbed by regional refineries as feedstock.

Pakistan's main state-linked and privately operated refineries, which typically supply the domestic market, increased exports as local demand declined. One of the largest refiners reported shipping roughly a quarter million tons in the last fiscal year and expects significantly higher volumes this year due to increased processing of lighter crude grades that yield more low-sulfur marine fuel. The company has also partnered with a major global commodities trader to expand low-sulfur fuel supply from Pakistani ports.

According to market assessments, Pakistan's rising exports have added to an already well-supplied Asian market, further pressuring regional fuel-oil prices. Industry sources expect export volumes to hold steady or rise in 2026, noting that fuel oil is no longer viable for domestic power generation or profitable to sell locally under current budget rules. Pakistan became a net exporter of fuel oil in 2023. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government appoints adviser for privatization of two regional power distributors

(lm) Pakistan has appointed an international advisory firm to support the privatization of two regional electricity distributors as part of its wider effort to reform loss-making state-owned enterprises. The Hyderabad Electric Supply Company and the Sukkur Electric Power Company are part of Pakistan's network of power distribution companies, or "DISCOs," which are responsible for billing, grid operations, and revenue collection but have long struggled with political interference, weak governance, and low recovery rates.

The initiative forms part of a broader reform agenda linked to Pakistan's USD 7 billion International Monetary Fund program, which requires improvements in governance and reductions in the financial losses of state-owned utilities. A first set of privatizations involving the distribution companies serving Islamabad, Gujranwala, and Faisalabad is already underway, and the inclusion of Hyderabad and

Sukkur marks a further expansion of this agenda. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government frames IMF corruption assessment as reform catalyst as fund prepares USD 1.2 billion disbursement review

(lm) Pakistan has presented the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) recent Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment (GCDA) as a catalyst for long-overdue institutional reforms, as the country prepares for a crucial IMF Executive Board review on December 8 expected to unlock USD 1.2 billion in financing.

The IMF assessment identifies governance gaps across state institutions and recommends a 15-point reform agenda focused on private-sector development, public-sector performance and accountability. According to the diagnostic, full implementation could raise Pakistan's GDP by 5–6.5 percent over five years. The report, which the government itself requested and facilitated, was issued after IMF teams helped Islamabad reconcile PKR 448 million (USD 1.58 million) in budget discrepancies during consultations in Karachi, Islamabad and Washington. [Arab News 1]

The upcoming board meeting covers Pakistan's USD 7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the USD 1.4 billion Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF). If approved, total disbursements under these programs will reach approximately USD 3.3 billion. The review follows a staff-level agreement reached in October.

Pakistan narrowly avoided default in mid-2023 when foreign exchange reserves fell below three weeks of import cover and inflation peaked at 38 percent. Authorities now point to short-term stabilization, including lower inflation, an improved current account position and foreign exchange reserves of roughly USD 14 billion, equivalent to about two months of import cover. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb stressed that the challenge is to shift from stabilization to durable, broad-based and export-driven growth anchored in productivity, remittances and private investment.

The minister added that the IMF recognized "meaningful progress" in areas such as taxation, governance, public financial management and procurement. Industrial output also shows signs of recovery compared to last year's contraction: between

July and October, cement production increased by 16 percent, fertilizer by 9 percent, petroleum by 4 percent, automobiles by 31 percent, and mobile-phone manufacturing by 26 percent. Large-scale manufacturing expanded by 4.1 percent year-on-year in the first quarter. Aurangzeb cautioned that sustaining this trajectory requires shielding the economy from Pakistan's recurring boom-and-bust cycles through deeper structural and institutional reforms. [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Major gold-mining company's restructuring review coincides with full financing for flagship copper–gold project

(lm) Pakistan has secured full financing for the first phase of the Reko Diq copper–gold project at the same time a major Canadian gold-mining group — Barrick Mining, one of the world's largest gold producers and Pakistan's joint-venture partner — is evaluating a restructuring plan that could influence its long-term portfolio balance between stable and higher-risk jurisdictions. Although no changes have been announced for Pakistan, analysts view the company's planned reorganization of its North American assets as part of a broader effort to consolidate core operations following a volatile year.

Reko Diq, located in Balochistan near the borders with Iran and Afghanistan, ranks among the world's largest undeveloped copper–gold deposits. The first phase of construction carries a cost of USD 5.66 billion (about PKR 1.62 trillion), rising to roughly USD 7 billion (about PKR 2 trillion) once financing charges are included. According to project officials, this phase is now fully funded through a USD 3.5 billion (about PKR 1 trillion) debt package arranged by a consortium of eleven international lenders led by the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Ore processing is scheduled to begin in late 2028, with initial copper exports expected in early 2029. Islamabad considers the project central to its future export profile, projecting annual copper exports of about USD 2.8 billion (around PKR 800 billion) in the early years — close to ten percent of Pakistan's current export base. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

For Pakistan, the timing of the financing milestone coincides with the Canadian partner's global restructuring review. The company is evaluating an initial public offering for a new entity holding its North American mines, a move driven by investor pressure to strengthen returns and reduce exposure to politically or operationally challenging jurisdictions. While the

review targets the company's broader portfolio, it has prompted renewed scrutiny of long-term strategies concerning higher-risk regions, including Pakistan. [Arab News 3]

At the same time, a UNDP-supported assessment warns that Pakistan's domestic gold market — estimated to be 90 percent informal — is not prepared to absorb the mine's future gold output. The study, supported by the Competition Commission, identifies widespread undocumented trade, weak consumer protection, the absence of mandatory hallmarking, and a lack of centralized regulatory oversight. Pakistan currently consumes 60–90 tons of gold annually, mostly imported, with prices still set by informal trader associations rather than regulated benchmarks.

Given that Reko Diq's gold reserves are valued at roughly USD 54 billion over the project's lifetime, the study warns that large volumes risk slipping into informal networks unless significant reforms are enacted. It recommends establishing a Pakistan Gold and Gemstone Authority to centralize regulation, enforce hallmarking, introduce digital traceability systems, and ensure that the mine's output enters documented and controlled supply chains. [Arab News 4]

Pakistan: ADB approves USD 48 million for water-resources development in Balochistan

(lm) The Asian Development Bank has approved an additional USD 48 million for a water-resources development project in Balochistan, Pakistan's driest and least developed province, where chronic water scarcity and climate stress have severely affected rural livelihoods. The funding will allow the completion of key components, including the Siri Toi Dam command area and watershed-management measures that were delayed due to budget constraints. The program is co-financed by Japan-backed regional funds and forms part of broader efforts to strengthen climate resilience and agricultural productivity in an area highly vulnerable to drought and water shortages. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Navy tests ballistic missile capable of striking sea and ground targets

(lm) Pakistan's navy has carried out a successful test flight of an indigenously developed anti-ship ballistic missile that the military says can hit both maritime and land targets with high precision. The missile is equipped with advanced guidance and maneuverability features and is launched from naval platforms rather than from land-based systems.

The launch comes as Pakistan seeks to strengthen its defense posture following a four-day conflict with India in May, during which both nuclear-armed states exchanged drone, missile, and artillery strikes before a United States–brokered ceasefire on May 10.

The navy conducted a similar test earlier in November involving a ship-launched ballistic missile with a 350-kilometer range. In July, it also launched a new domestically designed patrol vessel equipped with long-range, semi-automatic guns intended to expand its operational capacity at sea. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Security report records sharp rise in civilian fatalities amid continued militant activity

(lm) Civilian casualties from militant attacks in Pakistan rose by 80 percent in November, according to new data released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, which reported a continued uptick in violence across regions bordering Afghanistan. The figures indicate that 54 civilians were killed in November, up from 30 in October, while losses among security forces fell sharply from 72 to 25 over the same period. Overall, 292 people were killed and 164 injured nationwide in militant attacks and counter-militancy operations last month, with militants comprising 206 of the fatalities.

The think tank documented 97 militant attacks in November, compared with 89 in October, noting that most counter-militancy operations occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Of the 206 militant deaths recorded, 137 occurred in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 58 in its tribal districts, with smaller numbers reported from other areas. The month also saw an increase in suicide attacks, rising from one in October to four in November, with incidents reported in Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. These suicide bombings caused 31 deaths, including 12 civilians, four security personnel and 15 militants, and injured 64 people.

The report places the November developments within a broader national trend. Pakistan recorded 24 suicide

attacks in the first eleven months of 2025, compared with seventeen in all of 2024. PICSS said the first 11 months of 2025 have resulted in 3,144 conflict-related deaths, including 1,940 militants, 626 security personnel, 563 civilians and fifteen members of pro-government peace committees. The think tank characterized 2025 as the deadliest year for militants since 2015 and for security forces since 2014, underscoring the scale of the confrontation between state forces and militant groups active in Pakistan's western regions. [Arab News]

Seychelles: Government advances public–private model for affordable housing as it targets 2,000 new units

(lm) Seychelles has completed a new 32-unit condominium project on Ile Perseverance, a major reclaimed island near the capital Victoria that now serves as the country's primary hub for new housing development. Built in 15 months, the complex reflects the government's continued shift toward a public–private model in which the state provides land and regulatory facilitation while households secure bank financing and private contractors deliver the construction.

President Patrick Herminie used the inauguration to reaffirm his administration's pledge to build more than 2,000 affordable homes within five years. This includes additional condominium blocks on Ile Perseverance and new apartment-style housing on Aurore Island, another reclaimed island earmarked for urban expansion. [State House, Seychelles]

Sri Lanka: Islandwide disaster tests state capacity as Cyclone Ditwah leaves massive human and economic toll

(ss/lm) Sri Lanka has entered its second week of an islandwide emergency after Cyclone Ditwah—an unusually intense late-season storm for the region—brought days of extreme rainfall, floods and landslides across all 25 districts beginning in late November. Updated disaster-management figures as of December 1 indicate over 350 confirmed deaths, more than 350 missing persons, and more than 1.3 million people affected. The scale of destruction, which includes more than 15,000 homes destroyed and over 200 major roads rendered impassable, marks one of the most severe natural disasters in the country's modern

history and a rare climate event with national-level impact. [The New York Times] [Daily Mirror 1]

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has described the crisis as the "largest and most challenging natural disaster" Sri Lanka has faced, prompting the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency. Essential sectors—including electricity, fuel, healthcare, water supply, food distribution and transport—have been brought under centralized command through a Commissioner General of Essential Services. Approximately LKR 30 billion (about USD 102 million) from the 2025 budget has been released for immediate response, with additional supplementary allocations expected. [Daily Mirror 2] [Daily Mirror 3] [Daily Mirror 4] [Daily Mirror 5] [Daily Mirror 6]

The government has also launched a large-scale reconstruction framework. A statutory "Rebuilding Sri Lanka" Fund is being established under the Presidential Secretariat, with a management committee combining senior public-sector officials and major private-sector actors. Parallel discussions with the World Bank are underway to produce a Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation within two weeks to quantify losses and calculate financing requirements. [Daily Mirror 7] [Daily Mirror 8]

The extreme weather has also caused devastating agricultural losses. Heavy rains destroyed around 600,000 acres of rice and vegetable crops, with severe damage recorded in Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee, Monaragala, and several up-country districts such as Nuwara Eliya and Badulla. Farmers warn that the destruction of paddy fields and vegetable farms could lead to significant shortages and price increases during the upcoming festive season unless rapid recovery measures are taken. [Daily Mirror 9]

Sri Lanka: Opposition realignment gains momentum as two key parties move toward reunification

(ss/lm) Sri Lanka's political landscape shifted on November 26 when the United National Party (UNP) — the country's oldest center-right party and the former governing force for much of the post-independence era — announced full support for Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa's decision to take responsibility for merging it with the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB). [Ada Derena]

Both parties share a common institutional lineage: the SJB emerged from the UNP's reformist wing after years

of internal disputes over leadership, policy direction, and the party's response to Sri Lanka's economic deterioration.

The move comes at a time when the opposition landscape has been structurally weakened: the National People's Power coalition won a two-thirds parliamentary majority (159 of 225 seats) in 2024, leaving all other parties — including both the SJB and the UNP — without realistic near-term leverage in parliament.

Sri Lanka: Opposition calls for investigation into alleged rice-import irregularities

(lm) Sri Lanka's opposition has called for an immediate investigation after an audio clip circulated online that appears to feature Minister Sunil Handunnetti discussing the clearance of rice imported without the required license. Opposition MPs told Parliament that the recording suggests the minister was advising a third party on releasing a shipment despite a possible penalty of LKR 84 million (USD 285,600). They also claimed the matter involves a large quantity of rice and compared it to past controversies over improperly cleared containers.

Some government lawmakers questioned whether the allegations reflect internal political tensions. Minister Handunnetti denied any wrongdoing, stating that he has lodged a complaint with the Criminal Investigation Department and describing the recording as taken out of context. He said the discussion concerned five containers held at Customs due to a licensing problem and insisted he was providing procedural guidance rather than endorsing illegal activity. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government says full economic impact of 2015 bond scam still unassessed

(lm) Sri Lanka's government told Parliament that the total losses arising from the 2015 bond scam—a disputed government bond issuance in which irregular auction practices allegedly enabled a politically connected primary dealer to secure disproportionate gains at the expense of public funds—have still not been fully determined. Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya said that although the scam clearly caused losses worth billions of rupees, no complete assessment of its impact on the national economy has

ever been carried out, and a full review is now underway.

According to the Prime Minister, initial estimates show that the Central Bank and the Employees' Provident Fund suffered direct losses of more than LKR 7 billion (USD 23.8 million). The Central Bank has meanwhile initiated legal action to recover LKR 78 million (USD 265,200) and LKR 6.99 billion (USD 23.8 million) from those implicated in the case. Proceedings target both former officials and private-sector actors, and similar cases are in motion regarding a second alleged bond-related irregularity in March 2016. Several state institutions—including the national insurance corporation, the higher education scholarship fund, the National Savings Bank, and the Employees' Trust Fund—have also launched their own efforts to recover losses. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Opposition National List MP resigns, leaving seat vacant amid unclear circumstances

(lm) Sri Lanka's main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) has lost one of its National List lawmakers after a member representing the All Ceylon Makkal Katchi resigned from Parliament with immediate effect. The announcement was made during the November 28 sitting, though no reason was provided. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: UN torture-prevention body schedules 2026 visit

(ss) The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), the treaty body established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), announced that Sri Lanka will be included in its 2026 program of country visits. The decision follows the SPT's latest session in Geneva, where it confirmed that next year's roster will combine new missions with several postponed in 2025 due to budget shortages.

The SPT conducts unannounced inspections of detention sites such as police stations, prisons, psychiatric institutions, and immigration facilities, and works with national monitoring bodies to improve safeguards against torture. [Daily Mirror] [Colombo Gazette]

Sri Lanka: UK tribunal orders full rehearing in asylum case linked to 2019 Easter attacks

(lm) A Sri Lankan national who was questioned in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings is pursuing asylum in the United Kingdom after a senior tribunal ruled that his initial case had been improperly assessed and must be reheard. He left Sri Lanka in 2022 after being arrested and released on bail, and told the tribunal he fears persecution if returned, citing an arrest warrant issued shortly after his departure and reported police visits to his family home.

The upper tribunal found that the first-tier tribunal had made significant factual and procedural errors, prompting the decision to set aside the earlier ruling and remit the case for a full rehearing. UK authorities have maintained a firm stance, with the Home Office stating it will continue to defend its rejection of the man's claim as part of wider efforts to tighten migration rules.

The Easter Sunday bombings were a coordinated series of suicide attacks on luxury hotels and churches in Sri Lanka on April 21, 2019, killing more than 260 people and attributed to a local Islamist militant group. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Doctors' union to continue strike after partial progress in talks with Health Minister

(lm) Sri Lanka's Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) announced that it will continue its ongoing strike despite meeting the Health Minister for discussions that resulted in only limited agreement. The union said the talks did not produce a comprehensive outcome and that further decisions, including possible escalation, will be taken in the coming days.

The strike currently involves doctors refraining from issuing prescriptions that would allow patients to obtain medicines, tests, or medical equipment from private pharmacies and laboratories. At a recent Central Committee meeting, the GMOA reviewed options for intensified action.

The union had previously given the government 48 hours to present a clear, time-bound plan to resolve structural problems affecting doctors and the wider public health system. It argues that the 2026 Budget

failed to provide meaningful remedies for long-standing challenges faced by medical professionals, raising concerns about the sustainability of the country's free healthcare service. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government reports total debt surpassing USD 105 billion

(lm) Sri Lanka's government informed Parliament that the country's total public debt has increased to LKR 30.93 trillion (USD 105.16 billion) as of September 30. According to the deputy minister addressing Parliament, this marks a rise from LKR 29 trillion (USD 99.53 billion) recorded at the end of 2024. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Audit warns of severe prison security failures as escapes and overcrowding surge

(lm) A new audit has revealed major security and administrative shortcomings in Sri Lanka's prison system, reporting that 995 inmates or suspects escaped custody over the past six years, with 554 still not rearrested. The review highlights persistent failures in ensuring prisoner security and notes that delays, weak oversight, and inadequate procedures have contributed to repeated breaches.

The audit also found significant administrative delays in releasing suspects and inmates who had already secured bail or paid fines. In 2024 alone, 9,091 suspects in 11 institutions were released a day late, often due to slow court confirmations, while 2,278 inmates in 17 institutions were not released on the same day their orders were issued. Additionally, 1,252 inmates in 21 institutions remained in custody despite being granted bail, many due to financial constraints or difficulty meeting bail conditions.

Overcrowding remains acute, with prisons designed for 10,350 inmates currently holding nearly 37,000 people, exceeding capacity by more than 250 percent. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: President instructs drafting of new laws for instant destruction of seized drugs

(lm) President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has directed the Ministry of Justice to prepare legislation that would allow dangerous drugs to be destroyed immediately at the site of seizure, forming part of a wider national campaign against narcotics. The President instructed officials to accelerate the drafting process ahead of the March deadline and also called for strengthened rehabilitation capacity, including faster recruitment of permanent and temporary Government Analysts. [Daily Mirror]

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

Cambodia: Government rebukes opposition figure over alleged misinformation on Thai border

(dql) General Y Chhean, Cambodia's senior official responsible for border affairs, publicly condemned former opposition lawmaker Um Sam An for spreading what he described as fabricated claims about Cambodian–Thai border demarcation. He accused the ex-MP of using misinformation to fuel political agitation and undermine public confidence in the government's boundary work.

Chhean rejected allegations that he had acknowledged Thai encroachment, insisting that current demarcation activities strictly follow long-standing legal and historical documents, including French-era boundary records and the 2000 MoU. He also corrected assertions about who controlled parts of the frontier during past conflicts.

Positioning himself as a long-time defender of national territory, Chhean warned that Um Sam An has a record of distorting facts for political gain. He urged Cambodians to rely on the Royal Government and the Joint Boundary Commission, stressing that their actions comply with international norms and the historically recognized Cambodia–Thailand border. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Court denies bail to environmental activists

(dql) The Phnom Penh Appeal Court has denied bail to 10 environmental activists convicted last year for allegedly plotting an attack against government leaders and insulting the King in 2021. The decision, announced on December 1, upheld the Phnom Penh Municipal Court's ruling from July 2024.

The accused, including nine Cambodians and Spanish national Alex Gonzalez Davidson, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to eight years. They were charged with plotting against and insulting the King under Cambodia's criminal code. [Khmer Times]

Among the 10 environmental activists are five Mother Nature activists. The decision marks the third rejection of their bail applications, drawing sharp criticism from supporters who call the charges politically motivated and the sentences excessively harsh. [UCA News]

Cambodia: Government rejects report on lack of support for returning migrant workers

(dql) The labor ministry strongly rejected a new Human Rights Watch (HRW) report that accuses the government of failing to provide meaningful assistance to the large number of migrant workers who returned from Thailand during the mid-2025 border tensions, many of whom already struggled with high microfinance debts. The group urges the government to honor its promises to secure jobs for those who came back and adopt stronger protections against abusive debt-collection practices. [HRW]

The ministry denounced the findings as misleading and based on an unrepresentative sample, arguing that interviews with 56 people cannot reflect the situation of the roughly 90,000 returnees. Officials accused HRW of political bias and challenged the group to share the

interviewees' details so the government could offer assistance.

The ministry defended its response to the influx of workers, highlighting nationwide job-matching efforts, vocational training, and social security outreach, including more than 500 job fairs and related programs. [Khmer Times] [Cambodianess]

Cambodia: IMF lowers economic growth forecast

(dql) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised Cambodia's 2025 economic growth forecast down to 4.8 percent, citing an uneven recovery and escalating border tensions and warning that growth could further slow to 4.0 percent in 2026 unless prudent fiscal policies and targeted reforms are implemented to stabilize the economy and address underlying vulnerabilities. [IMF]

Several factors have contributed to the downgrade, including export volatility, a drop in remittances, a slowdown in tourism, and weak domestic demand. While Cambodia's growth in the first half of 2025 was strong—driven by garment and agricultural exports, as well as a recovering tourism sector—economic challenges emerged in the latter half of the year. These challenges included trade disruptions, border tensions, slow credit growth, and signs of a broader economic slowdown. Additionally, a reduction in remittances and weakening domestic demand have further pressured the economy.

The IMF also flagged risks to the economic outlook, emphasizing financial sector vulnerabilities, particularly elevated private debt and rising non-performing loans. Trade-policy uncertainty and tariff impacts on manufacturers could continue to undermine export performance, while border tensions could dampen domestic demand, tourism, and financial stability.

However, the IMF noted that regional trade and investment integration, along with the reintegration of returning migrant workers into the domestic labor market, could offer some support to Cambodia's economy moving forward. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia: Online scam syndicate dismantled

(dql) Cambodian authorities arrested 28 suspects, including 27 Vietnamese nationals, in a raid on a major online scam operation in Phnom Penh on December 1.

The syndicate, operating from a villa in Khan Chbar Ampov, allegedly ran romance fraud and digital extortion schemes, luring victims into fake online relationships before blackmailing them for money. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Military to guard oil refineries as next step of a further militarization of the civil sector

(ms) Indonesia will begin deploying soldiers to guard state-owned oil refineries in December, marking a significant expansion of the military's presence in strategic civilian sectors and adding to ongoing concerns about the widening domestic mandate of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI).

The security initiative was confirmed by both the government and Pertamina, the state energy company whose refineries will be protected under the new policy. Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin said the deployment forms part of the TNI's non-combat operations and targets national "strategic industries" deemed vital to economic and public welfare.

"The task of securing strategic installations, particularly those owned by Pertamina, falls under our non-combat military operations and is fully supported under the revised TNI Law," Sjafrie said, adding that more than 100 Territorial Development Battalions (BTP) have already been established, with plans for roughly 150 new battalions each year.

Pertamina welcomed the move. Company spokesperson Muhammad Baron described the refineries as critical national assets requiring layered security, saying the deployment would help ensure operational continuity. Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia also endorsed the plan after a briefing with President Prabowo Subianto, arguing that military involvement is justified given the risk of sabotage.

The decision comes as Indonesia accelerates refinery upgrades, including the USD 7.4 billion Balikpapan refinery, scheduled to begin full operations in December 2025. Recent refinery fires and security incidents have heightened government sensitivity toward infrastructure risks.

However, the deployment adds to a broader national debate about the militarization of Indonesia's civilian space, particularly since Prabowo and under him Sjafrie took office. Rights groups, analysts and several lawmakers have warned that an expanded military footprint — from disaster response to infrastructure protection — could erode civilian oversight and blur legal boundaries intended to limit the TNI's involvement in non-defense domains.

The revised TNI Law, which formalizes 14 categories of non-combat duties, has already drawn criticism for enabling a more assertive military role in governance. Critics argue the establishment of BTP units effectively embeds military personnel throughout Indonesia's provinces in ways not clearly distinguished from civilian functions. [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: President Prabowo's pardons for convicted SOE executives raise concerns over corruption agency's credibility

(ms) President Prabowo Subianto's granted presidential pardons to three former executives of state-owned ferry operator PT ASDP Indonesia Ferry, on November 25, triggering renewed scrutiny of Indonesia's anti-corruption framework, placing the spotlight on the authority and credibility of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).

The three executives were convicted on November 20 for their roles in ASDP's controversial acquisition of PT Jembatan Nusantara. The KPK argued that the acquisition caused Rp 1.25 trillion (USD 75 million) in state losses, primarily due to the inflated valuation of vessels and inherited debts. Although prosecutors found no evidence of personal enrichment, they maintained that mismanagement and negligence met the legal threshold for corruption. Sentences ranged from four to four-and-a-half years.

The pardons were first revealed by Deputy House Speaker Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, who said the decision followed public complaints and parliamentary input urging the President to intervene. The State Secretariat later confirmed that Prabowo had issued rehabilitation letters after what it described as a "comprehensive evaluation."

The move immediately raised concerns among legal experts and civil society groups, who warned that overriding a corruption conviction so soon after

sentencing risks undermining judicial independence and public faith in anti-graft institutions. Critics argue that executive intervention in a high-profile case—especially one involving executives of a major state-owned enterprise—could signal a willingness to soften the state's anti-corruption posture.

The KPK responded cautiously, saying it "respects the President's prerogative" but is awaiting the official decree before determining next steps. Rehabilitation in Indonesia restores a convicted person's legal status and rights but does not automatically annul a verdict, leaving uncertainty about how the convictions will be treated in practice.

The case also exposed divisions within the judiciary. The chief judge issued a dissenting opinion stating that the defendants' actions did not constitute corruption, fueling debate about whether the case reflected governance failures rather than criminal intent. [Antara] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Anti-corruption commission widens probe into hospital upgrades after graft arrests

(ms) Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has expanded its investigation into dozens of regional general hospital projects, following new arrests linked to alleged bid-rigging and kickbacks in the upgrade of East Kolaka Regional Hospital in South Sulawesi.

The East Kolaka project—one of 32 hospital expansions under President Prabowo Subianto's national health-infrastructure programme—was launched in May to elevate the facility from class D to class C. By August, the KPK had arrested five suspects, including East Kolaka Regent Abdul Azis of the NasDem Party, a Health Ministry official overseeing regional hospital construction and employees of a private contractor. Abdul is accused of manipulating the tender process in exchange for kickbacks of roughly 8% of the project value.

On Monday, the KPK detained three additional suspects: a Health Ministry official responsible for laboratory infrastructure, an executive from a second construction-management company and an official at the Southeast Sulawesi Revenue Agency described as the regent's confidant. Investigators accuse the trio of colluding in 2024 to secure higher special allocation funds (DAK) for the hospital upgrade.

KPK deputy for enforcement Asep Guntur Rahayu said the commission is now scrutinising the remaining 31 hospital projects, citing indications that "criminal acts are not only occurring in East Kolaka."

The widening probe raises concerns about systemic corruption risks in Indonesia's accelerated push to expand public health facilities. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Largest Islamic Organization enters turmoil after November shake-up

(ms) Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has entered a deeper phase of internal crisis after chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf abruptly reshuffled the group's executive board on November 28, removing Secretary-General Saifullah Yusuf from his position and reassigning several senior figures. The shake-up comes just days after NU's supreme council, the Syuriah, issued an extraordinary call for Yahya to resign over his decision to invite a pro-Israel speaker to an internal event in August.

NU is one of the most influential religious organizations in the world, with an estimated 50 million members, authority over tens of thousands of Islamic boarding schools, and deep social, political, and economic networks across Indonesia. Its leadership decisions often ripple into national politics, shaping electoral dynamics, social policy, and the country's broader religious discourse. Internal disputes within NU therefore carry significant consequences well beyond the organization itself.

During the executive board meeting in Jakarta on November 28, Yahya reassigned Saifullah—who also serves as Indonesia's Social Affairs Minister—to an executive chairman role, citing his prolonged physical absence from NU board meetings due to government duties. "Although coordination can be done virtually, his physical absence creates many obstacles," Yahya said. Amin Said Husni, formerly a deputy chairperson, was appointed as the new secretary-general.

Other senior figures were also rotated: Gudfan Arif was moved into an executive chairman post and Sumantri was assigned as general treasurer. Yahya said the reshuffle was permitted under NU bylaws and described it as an administrative adjustment. But given the backdrop of internal rebellion, the move is widely seen as an attempt to reassert control.

The crisis escalated after the Syuriah convened on November 20, declaring that Yahya should step down

for inviting a speaker perceived as supportive of Israel. The invitation, made in August, sparked outrage within NU ranks amidst heightened global anger over the war in Gaza. The Syuriah's call for Yahya's resignation was one of the most forceful challenges to an NU chairman in recent memory.

Senior NU clerics have urged reconciliation, but the organization remains divided. Yahya has not indicated any intention to resign, and the reshuffle suggests he is consolidating power as internal pressure mounts.

With NU continuing to play a central role in Indonesia's religious and political life, the outcome of this leadership conflict will have implications far beyond the organization's headquarters, potentially influencing national politics at a sensitive moment for the country. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Ministry's first Christmas celebration marks symbolic step amid ongoing religious intolerance concerns

(ms) Indonesia's Religious Affairs Ministry will host its first-ever Christmas celebration this year, a symbolic gesture toward greater religious inclusivity in a country where minority rights remain a sensitive issue. Minister Nasaruddin Umar announced the plan on November 23, calling it a "historic first" for an institution traditionally associated with managing — rather than participating in — religious festivities.

The event, limited to the ministry's internal community, coincides with nationwide Christmas programs and follows years of recurring debates over religious intolerance. In Indonesia's Muslim-majority context, seemingly simple matters such as offering Christmas greetings or holding joint celebrations have sparked controversy, often driven by conservative groups and local-level resistance.

Human rights observers note that while Indonesia's Constitution guarantees freedom of worship, Christian, Ahmadi, and Shi'ite minorities continue to face practical barriers, including difficulties obtaining church permits, periodic harassment, and uneven enforcement of national protections. The Setara Institute and other watchdogs report that incidents of discrimination and church closures have persisted in recent years.

Against this backdrop, the ministry's decision signals institutional recognition of minority religious observance. While largely symbolic, it is seen as a

positive gesture — though rights advocates stress that improving religious freedom will require consistent policy enforcement and stronger protections at the local level. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Climate stance at COP30 signals prioritization of growth over green ambitions

(ms) Indonesia's muted role at COP30 has amplified concerns that Southeast Asia's largest economy is prioritising near-term growth and investment stability over meaningful climate action. As the summit in Belém closed on November 21, Jakarta stood apart from more than 80 countries pushing for the *Global Mutirão* framework — a collective roadmap to phase out fossil fuels — underscoring what critics call a deliberate policy choice: protecting domestic economic interests rather than accelerating decarbonization.

Indonesia's economy remains deeply tied to coal, which underpins electricity generation, industrial expansion and export revenue. With President Prabowo Subianto promising rapid growth and major infrastructure upgrades, policymakers appear wary of committing to measures that could constrain energy supply or raise production costs. Analysts note that the state's fiscal dependence on coal royalties, and the political clout of fossil-fuel industries, remain significant obstacles to an ambitious transition.

This macroeconomic calculus was reflected in Indonesia's COP30 posture. While dozens of countries sought coordinated action on fossil-fuel phase-outs, Indonesia focused largely on carbon-market promotion, announcing the sale of 2.75 million credits. NGOs criticized this approach as favoring revenue-generation tools over structural reforms and warned that heavy reliance on carbon trading allows large emitters to delay genuine decarbonization.

Indonesia's updated climate pledge — targeting only 23 percent renewable energy by 2030 — further signals that the government is opting for a gradual, investment-friendly pathway rather than costly upfront transitions. Environmental groups argue that these risks locking the country into a carbon-intensive development model just as global markets shift toward green technology and stricter emissions standards. [APSN] [Kompas] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: President Prabowo orders 1-MW solar plant for every village in major clean-energy push

(ms) Indonesia is preparing an unprecedented expansion of rural renewable energy after President Prabowo Subianto ordered the construction of a 1-megawatt solar power plant in every village, officials confirmed on November 26. Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia said technical planning is nearly complete, with financing arrangements now being finalized following a late-night briefing at the Presidential Palace.

The initiative—expected to total around 100 gigawatts of new solar capacity—aims to power Indonesia's newly established Red and White Village Cooperatives and accelerate the country's energy transition. Each solar unit will supply daytime electricity and charge battery systems for night use, creating new demand for domestic battery manufacturing and related industries.

By comparison, as of mid-2025 Indonesia's entire installed solar capacity (utility-scale and rooftop) stood at just over 1 gigawatt (1,000 megawatts). This gap underlines the scale of the planned expansion and highlights the government's ambition to leapfrog from small-scale adoption to a nationwide green rollout.

Lahadalia said the program will enhance rural energy security, expand productive economic activities, and support Indonesia's broader shift toward renewables. Construction is expected to begin soon after funding structures are approved, marking one of the world's largest village-level solar deployment plans. [Antara]

Indonesia: Finance Minister threatens freezing of customs agency if reforms fail within year

(ms) Indonesia's Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa has issued one of the sharpest institutional warnings of the Prabowo administration, announcing on November 27 that the Directorate General of Customs and Excise could be frozen or replaced if it fails to improve performance within a year. The agency — one of the country's most powerful bureaucracies, responsible for supervising imports, exports and excise duties — has long been viewed as a chokepoint in Indonesia's trade and investment system.

The warning comes at a sensitive moment for Indonesia. President Prabowo has pledged to accelerate economic growth, strengthen supply chains and attract more foreign investment, but persistent logistics delays and corruption at entry points have undermined these ambitions. Business groups frequently complain about unpredictable customs clearance times and unofficial fees, and public anger has intensified after viral claims that importers may need to pay illicit charges of up to USD 34,000 to clear a single container.

Purbaya said that this deteriorating credibility led President Prabowo to grant him a one-year mandate to "fix Customs without disruption." If the agency cannot reform, the government may outsource key functions to the Swiss inspection firm Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS). During the Soeharto era, Indonesia temporarily handed parts of its customs authority to SGS following major corruption scandals — an unusual step that Purbaya cited as precedent.

The minister stressed that the threat is real and could affect the agency's roughly 16,000 employees. His comments reflect concerns inside government that customs inefficiency is now a strategic economic liability, slowing imports of industrial components and creating friction for exporters at a time when Indonesia is trying to position itself as a regional manufacturing hub.

The Finance Ministry is preparing internal restructuring measures, including the use of artificial intelligence at ports to detect under-invoicing and accelerate inspections. Customs revenues reached USD 15.2 billion as of October, or 82.7 percent of the 2025 target, but Purbaya emphasized that solid revenue figures cannot compensate for chronic governance problems. [Indonesian National Police] [Jakarta Globe] [Tempo]

Indonesia: Jakarta formally joins BRICS' New Development Bank, commits USD 1 billion

Indonesia has formally joined the BRICS-backed New Development Bank (NDB), marking one of President Prabowo Subianto's most significant foreign-policy shifts since taking office. Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto confirmed the accession on December 1, describing it as a strategic move to deepen cooperation with major developing economies and broaden Indonesia's development financing options.

Following its entry, Jakarta has committed USD 1 billion in initial capital, paving the way for access to NDB loans for infrastructure and clean-energy projects. Officials say NDB membership strengthens Indonesia's economic diplomacy at a time when the country is diversifying partnerships amid shifting global trade dynamics.

The decision builds on Prabowo's broader outreach to the Global South and aligns with Indonesia's efforts to reduce reliance on Western-led financial institutions. Jakarta is also preparing to join the CPTPP in 2026 and aims for OECD membership by 2027, signaling an increasingly outward-looking economic strategy. [Bloomberg] [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: Trade surplus narrows as October exports fall on weaker China demand

(ms) Indonesia's trade surplus narrowed sharply in October as exports unexpectedly declined amid softening demand from China and weaker global commodity prices. According to official data released on December 1, exports fell 2.31 percent year-on-year to USD 24.24 billion, reversing September's strong performance and missing economists' expectations of modest growth. Shipments of coal and copper—two of Indonesia's key export earners—dropped more than 30 percent, with officials citing both falling prices and lingering production disruptions at Freeport Indonesia's Grasberg mine after a fatal mud-flow incident in September.

The country posted a USD 2.4 billion trade surplus, down from USD 4.34 billion in September and the smallest surplus since April, though it extended Indonesia's streak of monthly surpluses to 66. Analysts noted that exporters had accelerated deliveries earlier in the year ahead of reciprocal U.S.–Indonesia tariffs implemented in August, contributing to a sharper-than-usual correction in October.

Imports also softened, contracting 1.15 percent year-on-year to USD 21.84 billion, reflecting lower demand for consumer goods and industrial inputs. However, on a monthly basis imports rebounded, supported by stronger manufacturing activity.

Economists said China's slowing economy remains the primary drag on export performance, given its role as Indonesia's largest buyer of mining commodities. At the same time, Indonesia's growing network of trade agreements and progress toward securing zero-tariff

access in key markets are expected to help offset external headwinds in the months ahead.

Inflation eased to 2.72 percent in November, staying within Bank Indonesia's 1.5–3.5 percent target range, giving policymakers some scope to maintain a supportive stance once currency pressures stabilize. [Reuters] [The Business Times] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Air Force conducts successful test of locally produced BNT-250 bomb

Indonesia's Air Force has successfully completed live-fire tests of the domestically manufactured BNT-250 bomb, marking a step toward reducing reliance on imported U.S.-made Mk. 82 munitions. The test was conducted on November 18 at the Pandanwangi Air Weapons Range in Lumajang, East Java, using two F-16AM fighters from the 3rd Air Squadron based at Iswahjudi Air Force Base.

Each aircraft carried six BNT-250s—a 250-kilogram, NATO-standard general-purpose bomb jointly produced by private defense firm PT Sari Bahari and state-owned explosives manufacturer PT Dahana. Test pilots Lt. Col. Anwar "Weasel" Sovie and Maj. Windi "Lion" Darmawan executed eight single-release bombing runs and two additional dual-release rounds. A third F-16BM served as spotter aircraft, recording impact patterns and blast performance.

The test is part of Jakarta's broader push for defense self-sufficiency as part of its long-term modernization strategy, which accelerated under President Prabowo. Locally manufactured munitions are expected to improve supply resilience, reduce procurement costs, and support the domestic defense industry as Indonesia prepares for new aircraft acquisitions and expanded air-combat training requirements. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: USD 150 million program to modernize aging C-130 Hercules fleet

(ms) Indonesia has launched a USD 150 million program to modernize nine C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, extending the service life of the four-decade-old fleet by an estimated 15 years. The upgrade effort, carried out by state-owned aerospace firm PT Dirgantara Indonesia (PTDI), includes center wing box replacements and a full avionics overhaul from analog

to digital systems, officials announced on November 26.

Colonel Arif Djoko, head of the C-130 Modernization Task Force, said each H-model aircraft—procured between 1980 and 1982—will undergo six to seven months of work to add roughly 25,000 flight hours. The program aims to strengthen Indonesia's strategic airlift capacity for military logistics and humanitarian missions, including regional disaster response and international aid operations.

Officials said performing the upgrades domestically reduces dependence on foreign maintenance facilities while deepening Indonesia's aerospace manufacturing capabilities and enhancing long-term fleet readiness. [Antara]

Indonesia: Reinforcements deployed after residents attack security posts over land seizure

(ms) Indonesia has increased security in Tesso Nilo National Park after local residents destroyed two government security posts amid mounting tensions over land seizures linked to the Prabowo administration's crackdown on illegal oil-palm plantations.

The attacks occurred on November 22, when dozens of residents entered the park, demolished guard posts, tore down entrance signage and removed metal barriers using heavy equipment. Videos circulated widely on social media, showing crowds demanding the withdrawal of military personnel assigned to support the Forestry Ministry's enforcement task force.

Police in Riau Province said investigators are identifying suspects and reviewing online footage to determine whether the incident was coordinated. Authorities described the destruction as the most serious escalation to date in the long-running land conflict around Tesso Nilo, where overlapping claims between conservation zones and community settlements have fueled periodic confrontations.

In response, Jakarta has deployed additional soldiers and forestry police to resecure command posts and prevent further attacks. The Forestry Ministry confirmed on November 25 that reinforcements include 30 soldiers and 20 forestry police, while regional officials later said total personnel in the area now number about 350, drawn from the military, police, and park rangers.

Tesso Nilo, a key habitat for the critically endangered Sumatran elephant, has faced years of encroachment. The task force says it has seized 4,700 hectares of illegal plantations in the park since early 2025. [The Jakarta Post] [The Strait Times]

Laos: Government accelerates debt reforms with new strategy and tighter SOE oversight

Laos is intensifying efforts to stabilize its public finances through a new medium-term debt management strategy and stricter oversight of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), Deputy Finance Minister Soulivath Souvannachoumkham said on November 25. The upcoming strategy aims to guide borrowing, strengthen risk assessment, and improve long-term debt sustainability as the country works to reduce vulnerabilities accumulated over the past decade.

A series of institutional reforms has already been introduced. The establishment of the Public Debt Statistics Division in 2021 has improved the accuracy and transparency of debt reporting, while SOEs—particularly Electricité du Laos—are now subject to closer scrutiny, mandatory reporting, and a temporary suspension of new government guarantees to limit fiscal exposure.

The reforms come as Laos shows signs of macroeconomic stabilization. Inflation has eased from 31.2 percent in 2023 to 4.0 percent in October 2025, revenue collection has strengthened, and the exchange rate has stabilized following the creation of the Lao Foreign Exchange Market. Economic growth reached 4.3 percent in 2024 and is projected to rise to 4.8 percent in 2025, supported by energy exports, a tourism rebound, and gradually improving investor confidence. The government repaid USD 2.45 billion in foreign debt between 2024 and September 2025, signaling progress in reducing short-term pressures.

Despite improvements, households continue to face rising costs, with inflation edging up to 4.8 percent in November due to higher utility, health care, and education prices. A recent VAT increase from 7 to 10 percent has boosted fiscal revenue but added consumer strain.

The International Monetary Fund expects growth to reach 4.5 percent in 2026 but warns that external shocks and banking-sector weaknesses remain risks, making sustained reforms and stronger SOE governance essential.

Laos: Migrant workers send home USD 366 Million in first half of 2025, but most transfers remain informal

(ms) Laos received an estimated USD 366 million in remittances from its migrant workers during the first half of 2025, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare reported. However, only USD 32.5 million—less than 10 percent—passed through formal banking channels, reflecting the country's continued reliance on informal and often costly transfer networks.

Remittances are a major pillar of Laos's economy: in recent years they have typically accounted for between 7 and 10 percent of GDP, helping to stabilize household incomes amid inflation and currency depreciation. Most Lao migrant workers—over 350,000 between 2021 and 2025—are employed in Thailand, with growing numbers also working in Japan and South Korea.

Labor officials said on November 25 that overseas employment remains one of the few accessible pathways for Lao citizens seeking higher wages and financial security. Yet the ministry acknowledged persistent risks, including unsafe working conditions, exploitation, and trafficking.

To improve protections, the government has expanded its support network, now comprising 48 employment service enterprises, 18 provincial service centers, 41 district-level job service points, six migrant information centers, and a national assistance center for overseas workers.

Authorities said they will deepen cooperation with destination countries to promote safer and more regulated migration channels, while also encouraging greater use of formal remittance systems to strengthen transparency and financial inclusion. [The Laotian Times]

Malaysia: Sabah state elections mark setback for Prime Minister Anwar's coalition

(ea) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition posted a weak performance in Sabah's state election, winning only one of the 20 seats it contested, a significant drop from the eight it held in the previous assembly. Its coalition partner, the

Democratic Action Party (DAP), also lost ground and did not retain any of the six seats it previously held. As the first in a series of state elections ahead of Malaysia's next general election, the Sabah vote served as an early test of the federal government's standing in East Malaysia.

The November 29 election was dominated by Sabah-based parties, with Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS), a coalition of local parties loosely aligned with the federal ruling bloc, winning 29 of the 73 seats. Although it fell short of the 37 seats required for a majority, GRS and Anwar's PH secured enough support from other parties to form a coalition government. As a result, GRS chairman Hajiji Noor was sworn in for a second term as Sabah's chief minister. [Bernama]

Opposition party Warisan, a multi-ethnic opposition party that centered its campaign on the idea of "Sabah for Sabahans," also increased its representation to 25 seats. [Free Malaysia Today]

The results reflected growing frustration with the federal leadership in Sabah and rising demands for greater state autonomy. These sentiments were amplified by a recent High Court ruling affirming Sabah's entitlement to 40 percent of federal revenue derived from the state. The federal government decided not to appeal against the ruling, which strengthened calls among Sabah-based parties for a more assertive approach to state rights.

PH's position was further weakened by a corruption case involving a former aide to Anwar, which analysts say reduced support among key voter groups. Although GRS narrowly led Warian in the popular vote, concerns over money politics and shifting support among urban Chinese voters pointed to wider public dissatisfaction.

The result suggests that relations between the federal government and Sabah may become more complex as national elections draw closer. [The Diplomat] [Reuters]

Malaysia: Urban Renewable Bill put on hold pending PM's decision

(ea) Malaysia's long-awaited Urban Renewal Bill (URA) will only proceed to its second reading in the Dewan Rakyat, the lower house of Parliament, once Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim approves it, according to Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming. Nga said his ministry is ready to move forward, but the

timing depends on Anwar's decision on which government matters will be prioritized in the final sitting week of the year.

This week marks the last four sitting days of the Dewan Rakyat for 2025, leaving limited time for major legislation. Nga said the packed schedule is the main reason the second reading has not yet been fixed. He also highlighted the extensive consultation process behind the URA bill, noting that since early 2024, the ministry has held 126 engagement sessions involving over 6,500 residents, NGOs, and academics.

The bill aims to renew ageing and deteriorated housing areas to improve residents' living conditions and promote sustainable urban development. It introduces three categories of urban renewal projects: redevelopment, involving demolition and reconstruction; regeneration, focusing on repairing dilapidated or abandoned buildings; and revitalization, upgrading existing areas without demolition.

Despite these efforts, the bill continues to face cross-party resistance. Opposition MPs, along with members of the governing coalition—including Barisan Nasional and seven MPs from Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)—objected to the bill during the previous parliamentary meeting in August, resulting in its postponement.

Much of the resistance focuses on the bill's lower consent thresholds, which critics warn could force a minority of owners to give up property against their will. The draft allows redevelopment to proceed even if up to 20% of owners object, raising concerns that compulsory redevelopment without full consent may conflict with property rights protected under Article 13 of the Federal Constitution. [Free Malaysia Today 1] [Free Malaysia Today 2]

Malaysia: Parliament passes bill to bar political party members from Legal Profession Qualifying Board

(tl) The parliament has approved the Legal Profession (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2025, introducing a key safeguard that prevents anyone holding positions in a political party from serving on the Legal Profession Qualifying Board (LPQB) - a statutory body that determines the qualifications necessary for admission as an advocate and solicitor in Malaysia

Deputy Minister for Law and Institutional Reform M. Kulasegaran said the new rule is intended to eliminate

concerns over political influence or interference in the LPQB's decisions. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: UN experts warn of systemic labor abuses against Bangladeshi migrant workers

(ea) UN human rights experts have raised concerns about what they describe as "widespread and systematic" exploitation of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. With more than 800,000 Bangladeshis holding Malaysian work permits, many reportedly face abuses such as inflated recruitment fees, deceptive job offers, passport confiscation, and discrepancies between promised and actual employment conditions.

According to the UN, thousands of Bangladeshi workers are stranded in Bangladesh or exploited in Malaysia after paying recruitment fees up to five times higher than the official rate. Those without valid documentation remain particularly at risk of arrest, detention, ill-treatment, and deportation under Malaysia's strict immigration laws, which criminalize irregular entry. Malaysian authorities carry out regular immigration raids, and an estimated 18,000 migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are currently detained.

The findings come amid growing international scrutiny: the US has previously imposed import restrictions on Malaysian factories over forced labor concerns, and the European Union's forthcoming Forced Labour Regulation may further affect Malaysian exports linked to debt bondage and other coercive practices. The UN experts urged Malaysia and Bangladesh to promptly investigate reported abuses and provide effective remedies for affected workers. [Human Rights Watch]

Malaysia: Maharani Freeport launched to boost maritime logistics, jobs and investment

(tl) Malaysia officially launched the Maharani Freeport, a major development aimed at strengthening the country's role in global maritime trade and enhancing supply chain resilience. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the freeport is expected to generate at least 45,000 jobs, attract related industries, and expand small and medium enterprises (SMEs) participation in international trade.

Located along the Straits of Melaka, one of the world's busiest shipping routes, the hub is envisioned as a strategic gateway connecting East and West. Anwar noted that around 100,000 vessels pass through the strait annually, carrying nearly a quarter of global seaborne oil trade, positioning the new port to attract investors seeking efficient access to the growing Asia market.

The government has approved tax incentives to encourage large-scale investments in energy hub activities, deep-sea port operations and trade services, alongside tailored benefits for sectors such as data centres, green technology, medical tourism and hospitality. The development also incorporates sustainability features, including renewable energy and digital systems designed to reduce emissions and enhance operational efficiency.

The freeport status was officially gazetted on 28 November and is now open for business, with the government presenting the project as a signal of Malaysia's readiness to welcome global investors. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Digital security strengthened with MyDigital ID integration

(tl) Starting from 1 December, all Malaysian telecom providers will integrate MyDigital ID into their mobile apps to enhance identity verification and combat scams, identity fraud, and SIM card misuse. The initiative, coordinated by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and supported by the National Cyber Security Agency (NACSA), ensures every mobile number is linked to an officially verified identity.

The system covers verification of existing prepaid numbers, registration of new SIM cards, and logging into telecom apps through MyDigital ID. Regarding public's concern about privacy, officials emphasized that the platform does not store personal data or track online activity, operating only with user consent to verify identities.

This move is part of Malaysia's broader Cyber Security Strategy Plan 2025-2030 and aims to increase digital trust, security, reduce financial and identity-related crimes, and ensure safer access to online services. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Government rejects World Bank's proposal to raise RON95 petrol price

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told to the House House of Representatives that Malaysia will maintain its targeted RON95 petrol subsidy under Budi95 program, rejecting World Bank's proposal to increase the fuel price to the market price.He said that the existing approach has reduced government spending, while shielding the public from higher costs. Under the current scheme, Malaysians pay MYR 1.99 per liter, while foreigners pay MYR 2.60.

Anwar, who also serves as Finance Minister, argued that targeted subsidies help prevent leakages to businesses and non-citizens, similar to earlier reforms involving subsidies for chicken, eggs, electricity and diesel. He said the overall subsidy-targeting agenda is expected to generate savings of about MYR 15.5 billion (USD 3.25 billion) annually.

In presenting Budget 2026, Anwar also emphasised that the government is not introducing new taxes, instead relying on better governance, tighter subsidy targeting and stronger tax compliance. He urged state governments to adopt similar caution to avoid placing new financial burdens on the public. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Police crack down on online scam syndicates

(ea) Malaysian police have shut down eight online scam call centers in Kuala Lumpur and arrested 57 people in a series of raids carried out between November 10 and 14, most of whom were foreign nationals.

The groups were allegedly involved in fake job offers and cryptocurrency scam schemes that targeted victims in Malaysia and abroad. The case highlights ongoing concerns over transnational cybercrime networks operating in the country. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Authorities seize drugs hidden in livestock on the Thailand border

(tl) The General Operations Force (GOF) has reported that drug syndicates operating along the Malaysia-Thailand border that use livestock as concealment for narcotics have been seized. The method, involving

drugs hidden in the rectums of cows and pigs, is reportedly common along Kelantan's border routes, where smugglers exploit informal crossings and enforcement's reluctance to inspect animals, particularly pigs.

GOF southeast brigade commander Ahmad Radzi Hussain said the drugs typically originate in the Golden Triangle before being transported into Thailand and then moved into Malaysia using livestock or river routes. Since January, the GOF has caught an estimated MYR 8.3 million (USD 1.77 million) worth of drugs, with 281 cases recorded and 236 arrests. Crystal meth accounted for the majority of seizures (200 kg), followed by cannabis (108.6 kg) and 19,500 methamphetamine pills.

Despite increased enforcement and the closure of illegal jetties and land routes, trafficking persists as smugglers shift tactics. Border districts such as Pasir Mas, Tumpat, Jeli and Tanah Merah remain hotspots for cross-border narcotics activity. [Malay Mail]

Myanmar: Regime grants amnesty to prisoners ahead of elections

(su) The National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) announced on November 26 to grant amnesty to 2,361 prisoners convicted under Section 505-A of the Penal Code. The provision has been widely used by the junta since the 2021 coup to prosecute political dissent, including criticism of the military, alleged "false news," and statements deemed to cause public alarm. The amnesty involves the commutation and pardon of remaining prison terms.

State media framed the move as part of the NDSC's stated goal of advancing a "multiparty democracy system" and ensuring that eligible voters do not lose their right to participate in the upcoming phased general election.

Rights organizations, however, argue that the mass amnesty does not alter the broader environment of repression, with over 22,000 political detainees still imprisoned and many released prisoners remaining vulnerable to re-arrest under conditional provisions.

The announcement comes as the regime continues preparations for its first phase of voting on December 28, amid widespread domestic and international criticism that the planned elections lack credibility due to conflict, repression, and the detention of political opponents. Rights monitors and a UN expert have

described the vote as a mechanism for rebranding military rule rather than restoring democratic governance, noting that the junta continues to pursue offensives against resistance groups even as it promotes the election.

The UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) has warned that detentions of election critics and intensified military operations in the run-up to the polls may amount to serious international crimes, including crimes against humanity. [Eleven Media Group] [Mizzima] [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Shan State students forced into advance voting

(anl) The Shan Human Rights Foundation reported that regime officials in Pindaya, Namzarng, Kunhing, Lawksawk, and Mong Hsat townships forced over 250 university students to cast advance votes for the general election.

In Kunhing, authorities are said to have gone door-to-door in early November to list students and ordered them to vote on November 17-18, resulting in 36 advance ballots. In Namzarng, 79 students voted between November 17-20, with officials withholding university recommendation letters until voting.

Similarly, 94 students in Pindaya were reportedly compelled to vote on November 17, while 47 students in Mong Hsat were forced to cast ballots on November 18-19 to receive needed documents. In Lawksawk, officials collected student data and warned that recommendation letters would only be issued after voting.

Most of those pressured are first-year students preparing to enter university this December. To enroll, they must obtain a "good conduct" recommendation letter from their quarter or village administrator. Students in fields such as education and medicine also require a police-issued criminal clearance certificate, while students in other academic years need recommendation letters to rent dormitories or housing. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta removes Deputy Energy Minister amid corruption scrutiny

(anl) On November 26, state-controlled newspapers reported that the military regime has dismissed Deputy Minister for Energy U Thant Sin, without providing any official explanation. His removal comes after earlier reports that he and several senior officials and businessmen were questioned over alleged dollar speculation and corruption linked to the country's vital fuel import sector.

U Thant Sin was appointed Deputy Minister in October 2023 and also chaired the Supervisory Committee for the Import, Storage and Distribution of Fuel Oil. His appointment followed the dissolution of the committee's previous version after former Deputy Minister for Commerce U Nyunt Aung and former Brigadier General Yan Naung Soe were arrested and prosecuted on corruption charges.

Separately, local media reported on November 25—though without official confirmation—that Air Force Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Zaw Win Myint had been removed and replaced by Major General Tun Win, head of the Western Air Force Command. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Reports of forced recruitment and abductions for military conscription in Yangon

(su) Local networks in Yangon have reported a rise in abductions and forced recruitment of young people by brokers allegedly working with military-linked actors. According to the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN), individuals seeking employment were detained during the second and third weeks of November after being approached by company employees and job brokers offering false work opportunities. The group said three youths from Kone Ta La Paung village in Mingalardon Township were handed over to the military in exchange for payment and transferred to a training camp in Taungoo.

Residents cited similar incidents in Dagon Myothit, Thaketa, North Okkalapa and Hlaing Tharyar townships, including the September abduction of a man reportedly lured by a taxi driver and cases in early November involving young men approached by individuals posing as accommodation brokers. In another incident on November 10, two employees of a private eye clinic were detained near People's Square by plainclothes officers and later sent to military units after their families were unable to pay the sums demanded.

According to local accounts, brokers, taxi drivers and individuals affiliated with militias such as the Pyu Saw Htee are allegedly selling conscripts to the military for between 150,000 and 300,000 kyat. RSN said at least 30 people have been detained across Yangon this month and warned residents to take precautions.

The reports coincide with the junta's announcement of Military Service Training Course No. 19 on November 17 and increased checks across multiple townships, including Insein, Twante, Thingangyun, Bahan and Ahlone. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: UN warns of rising digital gender-based violence targeting women and LGBTIQ+ individuals

(su) The UN is drawing attention to the escalating risks faced by women and marginalized groups in Myanmar's increasingly volatile online environment. In a statement last week, the United Nations in Myanmar highlighted an increased risk of digital gender-based violence against women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals, marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The statement said online platforms have become major channels for abuse, including non-consensual image sharing, disinformation and AI-generated deepfakes intended to intimidate or silence targeted individuals. [UN Women]

According to the UN, these forms of online harm translate into real-world consequences such as coercion, physical violence, economic loss, and social exclusion. It noted that ongoing humanitarian and political crises in Myanmar heighten exposure to digital abuse at a time when protection systems remain limited. Nearly 10.4 million women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals are estimated to be in humanitarian need, while widespread connectivity gaps, data insecurity and internet shutdowns restrict access to support services and credible information.

The UN also acknowledged the role of women-led and community organizations, which continue to support survivors and advocate for safer digital spaces despite reduced funding and operational constraints. It called for strengthened legal protections, safer online platforms, and a collective commitment to address all forms of digital violence. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: TNLA withdraws from Mogoke as China-brokered handover paves way for junta's return

(su) The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has withdrawn nearly all of its administrative departments and forces from Mogoke in Mandalay Region, clearing the way for the military to retake control of the ruby-mining hub under a China-brokered ceasefire arrangement.

Local sources told independent outlets that the TNLA relocated its health, education, judicial, forestry, fire services, and municipal departments to Namhsan on November 26, leaving only small administrative and police units in Mogoke to maintain order during the transition. Gem-mining enterprises licensed by the TNLA, as well as companies linked to the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), have halted operations and moved machinery to Monglon in northern Shan State.

Nearly 100 military vehicles reportedly entered Mogoke on Friday, November 28, marking the formal implementation of the ceasefire deal reached on October 29. A Mogoke resident told DVB that the TNLA will retain only a liaison office in the town and continue operating some mining sites in the wider township, as ruby revenues remain valuable for both the military and ethnic armed groups.

PDF units that assisted the TNLA in seizing Mogoke in July 2024 during the second phase of Operation 1027 have withdrawn to positions outside the town. Resistance sources also report that the military has massed troops along the Nawnghkio–Mogoke road and plans to reenter neighbouring Mongmit imminently, also under the ceasefire terms.

As part of the same China-mediated agreement, TNLA forces are preparing to hand over Momeik Township in northern Shan State. Analysts note that Beijing has exerted "significant" pressure on the Brotherhood Alliance—the TNLA, MNDAA, and Arakan Army (AA)—to halt fighting along the China border, with possible implications for weapons flows to other resistance groups.

Meanwhile, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has advanced towards Mongmit, prompting the TNLA to reinforce surrounding security positions amid heightened competition among resistance forces for control of previously captured areas.

Most residents of Mogoke and Mongmit have fled toward Mandalay and towns in northern Shan State in anticipation of the military's return. Although the TNLA acknowledged its intention to withdraw in a statement on October 29, it has not publicly commented on the timing or scope of the handover.

Myanmar's Union Election Commission has announced that elections beginning on December 28 will not be held in Mogoke, Singu, or Natogyi townships due to ongoing instability, despite the regime's reoccupation of key areas in Mandalay Region. [Democratic Voice of Burma] [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Over 2,000 foreign nationals detained as demolition of illegal structures expands in KK Park and Shwe Kokko

(su/anl) Myanmar authorities report that 2,042 foreign nationals have been detained amid ongoing clearance operations targeting online fraud and gambling networks in the KK Park and Shwe Kokko areas of Myawady Township, according to state media on November 30.

The regime has continued demolitions in the KK Park zone, where 270 of 635 illegal buildings have been removed to date. In Section (3) alone, 122 out of 425 structures have been demolished following the latest round of seven buildings on November 29.

Parallel inspections have been underway in Shwe Kokko since November 18. Authorities reported that 26 more buildings—including residential units, warehouses, shops, hotels, and entertainment venues—were inspected on November 29, with equipment seized, but no individuals found engaged in online fraud. From November 18 to 29, 135 illegal buildings were identified, and 101 structures have been sealed to prevent reuse, including three- to thirteen-storey buildings.

Security teams have seized 3,310 computers, 21,870 mobile phones, 102 Starlink kits, and other equipment reportedly used for online gambling operations. Detainees are being held in Long Htin Wun, Shwe Kokko Myaing Village, where officials are processing personal data for repatriation.

According to official figures, 12,915 foreign nationals who entered Myanmar illegally were detained between January 30 and November 29, 2025. Of these, 10,029

have been deported through Thailand, while 2,886 remain in custody awaiting transfer. [Eleven Myanmar]

Meanwhile, thousands of Chinese nationals linked to online scam syndicates in Myawaddy have fled to cities like Yangon and Mandalay with the help of ethnic Karen armed groups.

Sources close to the Karen State Border Guard Force (BGF), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), and Karen National Liberation Army–Peace Council (KNLA-PC) reported that the groups are escorting scam workers out of Myawaddy, charging up to USD 11,900 per person.

Locals estimate more than 50,000 workers, many of them Chinese, were employed at scam compounds in KK Park and Shwe Kokko. Yet Thai and Myanmar officials indicate only around 10 percent have been detained or transferred to Thailand. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta intensifies artillery fire around Sittwe to deter Arakan Army advance

(su) Residents in Sittwe, Rakhine State, report that the military has been firing artillery and small arms continuously since November 22 in an effort to prevent Arakan Army (AA) units from advancing toward the state capital. Local sources told Mizzima that around 500 junta soldiers arrived in Sittwe on vessels from Yangon on November 22, after which the military began day-and-night firing aimed at blocking AA positions in southern Ponnagyun Township.

According to residents, the firing occurred even in the absence of direct clashes and was accompanied by tightened security measures inside Sittwe. Entry and exit points have been closed, and combined forces of police and soldiers have carried out searches in neighborhoods, monasteries, and displacement camps. At least ten people suspected of AA links have reportedly been detained this month.

Fishing activities near the maritime boundary have also been restricted, with fishermen and net-laying crews reportedly arrested. Locals believe the increased pressure follows recent junta losses in fighting near Min Pyin village in Kyaukphyu Township, and some residents say administrators have begun urging people to cast early ballots ahead of the planned election. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta launches new offensive into Mandalay's Singu Township

(su) Myanmar's military has expanded operations in Mandalay Region, pushing north into Singu Township after regaining most areas of neighboring Madaya from resistance forces. Troops moved into Singu on November 26, two days after taking control of villages along the Madaya–Singu section of National Highway 31. According to local sources, four military columns advanced from Madaya while additional units pushed south from Thabeikkyin, forming a two-pronged offensive.

The escalation follows the Ta'ang National Liberation Army's agreement to return Mogoke, on the Mandalay–Shan State border, to junta control, reportedly freeing up regional troops for redeployment. The military has reinforced positions in northern Madaya and along Highway 31, while People's Defense Forces in Singu and Thabeikkyin are said to be preparing countermeasures.

Resistance forces had captured more than 40 junta bases in eastern Madaya and Patheingyi and took full control of Singu earlier this year but were pushed back in late August under heavy military pressure. Recent junta gains include the Sedawgyi Dam and Ingyin Myaing bases, both important for operations in northern Mandalay. Fighting has displaced over 100,000 civilians, according to local relief groups.

The regime is reportedly using nearly 900 personnel, including conscripts, supported by artillery, airstrikes, and drones. Concurrent military activity has also intensified west of the Irrawaddy River to block reinforcements from Sagaing, with air and ground attacks reported in Shwebo, Wetlet, Khin-U, and Ye-U. Analysts say two regional commands appear to be coordinating the Mandalay operations, complicating resistance movement in the area. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: Corruption scandal escalates as former Representative implicates the family of President, triggering massive rallies across the nation

(ghd) In a series of video releases that have shaken the political landscape, former Representative Zaldy Co leveled explosive allegations against several high-ranking officials. Co also accused First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos and her brother of involvement in a supposed rice and onion cartel and of facilitating

agricultural smuggling. He also targeted presidential son and current Ilocos Norte Representative Sandro Marcos, accusing him of spreading disinformation. Additionally, Co claimed that Senator Francis Escudero sought a USD 2.56 billion insertion in the 2025 national budget. [Inquirer1] [Inquirer2] [Inquirer3] [Manila Bulletin1]

The Marcos family has vehemently denied Co's claims. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. stated that Co's legal counsel attempted to blackmail the First Family, threatening to release damaging videos if the government proceeded with canceling Co's passport. First Lady Liza Marcos dismissed the cartel allegations as mere "political theatrics." The Office of the President has also pointed out inconsistencies in Co's videos, suggesting that the former lawmaker is adjusting his narrative based on public reaction rather than facts. [Inquirer4] [Inquirer5] [Manila Bulletin2] [Straits Times]

Investigative bodies have likewise accelerated their related probes. The Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) submitted its report to the Office of the Ombudsman, recommending charges against eight former and incumbent lawmakers for their alleged roles in anomalous infrastructure projects. Notably, the ICI clarified that it found "no finding of guilt" against former House Speaker Martin Romualdez, who is Marcos' cousin, in this referral. [Inquirer6] [Inquirer7] [Inquirer8]

Acting on these recommendations, the Ombudsman filed cases against seven lawmakers implicated in the flood-control scandal and requested the Bureau of Immigration to issue travel restrictions on 77 individuals, including legislators and private contractors. At the Sandiganbayan, eight accused individuals pleaded "not guilty" to graft charges involving a separate USD 4.93 million flood control project. [Inquirer9] [Manila Bulletin3] [Manila Bulletin4]

Legislative scrutiny has intensified in parallel with the criminal investigations. Senator Panfilo Lacson revealed the presence of "duplicate projects" within the Department of Public Works and Highway's (DPWH) 2025 budget—items he said were designed to confuse auditors and enable corruption. Senator Escudero confronted DPWH officials over the revelations, while senators flagged approximately USD 8.52 billion in "allocable and non-allocable" lump-sum items in the proposed 2026 National Expenditure Program, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. [Inquirer10] [Inquirer11] [Manila Bulletin5]

Investigators have made substantial financial recoveries. The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC)

froze roughly USD 204 million in assets linked to the scandal, including USD 68.1 million worth of air assets such as private planes and helicopters. In a major breakthrough, former DPWH Engineer Henry Alcantara surrendered USD 1.87 million in cash to the Department of Justice, admitting it was part of kickbacks he had received. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Internal Revenue filed tax-evasion charges against two contractors behind alleged "ghost projects" in Bulacan and began probing the tax implications of a USD 511 thousand campaign donation involving Senator Escudero. Separately, the Commission on Audit flagged USD 5 million in Bulacan flood-control works as "ghost" or "relocated" projects. [Inquirer12] [Inquirer13] [Inquirer14] [Inquirer15] [Inquirer16] [Inquirer17] [Inquirer18] [Inquirer19]

Nationwide protests—branded the "Trillion Peso March" or "Baha sa Luneta 2.0" (Flood in Luneta 2.0) — unfolded on November 30, calling for the resignation of President Marcos and Vice President Sara Duterte, whom protesters labeled the "King and Queen of Corruption." Demonstrators demanded accountability and the return of allegedly stolen public funds. The Philippine National Police deployed 15,000 personnel and suspended permits to carry firearms to maintain order.

The main rally at Rizal Park drew around 3,000 attendees, with simultaneous protests held across the country, including in Baguio, Angeles, Malolos, Iloilo, Bacolod, Tacloban, Davao, Pagadian, Iligan, and Malaybalay. While turnout varied—with Iloilo seeing fewer attendees than expected and Bacolod drawing thousands—events remained largely peaceful. Public officials, including the Mayor of Malaybalay and Catholic bishops in Iligan and Malolos, joined citizens in urging government accountability. [Bloomberg] [Inquirer20] [Inquirer21] [Inquirer22] [Inquirer23] [Inquirer24] [Inquirer25] [Inquirer26] [Inquirer27] [Inquirer28] [Inquirer29] [Inquirer30] [Inquirer31] [Inquirer32] [Manila Bulletin6]

Philippines: ICC Appeals Chamber denies former President's bid for interim release

(ghd) Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte will remain in ICC custody after the ICC Appeals Chamber unanimously rejected his request for interim release.

The decision, handed down on November 28, upheld an earlier ruling by Pre-Trial Chamber I denying Duterte's bid for conditional freedom while proceedings related to the "war on drugs" continue.

According to the ICC, Duterte's legal team failed to demonstrate any error in the earlier finding that he remains a flight risk and that his release could endanger witnesses or jeopardize the investigation. The Appeals Chamber stressed that the conditions for detention under the Rome Statute continue to be met.

Duterte waived his right to be physically present for the announcement of the judgment, electing to stay in his detention cell while his lawyers appeared in open court. As a result of the ruling, he will continue to be held at the ICC Detention Centre in The Hague while the case proceeds. [ABC] [Al-Jazeera] [Inquirer1] [Inquirer2] [Manila Bulletin1]

While Duterte remains detained in the Netherlands, the legal battle regarding his transfer continues in Manila. The Supreme Court (SC) of the Philippines has ordered all involved parties to submit memoranda clarifying the legal grounds of Duterte's arrest and his subsequent turnover to the ICC. The High Court is reviewing whether the procedures followed by domestic law enforcement in executing the international warrant adhered to the Philippine Constitution and local statutes. This directive indicates that despite the former president's physical transfer to The Hague, questions regarding the legality of the government's cooperation with the tribunal remain under judicial review. [Manila Bulletin2]

Philippines: Asset forfeiture of late Muntinlupa mayor upheld by anti-graft court

(ghd) In its ruling dated November 24, the Sandiganbayan, the anti-graft court, upheld the forfeiture of millions of pesos in assets belonging to the late Maximino Argana, the former mayor of Muntinlupa, and his heirs. This latest resolution affirms the court's August 18 decision finding that the properties were "unlawfully acquired" during Argana's terms in office. The Sandiganbayan declared that the assets, valued at approximately USD 99 thousand, were manifestly out of proportion to Argana's legitimate income. Consequently, the state is set to seize these properties, which include 251 parcels of land and various shares of stock, marking the conclusion of a legal pursuit that has spanned nearly four decades.

The judgment hinged on a financial analysis comparing Argana's accumulated wealth against his lawful earnings. Records showed that during his tenure as mayor—first from 1964 to 1967 and again from 1972

until his death in 1985—his total lawful income amounted to only about USD 12 thousand. The disparity between this income and the acquired assets created a legal presumption of ill-gotten wealth.

Throughout the proceedings, the heirs of Argana attempted to rebut the presumption of unlawful acquisition by claiming the late mayor had substantial income from other sources. However, the Sandiganbayan found these claims unsubstantiated as the heirs failed to present essential documentary evidence to prove that these sources generated the funds used to purchase the disputed assets.

This case is one of the longest-running battles initiated by the government to recover ill-gotten wealth following the ouster for former President Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. The original petition, filed on July 1987, faced numerous delays, including a controversial compromise agreement in 1998 that would have allowed the heirs to keep a significant portion of the assets. That agreement was rescinded in 2000 after the government successfully argued it was grossly disadvantageous to the state. The November 24 ruling serves as the final chapter in this saga, enforcing the state's right to recover wealth that public officials cannot legitimately explain. [Rappler]

Philippines: Senate concludes plenary debates on 2026 budget, sets stage for amendments

(ghd) The Senate has concluded its plenary deliberations on the proposed 2026 national budget after a final session that lasted nearly six hours on November 28.

The two-week debate period wrapped up with discussions on the budgets for the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of National Defense (DND). Key outcomes include the restoration of the Office of the Vice President's (OVP) budget to its original amount of approximately USD 15.3 million, and significant cuts to unprogrammed funds and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) budget. The restoration of the OVP budget counters the decision by the House of Representatives, which had previously reduced the allocation to USD 12.6 million following heated disagreements and Duterte's refusal to attend budget hearings.

The Senate is now set to move into the period of amendments starting December 1, aiming to pass a

final version that is lower than that proposed by the executive branch. [Inquirer] [Inquirer2]

Philippines: Anti-graft court issues arrest warrant for Pampanga mayor

(ghd) The Sandiganbayan, the anti-graft court, has issued two arrest warrants for suspended Pampanga Mayor Abundio Punsalan Jr., stemming from charges of graft and malversation of public funds related to an allegedly unlawful land purchase in 2023. The warrants, which were dated November 17, specify a bail amount of approximately USD 1,533 for the graft charge, while the malversation case allows for no bail.

The cases center on the unauthorized acquisition of a private lot valued at approximately USD 766 thousand, which Punsalan reportedly executed without the necessary approval from the municipal board. This transaction led to Punsalan's six-month suspension by the Office of the Ombudsman in October 2025 for grave misconduct. Additionally, Punsalan faces separate legal troubles following an entrapment operation by the National Bureau of Investigation in August, where he allegedly extorted USD 511 thousand as an advance payment from a businessman. Authorities have also issued a hold departure order against Punsalan. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Cebu City officials, contractors charged with non-bailable malversation

(ghd) The Office of the Ombudsman has filed non-bailable charges of malversation of public funds against 11 individuals—including eight Cebu City government officials—before the Sandiganbayan, the anti-graft court. The case involves the alleged misappropriation of approximately USD 4.08 million paid to a private contractor for garbage collection and disposal in 2021. The accused are also facing charges of graft under the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, with a recommended bail of USD 1,533. In July 2025, the Ombudsman ordered the dismissal of the involved officials and the forfeiture of their benefits.

The charges stem from a complaint filed by then-Vice Mayor Michael Rama, which prompted an investigation. The probe revealed that the contractor was allowed to bill the city USD 30.66 per ton of garbage, significantly higher than the USD 10.22 per

ton rate actually charged by the dumpsite owner. Furthermore, the contractor allegedly falsified documents to make it appear that they handled deliveries made by government trucks and continued billing the city even after being banned from the dumpsite for non-payment. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Nuclear energy implementing rules set for early 2026 release

(ghd) The Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for the newly created independent nuclear regulator, the Philippine Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (PhilATOM), are expected to be released in early 2026, with officials targeting around March for publication. Philippine Nuclear Research Institute (PNRI) Director Carlo Arcilla said the drafting is already underway, following the enactment of Republic Act (RA) 12305, the law which established PhilATOM, last September.

Under RA 12305, PhilATOM is established as a quasi-judicial body with sole and exclusive jurisdiction over all nuclear and radiation regulation in the Philippines. It will take over responsibilities previously held by the PNRI and other agencies, consolidating oversight under a single regulatory authority. Licensing, safety standards, registrations, monitoring, enforcement, and enforcement authorities will fall under PhilATOM's remit.

The IRR will set out detailed rules for licensing, regulation, and enforcement procedures. According to government statements, the new regulatory framework aims to enhance nuclear safety and align Philippine regulation with international standards. Meanwhile, the generation of electricity from nuclear power will remain subject to energy-sector regulation by the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC), under existing power-sector laws.

The creation of PhilATOM is widely viewed as a key step in preparing the Philippines for potential future nuclear power development by establishing a modern, independent regulatory system capable of ensuring safety, security, and compliance with global nuclear safeguards standards. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Slow public spending and infrastructure probe limit public deficit

(ghd) The Philippine government's budget deficit for the first ten months of 2025 has been held at approximately USD 18.9 billion, staying well within the full-year target of approximately USD 26.6 billion. The Bureau of the Treasury attributed this to sluggish government spending, particularly in infrastructure, which has been hampered by ongoing investigations into public works projects. While this restrained spending helped contain the fiscal gap, economists expressed concern that it could slow down the country's broader economic recovery.

In October alone, the government recorded a budget surplus of approximately USD 190.9 million, a 76 percent increase from the surplus recorded in the same month the previous year. Total revenues for the ten-month period reached USD 64.9 billion, driven by a 9.55 percent increase in collections from the Bureau of Internal Revenue. However, government expenditures grew by only 3.9 percent to USD 83.7 billion, with primary spending slowed by reviews of flood control projects and infrastructure implementations. Meanwhile, debt interest payments surged by over 13 percent to USD 12.3 billion, reflecting higher debt servicing costs. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: President Marcos, Central Bank optimistic on 2026 economic rebound

(ghd) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) (Central Bank of the Philippines) Governor Eli Remolona Jr. met on November 26 to review the country’s economic outlook, with both expressing cautious optimism about the recovery trajectory in light of recent macroeconomic developments. According to the BSP, headline inflation averaged 1.7 percent from January to October — well within the central bank’s 2–4 percent target range — while inflation among the bottom 30 percent of households reportedly turned negative (–0.4 percent), reflecting easing price pressure on low-income families.

In this more benign inflation environment, the Monetary Board agreed in October to cut the policy rate to 4.75 percent, part of a broader easing cycle intended to support demand and stimulate growth amid a sluggish investment climate. The BSP’s latest projections envisage inflation of 3.1 percent in 2026 and 2.8 percent in 2027, suggesting price stability may allow for sustained policy support.

While economic growth in 2025 is expected to underperform earlier targets, weighed down by weakness in infrastructure and public-spending disbursements, the BSP and government remain hopeful of a rebound in 2026 and beyond. The meeting underscored a commitment to balancing inflation control, investment support, and measures to revive demand, with the aim of promoting stable, broad-based growth. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government revenue boosted by mining payments

(ghd) The Philippine government's privatization revenues exceeded approximately USD 102.2 million in the first ten months of 2025, driven largely by recurring payments from the sale of assets belonging to Nonoc Mining and Industrial Corp. According to Department of Finance (DOF) Assistant Secretary Michael Peter A. Alejandro, payments related to Nonoc Mining surged by 152.4 percent year-on-year, reaching USD 12.6 million as of October. A significant portion of this, USD 9.9 million, was remitted in October alone. These inflows enabled the government to surpass its revised USD 85.2 million privatization target for 2025.

However, discrepancies remain between agencies. While the Privatization and Management Office (PMO) reports collections exceeding USD 102.2 million, the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) recorded only approximately USD 34.1 million in privatization income over the same period. This gap likely results from differences in accounting classifications.

Looking ahead, the DOF aims to raise USD 3.3 billion in 2026 by privatizing major government-owned assets, signaling a more aggressive push to unlock value from underutilized public resources. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Despite US tariffs, Philippine trade deficit narrows by 34 percent

(ghd) The Philippines' trade deficit narrowed by 34.2 percent year-on-year to USD 3.83 billion in October, as exports surged and imports continued to contract, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Exports grew 19.4 percent to USD 7.39 billion, the highest October value on record since 1991. Electronic products remained the country's top export, accounting for over 56 percent of total shipments.

Cumulative exports for January to October also hit a record USD 70.43 billion, based on PSA data. Imports, meanwhile, fell 6.5 percent to USD 11.22 billion in October. China remained the Philippines' largest import source, supplying USD 3.41 billion worth of goods that month.

Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan noted that part of the surge in exports may reflect "front-loading" by businesses anticipating tighter US trade restrictions, though officials expect growth to temper in the months ahead. The US remained the Philippines' top export destination in October, absorbing USD 1.16 billion (15.7 percent) of outbound shipments, followed by Japan and Hong Kong.

Despite the narrower monthly gap, analysts note that the high level of imports earlier in the year means net exports could still weigh on full-year GDP performance, even with October's strong results. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Government reduces foreign debt reliance, shifts to local market to mitigate forex risks

(ghd) The Philippine government has further reduced its reliance on foreign borrowing in 2025 as it continues shifting toward domestic financing to limit exposure to foreign exchange volatility. Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) data show that total gross borrowings for the first ten months of the year reached USD 42.25 billion, with a noticeable decline in the share of external financing. Foreign borrowing fell by 20.6 percent, while domestic borrowing expanded by 9.1 percent, allowing domestic sources to account for nearly 82 percent of the overall financing mix—slightly above the government's 80:20 target.

National Treasurer Sharon P. Almanza cautioned, however, that the recent depreciation of the peso could still increase the peso value of existing dollar-denominated obligations. This may push the national government's outstanding debt close to, or even above, the 2025 year-end target of USD 295.6 billion despite the reduced pace of foreign borrowing.

To meet its funding requirements locally, the government raised approximately USD 19.1 billion through fixed-rate Treasury bonds and an additional USD 7.25 billion via retail treasury bonds issued in August. Officials say this strategy not only reduces foreign-exchange risk but also helps deepen domestic capital markets, ensuring more stable and predictable

financing conditions for the government. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Retired generals reject calls for withdrawal of military support amidst destabilization rumors

(ghd) The Association of Generals and Flag Officers (AGFO), a group comprised of retired military and police generals, has rejected calls for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to withdraw support from the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The government is currently facing a massive corruption scandal.

In a statement released on November 30, the group condemned attempts by some retired officers to incite active personnel into "military adventurism" or a coup d'état, labeling such actions as glaring violations of the Constitution. The AGFO emphasized that the military must remain insulated from partisan politics and loyal to the Constitution rather than political interests. The AFP leadership welcomed the statement, affirming their commitment to the chain of command and civilian authority. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Army, police and coast guard conclude joint drills

(ghd) On November 26, 2025, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) successfully concluded their first-ever interagency tabletop exercise, dubbed "Pagsasanay Sanlakas" (National Forces Training).

According to AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr., this three-day event marked a shift in the operational strategy of the three forces. Unlike previous joint activities where one agency typically took the lead while others played supporting roles, this exercise placed the military, police, and coast guard on a "co-equal footing." This unified approach was deemed essential to address the country's complex and overlapping security challenges, particularly those involving internal security, maritime defense, and multi-domain threats within the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The exercise used tabletop scenarios to rigorously test the alignment of the agencies' respective doctrines, communication systems, and intelligence-sharing

mechanisms. Participants focused on applying legal frameworks, rules of engagement, and use-of-force policies to identify long-standing gaps in coordination. The insights gained from this assessment will guide future operations.

Looking ahead, the "Pagsasanay Sanlakas" program is designed to evolve from these initial tabletop discussions into command post exercises and, eventually, full field training exercises involving regional units. The officials announced that the PCG will host the next iteration of the drills, which aims to include additional government agencies to further foster a whole-of-nation approach to security. [Inquirer]

Philippines: Suspected rebel killed, firearms seized in clash

(ghd) A suspected member of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, was killed and five high-powered firearms were seized during an encounter between the Philippine Army and communist rebels in Northern Samar on November 29.

The clash occurred early in the morning when soldiers from the 8th Infantry Division engaged members of the Sub-Regional Committee Arctic of the Eastern Visayas Regional Party Committee. The rebels were reportedly extorting from locals and harassing communities recovering from recent typhoons.

Government troops encountered strong resistance from the rebels, who had positioned themselves in a hideout rigged with anti-personnel mines, which are banned under international humanitarian law. While one rebel was killed, several others escaped, prompting pursuit operations. [Inquirer]

Singapore: Court allows USD 2.7 Billion suit against Standard Chartered bank over involvement into 1MDB fraud to proceed

Singapore’s High Court has dismissed Standard Chartered Bank’s attempt to strike out a USD 2.7 billion lawsuit over its alleged role in the 1MDB fraud, clearing the way for the case to move forward, liquidators for the Malaysian fund said on November 25.

The suit, filed in June by liquidators seeking to recover stolen 1MDB assets, alleges that Standard Chartered enabled more than USD 2.7 billion in losses by permitting over 100 intrabank transfers between 2009 and 2013 that helped obscure the flow of misappropriated funds. Liquidators described the ruling as a "significant legal victory" that allows continued efforts to reclaim assets for Malaysia.

Standard Chartered said it disagreed with the decision and would appeal, calling the claims "without merit." The bank said the transfers involved "shell companies that misappropriated funds from 1MDB" and that it had reported suspicious activity before closing their accounts in 2013.

The disputed transactions allegedly included funds routed to the personal account of former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is serving a six-year prison sentence for graft linked to 1MDB. Global investigations have traced roughly USD 4.5 billion stolen from the sovereign fund between 2009 and 2014, implicating officials and bankers across several countries.

Malaysia has recovered about 29 billion ringgit—USD 7.01 billion—in 1MDB-linked assets since 2019. Singapore previously fined Standard Chartered's local unit in 2016 for money-laundering breaches tied to the scandal. [Reuters]

Singapore: Authorities direct Apple, Google to stop gov-agency impersonation on iMessage, Google Messages

Singapore has ordered Apple and Google to introduce new safeguards on iMessage and Google Messages to prevent scammers from impersonating government agencies, the Home Affairs Ministry said on November 25. The directive, issued under the Online Criminal Harms Act, follows a rise in cases where fraudsters used the platforms to pose as entities such as SingPost.

The move closes a gap in Singapore's existing anti-spoofing system. Government agencies are already registered under a national SMS registry, ensuring only verified senders can use "gov.sg" in text messages. But this protection does not extend to internet-based messaging apps, where spoofed names can appear alongside legitimate SMS messages, making scams harder for the public to spot.

Under the new order, Apple and Google must block accounts and group chats from displaying names that mimic "gov.sg" or any Singapore government agency, or filter such messages before they reach users. Both companies have agreed to comply, and the government has urged users to update their apps once protections are rolled out.

Google said it is working with authorities to implement the measures, adding that they complement existing spam- and scam-filtering tools. Apple did not immediately comment. [Reuters]

Singapore: Executions reach highest level in two decades ahead of key death penalty challenge

Singapore executed three men for drug trafficking over two days last week, bringing the total number of judicial executions this year to 17 — the highest annual figure since 2003. The latest hangings come just days before the Court of Appeal is set to hear a constitutional challenge arguing that the mandatory death penalty for drug offences violates fundamental rights to life and equal protection.

The executions included two Singaporeans and Malaysian national Saminathan Selvaraju, whose case had long been cited by activists due to his repeated legal challenges. Saminathan was convicted of transporting more than 300 grams of heroin in 2013, a quantity that exceeds the threshold for capital punishment under Singaporean law. His defense — that he was not in control of the vehicle at the time — was rejected by the court, and his subsequent appeal and clemency petition were dismissed.

Singapore maintains some of the world's strictest drug laws, arguing the death penalty is a critical deterrent that keeps the country safer than many others in the region. Officials point to the potential for increased violence, addiction, and drug-related deaths if capital punishment were removed. The Ministry of Home Affairs said all executions followed due process and occurred only after all legal avenues were exhausted.

But rights groups, legal experts and foreign governments have intensified criticism. The Transformative Justice Collective, which brought the upcoming constitutional challenge, argues mandatory death sentences are disproportionate and largely ensnare low-level couriers rather than drug syndicate leaders. The EU and human rights organizations say drug offences do not meet the international-law

threshold of “most serious crimes” required to justify executions.

Globally, the trend has moved away from capital punishment for drug offences: Malaysia abolished its mandatory death penalty in 2023, Pakistan has moved to restrict it, and nearly 20 countries have scaled back its application in recent years.

Singapore’s government, however, shows no sign of shifting course. A 2023 survey commissioned by the Home Affairs Ministry found around 69 percent of residents support the death penalty for significant drug trafficking. With another challenge now before the courts, the debate over punishment, deterrence and human rights is set to intensify. [BBC] [Bloomberg]

Singapore: One-time property tax rebate of up to 15 percent for owner-occupied homes in 2026

(st) Singapore will give a one-off property tax rebate in 2026 to help cushion higher tax bills for owner-occupied homes, the Ministry of Finance and the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore said. All owner-occupied HDB flats will receive a 15 percent rebate, while owner-occupied private residential properties will receive 10 percent, capped at SGD 500 (USD 385). Officials said the measure is meant to ease the impact of tax adjustments at a time when the rental market is moderating.

Owner-occupiers of three-room and larger HDB flats will see average monthly property tax increases of about SGD 2 to SGD 3 after the rebate, while one- and two-room HDB owner-occupiers will continue to pay no property tax. About half of private property owner-occupiers will face increases of less than SGD 6 per month, with higher amounts mainly affecting higher-value homes.

Property owners will receive their 2026 bills in December via SMS, email or myTax Portal. Authorities urged homeowners to use GIRO for up to 12 months of interest-free installments, and said those facing financial difficulties can contact IRAS to discuss payment options. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore: Permanent Employment Rises as Job Switching Drops to Seven-Year Low

(ms/st) Singapore's labor market in 2025 is showing greater job stability but weaker mobility, according to advance data from the Ministry of Manpower. A record 90.8 percent of resident workers now hold permanent jobs, with gains across most age groups and industries.

Job switching, however, fell to 6.2 percent — the lowest since 2018. The steepest decline came from workers aged 25 to 29, who remain the most mobile cohort but appear more cautious amid slower hiring and global economic uncertainty. Fewer employed workers are actively looking for new roles, and mobility eased across both domestic-facing and export-oriented sectors.

Labor force participation dipped again to 67.9 percent, largely due to ageing, even as senior and female participation continues to rise. Real incomes grew for lower-wage and median workers, supported by productivity gains and the Progressive Wage Model. Unemployment and long-term unemployment remained low.

Self-employment stayed stable at 11.8 percent of resident workers, with more choosing flexible work arrangements. Platform worker numbers inched up to 71,600, driven by demand for private-hire car services. Challenges for own-account workers have eased with policy support such as the Platform Workers Act, though income uncertainty remains their top concern. [Channel NewsAsia 1] [Channel NewsAsia 2]

Singapore: Authorities order TikTok and Meta to block accounts of Australian linked to radicalization

(st) Singapore has directed TikTok and Meta to block local access to the social media accounts of Australian national Zulfikar bin Mohamad Shariff, whom authorities say contributed to the radicalization of two Singaporeans. The Ministry of Home Affairs said Zulfikar had urged Muslims to reject Singapore's constitutional and secular system in favor of an Islamic state governed by Syariah law and believed that violence could be used to achieve this goal. He also posted content that authorities said stoked discontent between Malay and Muslim communities and the Chinese majority, including a June video claiming Malays and Muslims were being forced to assimilate.

Zulfikar was detained in 2016 under the Internal Security Act, which allows detention without trial, for promoting terrorism and glorifying the Islamic State online. He later renounced his Singapore citizenship in

2020 and is also accused of attempting to interfere in Singapore's 2025 election. The government said the blocking orders were issued under the Online Criminal Harms Act, which took effect in February 2024, and that it will act firmly against threats to racial and religious harmony, including those arising from foreign actors. TikTok and Meta have not yet commented. [Reuters]

Thailand: Southern flood disaster escalates into a major governance and political crisis

(msz/bk/lm) Catastrophic flooding that began on November 21 across Thailand's southern provinces — with Hat Yai in Songkhla province the most severely affected — has developed into both a humanitarian crisis and a significant political challenge for Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's interim government. Exceptionally heavy rainfall of 350 millimeters in one day, reportedly the heaviest in three centuries, inundated large parts of the region and exposed structural weaknesses in Thailand's emergency-warning and disaster-response systems.

For many residents, the most acute shock was the absence of timely evacuation orders. Local authorities had repeatedly assured communities that the situation was "under control" even as water levels rose rapidly. Within hours, entire neighborhoods were cut off, making evacuation impossible for tens of thousands of people who became trapped without food, electricity, or drinking water. Many survivors described relying entirely on neighbors, volunteers, or improvised rescue efforts for several days. [abc news]

As these accounts spread, attention shifted to the national response framework. The government's decision to invoke the Emergency Decree — despite already holding broad authority under the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Act — drew immediate scrutiny. Analysts questioned whether the decree was intended to provide operational flexibility or to shield decision-making from legal challenges. Tensions inside the government also became visible. Although the Army Commander-in-Chief was formally assigned to lead operations, Deputy Prime Minister Thammanat publicly criticized the military's zoning strategy and said unclear lines of responsibility were hampering relief efforts. [The Nation 1]

Local administration faced similar criticism. Hat Yai's mayor, only months into his term, initially suggested that the situation remained manageable but

disappeared from public view during the height of the crisis, undermining public confidence at a time when clear guidance was essential. The government has since removed the district chief and transferred the local police commander — measures widely interpreted as acknowledgements of institutional failure but taken only after public anger had intensified. [The Nation 2]

The official death toll across nine southern provinces stood at about 170 in early December, including roughly 138–140 deaths in Hat Yai. Health authorities said this figure would "increase only slightly" as residents return to homes. However, some rescue personnel operating in the most inundated areas say the real number may be considerably higher. Among the most prominent voices is former deputy national police chief Surachate Hakparn — widely known as "Big Joke" — who is from Songkhla province and was removed from the police earlier this year over alleged links to online gambling networks, allegations he denies. Surachate has emerged as one of the most outspoken critics of the government's response, citing local accounts that suggest fatalities could reach several hundred and accusing authorities of downplaying the scale of the disaster. Officials reject any claim of concealment. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The economic consequences have amplified the pressure on the government. Southern Thailand is a major tourism, logistics, and agricultural region, and Hat Yai serves as one of its key commercial centers. Preliminary assessments indicate that overall economic damage may exceed THB 500 billion (USD 14 billion), affecting an estimated 2.9 million people. Hat Yai's hospital, water, and transport infrastructure suffered severe destruction, including around THB 1 billion (USD 28 million) in losses at Hat Yai Hospital. [Bangkok Post 3]

In response, the government has expanded relief and recovery measures. Prime Minister Anutin convened an emergency meeting at the Finance Ministry to centralize oversight. The assistance package includes a direct payment of THB 9,000 — approximately USD 280 — per verified household, zero-interest loans, tax relief, consumer-goods subsidies, fast-tracked insurance coordination, and temporary wage assistance covering half of daily earnings for several months. State banks have disbursed THB 239 million (USD 6.6 million) and opened additional credit lines. The government says it aims to restore Hat Yai to normal operations within a month, though damage assessments continue [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5] [The Nation 3]

Politically, the flooding has become a stress test for the interim government. Polls indicate declining support for Prime Minister Anutin in parts of the South, though senior officials insist they are “not worried” and warn against politicizing the disaster. Opposition parties said they will scrutinize the government’s handling once parliament reconvenes on December 12 but have called for restraint until urgent relief is stabilized. [Bangkok Post 6]

Legal experts have meanwhile encouraged affected households to consider litigation. Lawyer and activist Ronnarong Kaewpetch argues that delayed warnings, incorrect risk assessments, and possible mismanagement of local drainage and water-control systems could meet the threshold for official negligence. He says residents may pursue compensation if administrative failures by local or provincial authorities can be demonstrated. [Bangkok Post 7]

Thailand: Intensifying political uncertainty ahead of charter-amendment session and rising speculation over early dissolution

(lm/msz) Thailand enters a critical political week as parliament prepares for a special session on December 10–11 to keep the constitutional-amendment timeline on schedule, while mounting political tension fuels speculation that Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul may dissolve the House earlier than expected. The special sitting is needed because constitutional procedure requires a fifteen-day interval between the second and third readings of any amendment bill. The review committee has completed its examination and will submit its report before the session. [Bangkok Post 1]

Across parties, one issue remains uncontested: any new charter must preserve the substance of Chapters 1 and 2, which establish Thailand as a unitary state and define the monarchy’s prerogatives. The struggle instead revolves around who will design the next constitution and how the drafting process will be structured. This debate is shaped by the Constitutional Court’s September 2025 ruling, which prohibits the creation of a directly elected constitution-drafting body and requires three referendums for any effort to write a completely new constitution. The ruling sharply restricts available options and effectively blocks a fully elected Constitution Drafting Assembly during the current parliament.

In response, the committee majority has endorsed a parliamentary-appointment model built around two new bodies: a 35-member Constitution Drafting Committee responsible for producing the draft within 360 days, and a 35-member Public Participation Committee tasked with gathering input and liaising with parliament, the cabinet, and state agencies. Both bodies would be appointed under a formula allowing every twenty MPs or senators to nominate one candidate. Once the draft is submitted, parliament would have thirty days to debate and comment on it without voting, before returning it for revisions. A final vote, conducted by roll-call, would require only a simple majority. [Bangkok Post 2]

These procedural steps mask growing political tension. Pheu Thai argues that the September ruling does not preclude a two-stage model in which citizens first elect a pool of candidates from which parliament then selects the drafters. The party has also proposed easing the nomination ratio to dilute the dominance of large parliamentary blocs. The People's Party (PP), which leads the amendment process, rejects these ideas, insisting that additional layers would complicate the legal environment, undermine the timeline and heighten the risk that the referendum—expected to coincide with the next general election—cannot be held as planned. Speed and predictability are central to its strategy. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Political calculations are shifting in parallel. The devastating southern floods have heightened scrutiny of the government's crisis-management capacity and weakened Bhumjaithai (BJT) in one of its core regions. Pheu Thai has denied plans to file a no-confidence motion immediately, arguing that flood relief should take priority, but emphasized that the government's handling of the crisis would inevitably form part of any future scrutiny. Senior members of the United Thai Nation Party similarly argued that a dissolution when parliament reconvenes on December 12 would serve no constitutional purpose, noting that the charter-amendment session remains scheduled. [Bangkok Post 5]

Independent analysts also warned that dissolving parliament while the December 10–11 sitting is underway would be inappropriate. They noted that a general debate without a vote under Section 152—expected in January—would provide a more suitable forum for political scrutiny at a moment when institutional stability is essential.

At the same time, electoral dynamics are evolving rapidly. A detailed assessment on December 1 indicates that the next election is shaping into a

contest for first place between BJT and the PP. Analysts argue that the PP holds an advantage in urban and middle-class constituencies due to its younger, policy-driven leadership and expanding volunteer networks, while BJT continues to rely on entrenched provincial patronage structures. The floods have further damaged BJT's standing in the South and strengthened calls within the party for strategic rebranding. The PP's prime-ministerial candidates, particularly its prominent technocratic female contender, are viewed as energizing younger demographic groups, while BJT's candidates—drawn largely from bureaucratic and business backgrounds—are seen as more conservative. Analyst projections suggest the PP could win 150–200 seats, with BJT securing around 100–150.

These shifting dynamics intersect with renewed speculation about an early dissolution. Prime Minister Anutin recently signaled that he is prepared to dissolve the House by December 12, acknowledging that his minority coalition of 165 seats may not survive a no-confidence vote. Analysts caution that BJT's deeper concern lies not in the motion itself but in the possibility of coordinated action between Pheu Thai and the PP that could unite the opposition. In anticipation of such risks, BJT has moved quickly to consolidate administrative influence. Within weeks of taking power, the Interior Ministry carried out an unusually rapid reshuffle of senior officials, strengthening provincial networks and positioning the party to contest an early election on short notice.

The timing of a possible dissolution remains unclear. But observers widely agree that only BJT and the PP are currently prepared for a snap poll. Pheu Thai—confronted with internal fractures, legal pressure surrounding its former leadership, and declining support—is considered the least ready to contest an early election, even though it views a no-confidence motion as a potential route back to power. [Bangkok Post 6] [Bangkok Post 7]

Parliament now anticipates long and contentious debates during the December 10–11 session, with December 12 designated as a spillover day. Even if the amendment clears the second reading, significant disagreements—particularly over the composition and selection method of the drafting bodies—are expected to resurface ahead of the third reading and the final referendum stage. [Bangkok Post 8]

Thailand: Senators challenge legality of Election Commission chair selection

(msz) A group of reserve senators — alternates designated during the 2024 Senate election who may replace elected senators if seats become vacant — has petitioned the Senate Secretariat to suspend the appointment of Narong Klunwarin as the new chair of the Election Commission (EC), arguing that the internal selection process may have violated Thai law.

The petition, submitted by former police lieutenant general Kamrop Panyakaew through Senator Premsak Piayura, claims that the EC's vote on November 18 was improperly conducted because two commissioners approved by the Senate had not yet received formal endorsement and therefore were not legally eligible to participate in the meeting that selected Narong as chairman. Senator Premsak added that the alleged irregularities could amount to official misconduct under Section 157 of the Criminal Code.

Notably, the dispute comes while Thailand is handling a far-reaching investigation into the 2024 Senate election. The EC continues to lead the main probe into alleged vote-collusion, while the Department of Special Investigation is pursuing a parallel money-laundering and secret-network investigation. A large share of those under scrutiny are linked to provincial political networks traditionally associated with Bhumjaithai, the party of Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, making the EC's leadership especially sensitive. Senator Premsak argues that changing the EC's composition shortly before the Senate's December 15 deliberation on a related case could influence how pending matters are handled.

On top of that, Prime Minister Anutin has signaled the possibility of dissolving parliament as early as December 12 after consolidating support within his party, raising concerns that a disputed EC could complicate preparations for a potential early general election. The petitioners have asked the Senate Secretariat to halt forwarding Narong's name for endorsement until the legality of the process is clarified, while any formal misconduct complaint would need to be filed with the National Anti-Corruption Commission by directly affected parties. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Southern survey shows traditional political alignments re-emerging ahead of the next election

(lm) A new regional opinion survey from the National Institute of Development Administration, conducted between November 18-24 across 14 southern

provinces, suggests that voter preferences in Southern Thailand are beginning to crystallize along familiar political lines. The South has historically been the electoral base of the Democrat Party, Thailand's oldest political party and traditionally associated with conservative and technocratic governance. Within this context, a significant share of respondents indicated support for Abhisit Vejjajiva, a former prime minister and recently re-elected leader of the party.

The survey found that 32.25 percent of eligible voters remain undecided about their preferred prime ministerial candidate, underscoring persistent uncertainty in the national political landscape. Among those who expressed a preference, 25.65 percent supported Abhisit, followed by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul of the Bhumjaithai Party at 15.40 percent and Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut of the main opposition People's Party at 12.85 percent. Support for all other candidates remained low.

Party preferences mirrored this pattern. The Democrat Party received 28.60 percent, narrowly ahead of the 28.45 percent who remain undecided. The People's Party placed third with 17.80 percent, while the ruling Bhumjaithai Party received 11.65 percent. Other parties registered only marginal support. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government criticized for weak border posture as tensions with Cambodia sharpen

(lm) Thailand's government is facing growing scrutiny over its handling of security along the Thai–Cambodian border, amid warnings from security analysts that Bangkok has placed itself at a strategic disadvantage at a time of rising geopolitical and criminal pressure.

Reports that Thai authorities plan to repatriate Cambodian prisoners of war have raised alarm because Cambodia has not yet fulfilled the four conditions previously set by Bangkok—withdrawal of armed units from contested zones, landmine clearance, suppression of cross-border scam syndicates, and progress on disputed boundary claims. Critics warn that pushing ahead regardless risks both security and negotiating leverage.

Analysts note that Thai forces have pulled back more deeply from front-line zones than Cambodian units, leaving areas such as Ban Nong Chan, Nong Ya Kaeo and the vicinity of the Prasat Ta Kwai temple exposed. The temple area, claimed by both states for decades,

remains one of the most politically sensitive border flashpoints.

Commentators argue that Thailand is “retreating without a backup plan” while publicly committing to a no-force approach, a posture they say may allow Cambodia to consolidate its presence in disputed terrain and later use it to strengthen legal arguments in international forums.

The situation is complicated by broader geopolitical shifts. Cambodia has recently benefited from an easing of United States restrictions and renewed access to certain military supplies, which analysts interpret as a strategic signal to the region. Thailand’s relative caution at the border, paired with Cambodia’s expanding support from major powers, has reinforced perceptions that the balance of initiative is shifting.

At the same time, transnational scam networks and human trafficking operations centered around the Thai–Cambodian frontier continue to expand. These networks, which generate extremely large financial flows, are widely described as Thailand’s soft underbelly. Critics say that inconsistent enforcement, a lack of unified command, and reluctance to confront politically connected figures have weakened Thailand’s ability to dismantle the criminal ecosystem. Nearly every major police raid reveals deeper levels of official complicity, further eroding public trust.

Government supporters argue that the administration is prioritizing diplomacy and avoiding escalation, but the opposition has seized on the issue to present the government as passive on national security and soft on organized crime. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Expanding police corruption revelations intensify debate over entrenched structural problems

(lm) Thailand’s campaign against police corruption has broadened amid a wave of high-profile disclosures led by former deputy national police chief Surachate Hakparn — widely known in Thailand as “Big Joke” — together with Atchariya Ruangratanapong, head of the Crime Victims Assistance Club. Surachate, once one of the country’s most prominent police officers, was dismissed from the Royal Thai Police earlier this year after an internal investigation into alleged links to online gambling networks. He denies the allegations, and several legal proceedings remain unresolved. His status as a removed senior officer with extensive

insider knowledge has made his current exposés both influential and controversial.

The Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT) — an independent civil-society coalition made up of NGOs, business associations, and academic bodies — argues that the latest revelations confirm long-standing structural patterns. According to ACT, recent cases involving online-gambling networks, "grey" Chinese criminal groups, illegal visa arrangements for thousands of Chinese nationals, and long-running protection rackets demonstrate how senior figures in politics and the civil service allegedly sit at the apex of criminal structures. ACT estimates that online scam networks defraud Thai citizens of more than THB 100 billion (USD 2.8 billion) each year, making fraud one of the most profitable illicit activities in the country.

Experts interviewed in the report point to structural weaknesses inside the Royal Thai Police. Excessive centralization under a single national police commander, politicized promotions and transfers, and longstanding off-the-books payments linked to senior appointments are described as key drivers of institutional vulnerability. These practices, they note, have historically enabled political interference and created an environment where officers can secure or purchase postings through informal networks.

Former deputy national police chief Winai Thongsong, now serving on the Police Commission, said efforts to curb unofficial payments are underway but incomplete. He argues that durable reform will require higher police salaries, increased welfare provisions, and a larger operating budget to reduce incentives for illicit income generation.

Oversight mechanisms are also under debate. Criminologists cited in the report warn that accountability processes must become faster, more transparent and more impartial. They highlight the absence of continuous professional training after officers graduate from provincial academies, a gap attributed to staff shortages. Expanded external monitoring by independent bodies is identified as essential to rebuilding public confidence.

Public trust in the police remains low. Interviewed citizens describe the institution as one of the least trusted in Thailand, second only to political officeholders. This perception is shaped by frequent exposure to officers in everyday life and by recurring allegations of corruption involving both lower-ranking personnel and senior officials. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Investigations deepen into Bangkok Remand Prison privilege scandal as rights commission and anti-graft bodies expand probes

(lm) Thailand's widening prison-privilege scandal has prompted simultaneous investigations by the Justice Ministry, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) and now the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), after mounting evidence that officials at Bangkok Remand Prison granted extensive illicit benefits to a group of Chinese inmates.

Justice Minister Pol Lt Gen Rutthaphon Naowarat said a full review is under way following allegations that prisoners linked to "grey Chinese" networks received prohibited privileges. Internal reports describe access to banned electrical appliances—such as mobile phones, lighters, portable air-conditioning units, a refrigerator and a microwave—and, most seriously, the arrangement of sexual services in a concealed room reachable through a special route that bypassed normal security controls. A raid on November 16 uncovered many of the prohibited items inside restricted zones, heightening concerns of entrenched corruption and discriminatory treatment [see AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4].

The Justice Ministry has confirmed an escalating disciplinary response: six officials have now been dismissed, including the former director of inmate supervision, while four more officers remain suspended pending further review. An additional 14 officials face active investigation for serious misconduct.

Former prison chief Manop Chomchuen, who was removed earlier, claims he committed no wrongdoing and alleges that his transfer was part of a wider attempt to discredit him after testimony he provided in a separate case involving senior Justice Ministry figures. Authorities have confiscated Manop's financial and travel records as part of the inquiry, but these remain confidential within the formal investigation process. [Bangkok Post 1]

The NHRC has now opened its own probe, citing concerns over human rights violations and unequal treatment of detainees. In parallel, the NACC has dispatched a team to the prison to determine whether officials abused their authority or violated the Organic Act on Anti-Corruption. Investigators are examining financial trails involving former and current officers, with some inquiries extending to family members. Elements of the case may be referred under Section

157, which governs official misconduct. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Royal family member and senior military officer dies at age 78

(lm) MC Chulcherm Yugala, a senior officer in Thailand's Royal Security Command and a member of the extended royal family, has passed away at the age of 78. A great-grandson of King Chulalongkorn, the nineteenth-century monarch credited with modernizing Thailand, he was widely known for his outspoken royalist views and frequent public commentary on social media.

MC Chulcherm's military career spanned several decades and included service in the Royal Guard, which provides protection for senior members of the royal family. In the 1970s he took part in counter-communist operations in Phetchabun province, a mountainous area that was then a stronghold of the Communist Party of Thailand during the country's Cold War-era insurgency. He later held positions in the Army Intelligence Department and the Internal Security Operations Command, Thailand's main domestic security agency responsible for counterinsurgency and internal stability. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Justice Ministry advances broad anti-discrimination bill aligned with international standards

(lm) Thailand's Justice Ministry is preparing a broad anti-discrimination bill for cabinet review, positioning it as aligned with the constitution's human-rights provisions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The initiative was outlined at a forum co-hosted by the ministry, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, and civil-society group MovED, where officials highlighted the bill's ambition to create an independent body empowered to address discrimination cases nationwide.

Research cited at the forum found that homeless people face the highest levels of discrimination, followed by LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and migrants, who are commonly perceived in narrow labor-related roles. Civil-society representatives underscored that discrimination persists at both policy and implementation levels.

Lawmakers from the Fair Party and the People's Party expressed support for the draft, noting its structural similarities to Thailand's existing Gender Equality Act. They argued that a solely Bangkok-based mechanism would be insufficient and suggested allowing provincial justice offices to handle discrimination cases directly. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Authorities extradite Vietnamese activist after court upholds 2024 ruling allowing his return

(msz) Thailand has extradited Y Quynh Bdap, an ethnic Ede minority activist and founder of Montagnards Stand for Justice, only two days after the Court of Appeal upheld a 2024 ruling permitting his return to Vietnam. Bdap, who had lived in exile in Thailand since 2018 and was granted refugee status by UN bodies, was handed over to Vietnamese authorities on November 28, according to his lawyer, who said Thai officials provided no details on his fate after the handover.

Vietnamese courts have confirmed a 10-year sentence in absentia against Bdap for alleged involvement in armed attacks on police posts in Vietnam's Central Highlands region in 2023—accusations he has consistently denied. Hanoi has designated his organization as a "terrorist" group, though rights advocates describe it as a non-violent movement defending the religious and cultural rights of Montagnard minority communities, who have long reported discrimination over land rights and religious practices. [Bangkok Post 1]

The extradition went ahead despite explicit warnings from the United Nations, Thailand's National Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Watch, and several Western governments that Bdap faced a credible risk of torture, ill-treatment, or unfair trial if returned to Vietnam. UN special rapporteurs also noted Vietnam's record of harsh treatment of minority-rights advocates. The Thai court, however, maintained that there was insufficient evidence to prove he would face torture or enforced disappearance.

The case has renewed scrutiny of Thailand's compliance with its 2023 anti-torture and non-refoulement law, which prohibits returning individuals to countries where they may face persecution. The controversy comes months after Thailand deported Uyghur individuals to China, fueling criticism that Bangkok is increasingly cooperating with neighboring governments to return political dissidents and

refugees. Rights groups argue that Bdap's handover undermines Thailand's credibility as a newly elected member of the UN Human Rights Council. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Concerns over Thailand's willingness to act on behalf of foreign governments were further heightened by the criminal defamation case against Australian journalist Murray Hunter, who was arrested on September 29 over articles published on his newsletter criticizing Malaysia's Communications and Multimedia Commission. After a 24-hour detention, Hunter was released on bail but had his passport confiscated, preventing him from leaving Thailand ahead of his December 22 trial at the Bangkok South Criminal Court.

The charges stem from a complaint filed in Thailand by the Malaysian regulator's legal representative; each count carries a possible two-year prison sentence under Section 328 of the Criminal Code. Human Rights Watch argues that Hunter's prosecution illustrates the misuse of criminal defamation laws and Thailand's readiness to restrict free expression in support of foreign governments seeking to target dissenters abroad. The UN Human Rights Committee has long held that imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty for defamation. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Supreme Court acquits protester in royal defamation case

(bk) Thailand's Supreme Court has acquitted a protester previously convicted of royal defamation under Section 112 for allegedly placing a sticker with the "Ku Kult" logo over King Vajiralongkorn's portrait during a demonstration outside the Supreme Court on September 19, 2020.

The Criminal Court had sentenced him to two years in prison in 2022, reduced from three years, but the Appeal Court dismissed the charge in 2023 after concluding that evidence was insufficient to prove he committed the act. On November 27, the Supreme Court upheld the dismissal, formally clearing him.

"Ku Kult" refers to a well-known political-satire Facebook page created in 2011. Although it was blocked after the 2014 coup, its logo circulated widely in protests, often used to parody state symbolism. The protester had also faced earlier accusations of running the page under Section 112 and the Computer Crime Act, but courts dismissed those charges as well. [Prachatai English]

Thailand: Family of deceased conscript pushes forward in military abuse case

(bk) The family of Vorapach Padmasakul, a military conscript who died in August last year after reportedly being beaten during disciplinary action and again after expressing a desire to report the abuse, is pressing forward with legal action against the training commander at Fort Nawamintharachini for allowing the assault to occur.

On August 13, the family filed a complaint alleging that the camp's training commanders were aware of the assaults but failed to intervene. Under the 2022 Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act, commanding officers who know their subordinates are committing such offenses and do not act can face half the penalty of the offenders. Two army instructors and 11 assisting conscripts have already been convicted under the Act, receiving prison sentences ranging from 10 to 20 years.

On October 24, the Office of Chonburi Public Prosecution confirmed a public prosecutor has been assigned to the case, following the family's request for an update. [Prachatai English]

Thailand: Activists urge renewed government action on decades-old North Korean abduction case

(lm) A Thai human-rights group has called on the government to revive efforts to resolve the 1978 abduction of Anocha Panjoy, a Thai citizen kidnapped by North Korean agents while working in Macau. Despite the Thai government confirming her abduction in 2005, no progress has been made in securing her return or obtaining official information from Pyongyang, and it remains unknown whether she is still alive.

The president of the Chiang Mai–based Support Group for Victims Abducted by North Korea told the Senate's Human Rights Subcommittee on November 20 that Thailand should submit a formal request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pursue direct negotiations with North Korea. The group had earlier petitioned the prime minister in September, urging renewed government action. The advocate criticized Thailand's long-standing reliance on bilateral contacts with Pyongyang and noted that Thailand has not raised the

case through international channels, despite serving on the UN Human Rights Council.

The group has repeatedly petitioned successive Thai governments over the past two decades. The National Human Rights Commission accepted a complaint in 2022, and recommendations were sent to the Prime Minister's Office in 2024, but officials have yet to take substantive steps. A Senate committee reviewed the matter last month, but no government decision followed.

Anocha Panjoy, originally from Chiang Mai province, is the only Thai national whose abduction by North Korean agents has been independently verified. Her case is part of a wider pattern of unresolved North Korean abductions affecting citizens from more than ten countries. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government unveils power strategy to court global data center investment

(msz) Thailand has outlined a national power and infrastructure strategy aimed at securing a larger share of global data-center investment, which policymakers view as central to the emerging AI-driven economy. Energy Minister Auttapol Rerkpiboon said approved projects already exceed THB 600 billion (USD 18.6 billion), reflecting strong investor interest but also exposing structural constraints in Thailand's power system.

The government argues that data-center expansion is now a strategic priority, noting that global facilities already consume the equivalent of 1.7 times Thailand's national electricity demand and could double or triple by 2030. To remain competitive, Thailand is linking investment incentives to domestic capacity development, requiring firms to help train an AI-skilled workforce and expand local employment.

The core challenge is energy availability. More than ninety percent of investment interest is concentrated in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), where transmission capacity is insufficient. The government has allocated THB 3 billion (USD 93 million) for immediate reinforcement and plans a larger THB 30 billion (USD 930 million) expansion to meet rising demand. Investors are also encouraged to consider alternative locations near Bangkok and central Thailand, where transmission infrastructure is stronger.

A major policy shift is the planned adoption of Direct Green Power Purchase Agreements by December 2025. These will allow data-center operators to buy electricity directly from renewable producers while paying only for grid transmission. Officials expect this to unlock over THB 30 billion (USD 930 million) in new renewable-energy investment, create several thousand jobs and reduce annual emissions by about 1.6 million tons, aligning Thailand with global data-center operators' commitments to long-term clean-energy sourcing. [The Nation]

Thailand: Government outlines fiscal and macroeconomic direction for FY2027 amid weak domestic momentum

(lm) Thailand has presented its fiscal and macroeconomic direction for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY2027), covering 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2027, combining an expansive expenditure plan with a medium-term commitment to gradually reduce the deficit after recent credit-rating concerns. The THB 3.78 trillion (USD 113.4 billion) FY2027 budget framework, unveiled by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and endorsed by the cabinet, allocates THB 788 billion (USD 23.64 billion) in deficit spending and projects THB 3 trillion (USD 90 billion) in net state revenue. While still expansionary, this marks a slight tightening from deficit levels in fiscal years 2025 and 2026. [Bangkok Post 1]

The newly approved Medium-Term Fiscal Framework aims to reduce the fiscal deficit to no more than three percent of GDP by 2029, down from more than four percent at present, and to maintain public debt below seventy percent of GDP. The trajectory is designed to reassure rating agencies, which downgraded Thailand's outlook to negative earlier this year over rising fiscal pressures and weak growth prospects. The FY2027 budget assumes GDP growth between 2.1 and 3.1 percent, with a central projection of 2.6 percent, slightly above the 1.7 percent forecast for FY2026. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand's latest macroeconomic indicators point to only a mild rebound. According to the Bank of Thailand, the economy showed modest month-on-month improvement in October, driven mainly by consumption, tourism and a small uptick in electronics exports, while private investment, energy-linked manufacturing and construction remained subdued. Tourism receipts rose eleven percent month-on-month, supported particularly by Chinese, Korean and European arrivals, underscoring the extent to which

the recovery still depends on short-haul Asian demand. Exports excluding gold grew by 0.7 percent, concentrated in hard-disk drives, transformers and solar-cell components, revealing the narrow base of the manufacturing rebound.

Industrial output overall remained flat, with refinery operations restricted by maintenance and vehicle production resuming only gradually after earlier shutdowns. Private investment contracted by 1.1 percent, reflecting reduced machinery imports, lower commercial and residential construction activity, and continued caution about domestic demand. [Bangkok Post 3]

Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas framed the moment as a structural turning point shaped by a reordering global trade environment, accelerated technological disruption and rapidly expanding climate-related regulatory barriers. He stressed the need to reposition Thailand by upgrading infrastructure, accelerating renewable-energy investment and aligning workforce skills with emerging technologies. Investment-promotion applications totaled THB 1.3 trillion (USD 37.7 billion) in the first nine months of 2025, with THB 480 billion (USD 13.9 billion) ready for immediate deployment. To convert approvals more reliably into concrete projects, the government introduced the new "Thailand Fast Pass" mechanism to ease long-standing regulatory bottlenecks.

Energy security has emerged as a central constraint. Rapid growth in data-center investment—one of Thailand's fastest-expanding sectors—depends on reliable access to clean electricity. To address this, the cabinet approved direct power-purchase agreements intended to unlock private renewable-energy investment. This also relates to Thailand's exposure to climate-trade mechanisms such as the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which the government views both as a challenge for carbon-intensive industries and an opportunity for bio-based manufacturing. [Bangkok Post 4]

The government is also advancing its "Five Pillars and One Foundation" economic agenda. A major SME assistance package is expected to reach the cabinet shortly, including SME loan guarantees of roughly THB 50 billion (USD 1.5 billion) through the Thai Credit Guarantee Corporation and a central-bank-backed guarantee fund. Large companies participating in the supply-chain liquidity program will receive accelerated tax refunds, while a digital lottery savings scheme will channel a share of management fees from digital

lottery sales into long-term savings accounts. Other elements already implemented include short-term stimulus under the Khon La Khrueng Plus co-payment scheme, higher welfare-card benefits and a program to acquire small borrowers' non-performing loans capped at THB 100,000 (USD 3,000) per debtor. In parallel, the government is attempting to accelerate implementation of Board of Investment–approved projects worth THB 470 billion (USD 14.1 billion). [Bangkok Post 5]

Externally, analysts argue that Thailand must broaden its free-trade agenda beyond negotiations with the European Union, South Korea and Canada to reduce dependence on the United States. Opportunities have been highlighted with the United Arab Emirates, whose fast-growing economy and large food-technology sector align strongly with Thailand's export strengths, as well as with Latin American partners such as Peru and Chile. Experts caution that bilateral FTAs must be designed carefully to avoid redundancy with ASEAN-level frameworks, pointing to potential overlap between the forthcoming ASEAN–Canada FTA, expected to be finalised next year, and the planned Thai–Canada agreement. [Bangkok Post 6]

Thailand: High-speed rail project linking three airports faces renewed contract review after years of delays

(msz) Thailand's high-speed rail project linking Don Mueang, Suvarnabhumi and U-Tapao airports—a flagship component of the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), the country's main industrial-development zone—is undergoing another contract review six years after falling behind schedule. The EEC policy committee will reassess a revised investment model this week before sending it to the cabinet, Deputy Prime Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said.

The THB 225 billion (about USD 6.1 billion) project was first agreed in 2019 between the State Railway of Thailand and Asia Era One, a consortium led by the Charoen Pokphand Group. The latest proposal introduces a "pay-as-you-build" disbursement plan for THB 120 billion (about USD 3.3 billion) in civil works. The Office of the Attorney-General has raised concerns that the model may weaken fiscal discipline and insists that the private partner provide guarantees matching the full state investment.

Officials aim to finalize an operational framework before the project is handed to the next government. Progress has remained slow due largely to unresolved

land expropriation, even after earlier contract revisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. To bolster investor confidence in the surrounding U-Tapao Aviation City area, the government is also considering a public-private partnership for a large sports complex.

The rail line, once planned to open in 2024, is now unlikely to begin operations before 2030. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Cross-border trade rises despite sharp drops with Cambodia and Myanmar

(bk) Thailand's cross-border trade continued to expand in October 2025, rising 4.2 percent to THB 146.6 billion (USD 4.6 billion), which helped lift total trade for the first ten months of the year to THB 1.63 trillion (USD 50.6 billion), up 7.7 percent. Despite the monthly increase, exports in October slipped slightly while imports climbed, leaving a modest surplus. Trade with neighboring countries, however, weakened significantly, with the combined value falling 17.5 percent as exports contracted more sharply than imports.

The most severe decline occurred in trade with Cambodia, which plunged by nearly 100 percent due to tightened security and the closure of several border checkpoints. Myanmar also recorded a double-digit drop as ongoing export-import controls hindered the flow of goods.

In contrast, Malaysia and Laos posted moderate growth, helping to cushion the overall downturn among regional partners. Shipments of electronics—particularly hard disk drives—along with various rubber products to China, Singapore, and Vietnam also jumped substantially in value, up 32.2 percent. This expansion reflects both global market demand and increased investment in Thailand's electronics and data infrastructure.

The Ministry of Commerce noted that, while broader cross-border trade shows promising momentum, the steep declines in trade with Cambodia and Myanmar require urgent policy attention. It is calling for stronger coordination between government and the private sector to improve connectivity, ease restrictions, and restore stability in the affected border areas. [The Nation]

Thailand: Cross-border shelling from Myanmar prompts warning fire and increased security

(lm) Thai authorities reported that artillery shells from fighting in neighboring Myanmar landed inside Thailand's Mae Sot district, which lies in Tak province along the Thai–Myanmar border. According to the Third Army Region, clashes were taking place in Min La Pan, a village in Myanmar's Myawaddy area directly opposite Mae Sot. During the fighting, five 60-mm shells fired by unidentified combatants crossed the border and hit the Thai side, damaging a house and injuring two Myanmar nationals who were in Mae Sot at the time. Both are receiving medical treatment.

Thai soldiers from the Ratchamanu Task Force responded by firing four 120-mm smoke rounds toward the Myanmar side as a warning. The Third Army Region added that patrols along the frontier will continue around the clock to protect local communities. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste: LNG push advances as government signs cooperation deal for mayor project "Greater Sunrise"

(ms) Timor-Leste and Woodside Energy have signed a cooperation agreement that advances long-delayed plans to develop the Greater Sunrise gas fields, marking the most concrete progress on the project in years and laying out a possible start to LNG production between 2032 and 2035. The agreement follows high-level negotiations in recent months and commits both sides to detailed commercial and technical studies for a Timor-based LNG development, including a five-million-tonnes-per-year processing plant, a helium extraction unit and domestic gas facilities.

The work will run in parallel with talks between the Sunrise joint venture, Timor-Leste and Australia on the regulatory, legal and fiscal frameworks needed to support the project. These discussions are critical, as Greater Sunrise—one of the region's largest undeveloped gas reserves—has been stalled for decades over disagreements on pipeline routes, revenue sharing and cost competitiveness. Woodside had previously argued that sending gas to Darwin was commercially superior, while Timor-Leste insisted on onshore processing to maximize national benefits.

For Timor-Leste, the stakes are unusually high. The country's Petroleum Fund, which has long financed

most state spending, is projected to decline sharply within the next decade. Greater Sunrise is viewed as the only viable long-term replacement for dwindling oil revenues. A domestic LNG plant could generate thousands of jobs, stimulate new industries, and expand supporting infrastructure. The inclusion of a helium extraction facility—serving a high-value global market linked to semiconductors and aerospace—could add an additional revenue stream.

However, the economic implications are mixed. Analysts estimate that building an LNG plant in Timor-Leste could cost at least USD 5 billion more than an Australian option, raising financing challenges for one of Southeast Asia's smallest economies. Successful development will also depend on political stability, investor confidence and the ability of Timor-Leste's regulatory system to meet international project standards.

Still, the government views the deal as a turning point. Petroleum and Mineral Resources Minister Francisco da Costa Monteiro said the project offers the "best economic, social and strategic benefits" for the country. Woodside CEO Meg O'Neill described the agreement as essential to resolving outstanding issues such as downstream commercial structures and pipeline routing. [Offshore Engineer] [Offshore Technology] [Reuters]

Timor-Leste: 50 years since 1975 Proclamation of Independence

(ms) Timor-Leste commemorated the 50th anniversary of its 1975 Unilateral Proclamation of Independence on November 28 with nationwide ceremonies, reflecting both historical remembrance and a renewed call for national unity. The main event was held at the Government Palace in Dili, where the declaration was first read half a century ago. President José Ramos-Horta presided over the flag-raising ceremony attended by senior state officials, foreign dignitaries, veterans of the independence struggle, and representatives of the diplomatic corps.

Across the country's municipalities, in the Special Administrative Region of Oe-Cússe Ambeno, and in Ataúro, local ceremonies paid tribute to the heroes of the resistance and highlighted the continued importance of independence in Timor-Leste's political identity. Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão led commemorations in Oe-Cússe, urging younger generations to learn from the events of 1975 and to

apply the same resolve to current development challenges.

In Dili, the programme also included exhibitions, religious services, and tributes to combatants. The National Parliament held a solemn session on November 27. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Timor-Leste: Prime Minister opens CPLP Sea Forum, emphasizes maritime legal challenges

(ms) Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão on November 25 opened the Fifth Seminar of the CPLP Sea Forum in Dili, launching two days of discussions on the legal and regulatory challenges facing Portuguese-speaking countries in managing and using their maritime spaces. The event, hosted at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, brings together officials, legal experts, and maritime specialists from across the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries.

In his remarks, Gusmão said CPLP members must strengthen cooperation on maritime governance, noting the growing complexity of issues such as boundary delimitation, environmental protection, and sustainable resource use. He highlighted Timor-Leste's recent entry into ASEAN as a factor increasing the country's responsibility—and opportunity—to link regional ocean initiatives.

The seminar also featured the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the G7+ and Timor-Leste's National Defense Institute to expand cooperation in training and governance-related programs. The forum continues through November 26 with thematic panels and a plenary session. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Timor-Leste: Energy and Mining Forum opens with push for investment

(ms) Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão on November 24 opened the Fifth Timor-Leste Energy, Mining, and Business Forum in Dili, stressing the sector's central role in national economic transformation. The three-day event gathers policymakers, regulators, investors, and industry representatives to discuss opportunities in oil, gas, and minerals.

Gusmão highlighted Timor-Leste's recent accession to the WTO and ASEAN, saying these milestones strengthen the country's economic standing and its ambition to become a regional energy and mining hub. He also reaffirmed that gas from the Greater Sunrise field must be processed onshore, arguing this is essential for jobs, industrial development, and long-term national revenue (see article above).

The Forum also saw the launch of the 2025 public mining tender for metallic and non-metallic minerals. The National Petroleum Authority noted growing international interest, citing improved governance and a clearer legal framework for investors. More than 400 delegates from 70 countries are attending the event. [Government of Timor-Leste]

Vietnam: New December Policies increase penalties for violence and public safety violations

(hn/ms) Vietnam will roll out a series of new regulations in December that significantly toughen penalties for domestic violence and public-order violations, while expanding state support for road-accident victims. The changes reflect growing public concern over safety and rising reports of violence in the country.

Domestic violence remains a persistent issue in Vietnam: according to the Ministry of Public Security, authorities record tens of thousands of cases each year, with many more believed to go unreported. Against this backdrop, a new decree introduces substantially higher fines. Threats or minor physical harm will incur penalties of VND 2–5 million (USD 76–191), while intentional injury or battery is subject to fines of VND 5–10 million (USD 191–383). Serious abuse, neglect, or failing to provide emergency aid may carry fines as high as VND 20 million (USD 765).

Public-order violations also face stricter enforcement. Individuals who cause disturbance while intoxicated, allow pets to injure others, or vandalize public spaces can be fined up to VND 3 million (USD 115). Illegal gambling—an activity authorities say continues to rise—will be punished on a tiered scale: from VND 0.2–0.5 million (USD 8–19) for small-stakes betting to VND 10–20 million (USD 383–765) for organizing gambling activities.

Another major change concerns environmental protection. People or companies that drill or build structures causing water pollution will face fines of

VND 50–60 million (USD 1,913–2,295). Severe cases may result in penalties up to VND 150–180 million (USD 5,739–6,886), along with mandatory removal of illegal works and remediation of environmental damage.

Finally, the government will expand support for road-accident victims amid rising traffic-related injuries nationwide. Individuals who assist in transporting victims to hospitals can receive up to VND 5 million (USD 191), while those suffering severe injuries may obtain up to VND 100 million (USD 3,826) from the Road Accident Damage Reduction Fund. [Vnexpress, in Vietnamese]

Vietnam: Politburo announces major personnel change in Hanoi leadership

(hn) Nguyễn Đức Trung, 51, from Thanh Hóa, has stepped down from his positions as Deputy Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee (term XVI) and Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee due to unexpected and serious health issues and his personal request.

The Politburo decided to relieve him of his roles in the Party Committee and reassign him as Deputy Head of the Central Committee for Policy and Strategy. In his place, Vũ Đại Thắng, Secretary of the Quảng Ninh Provincial Party Committee, has been assigned as Deputy Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee for the 2025–2030 term and recommended for election as Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee for the 2021–2026 term.

Previously, on November 7, Trung was transferred from Nghệ An to Hanoi to become Deputy Secretary, and shortly after, he was elected Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee, with the appointment approved by the Prime Minister on November 18. [Thanhnien, in Vietnamese] [Vietnamnet]

Vietnam: Launch of pilot AI education program for schools

(hn) The Ministry of Education has launched a pilot plan for AI education in schools, structured around four knowledge strands: human-centered mindset, AI ethics, applied AI techniques, and AI system design.

The curriculum spans two stages: basic education (elementary and middle school) and career-oriented education (high school). Elementary students explore

intuitive AI applications, middle schoolers learn AI principles and risk awareness, and high schoolers focus on system design and problem-solving. The pilot will integrate AI flexibly without overloading students, allowing schools to choose methods such as subject integration, projects, or clubs.

Localities will use existing resources efficiently, and social engagement is encouraged. Materials and teacher training will begin in December, with the pilot reviewed by May 2026. AI will also be piloted in school management to support teaching and assessment innovation. [Tuoitrenews] [Dantriinternational]

Vietnam: Launch of 5-year “golden visa” to attract global talent

(hn) Vietnam has introduced a new five-year multiple-entry “talent visa,” the first component of its broader golden visa framework aimed at drawing highly skilled foreign professionals. Implemented under Decree No. 221/2025/NĐ-CP on August 15, the scheme targets internationally recognized experts in academia, science, business leadership, culture, arts, and sports. Unlike traditional golden visas centered on investment thresholds, Vietnam’s model prioritizes expertise and international reputation, aligning with the government’s goal to strengthen research capacity, innovation, and soft power.

The new visa allows stays of up to 90 days per entry and is issued as a special exemption card valid for five years. It forms part of a three-tier package that will later include a 5–10-year general golden visa and a 10-year investor visa, the latter expected after 2026.

The program supports Vietnam’s wider strategy to boost competitiveness, attract long-term foreign residents, and meet its target of 23 million international tourists in 2025. [Aviation]

Vietnam to boost power imports fivefold to meet soaring demand

(hn) Vietnam plans to significantly increase imported electricity from Laos and China to 9,360–12,100 MW in the next five years—over five times current levels—to meet rapid demand growth and support an expected double-digit GDP expansion. Currently, imports account for only about 2.4 percent of national power capacity. By 2030, imported power is projected to

reach 4–5.1 percent of total capacity, mostly from Laos (around 8,000 MW) transmitted through new 500kV and 220kV lines. Vietnam is also considering importing another 3,000 MW from China.

Under the revised PDP8, electricity output and imports are expected to reach 560–625 billion kWh by 2030. Meeting demand will require an estimated USD 136.3 billion in investment by 2030 and another USD 569.1 billion by 2050. Vietnam's current system capacity is nearly 90,000 MW, but the growing share of renewables poses operational challenges. The country plans to prioritize energy storage (especially batteries), fast-start generation, and high-voltage direct current transmission to ensure reliability and long-distance power transfer. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Hà Nội plans gradual restrictions on gasoline motorbikes to tackle air pollution

(hn) Hà Nội will not fully ban gasoline-powered motorbikes within Ring Road No. 1 in 2026. Instead, the city plans time- and area-specific restrictions as part of a gradual transition to low-emission zones.

The pilot will start in nine central wards in 2026, expand to 14 wards by 2028, and cover 36 wards within Ring Road 3 by 2030, with further expansions thereafter. Restrictions will also target cars not meeting Euro 4 standards, commercial vehicles, and app-based transport services. Incentives and support measures will help residents and businesses shift to cleaner vehicles.

The approach replaces an earlier, stricter full ban, reflecting Hà Nội's focus on sustainable implementation, public feedback, and alignment with transport infrastructure while addressing severe air pollution from traffic. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnamstar]

Vietnam: Government reaffirms 2050 net-zero target despite USD 28 billion transition gap

(ms) Vietnam has reaffirmed its 2050 net-zero emissions commitment, even as policymakers warn that the country faces a substantial financing shortfall for its green transition. At the Autumn Economic Forum 2025 in Ho Chi Minh City on November 26, officials and experts noted that Vietnam will need an

estimated USD 28 billion by 2030 to meet targets laid out in its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

Economist Trần Du Lịch, who chaired the forum's high-level dialogue, cautioned that Vietnam risks losing competitiveness if it lags in both green and digital transformation, as global supply chains increasingly demand low-carbon production. Participants stressed that accelerating the transition will require clearer regulatory frameworks, stronger incentives for renewable energy, and more effective mechanisms to mobilize private and international capital.

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính reiterated that the government remains committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, despite fiscal constraints and competing development priorities. The renewed pledge comes as Vietnam faces mounting climate risks, including intensifying storms, rising energy demand, and pressure from major export markets adopting carbon-border measures.

Analysts say the coming years will be critical in determining whether Vietnam can translate ambitious climate goals into bankable projects and sustained decarbonization. [Recessary]

Vietnam: Government plans 33 airports by 2030 to boost connectivity and investment

(ms) Vietnam will expand its aviation network to 33 airports by 2030, up from the current 22, according to a revised master plan submitted by the Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam (CAAV). The system is expected to handle 297 million passengers annually and will require nearly VND 500 trillion (USD 19 billion) in combined state and private investment.

The update adds Mang Den in the Central Highlands and Van Phong on the south-central coast, aligning with national strategies to develop tourism zones, logistics corridors and coastal economic hubs. Van Phong Bay is planned as a service-logistics center, while Mang Den is being positioned as a major eco-tourism destination.

The CAAV said the additions will strengthen regional connectivity, attract private capital, and reinforce defence and security infrastructure. Mang Den Airport is projected to cost VND 5 trillion (USD 191 million), while Van Phong will require VND 9.2 trillion (USD 351 million). [Vietnam+]

Vietnam: State shipbuilder SBIC about to enter bankruptcy

(ms) Vietnam's state-owned shipbuilding group SBIC is set to enter formal bankruptcy after years of mounting losses and unsuccessful restructuring efforts, according to a government decision endorsed by the Politburo. Deputy Transport Minister Nguyễn Xuân Sang said bankruptcy is now "unavoidable," as SBIC's liabilities far exceed its asset base and the corporation can no longer meet its financial obligations.

SBIC was established in 2013 to take over the collapsed state shipbuilder Vinashin, which failed under roughly US$4 billion in debt. Despite once being among the world's top five shipbuilders during its 1999–2007 peak, operations under SBIC never returned to profitability. Mismanagement, cost overruns and outdated production capacity continued to undermine performance over the past decade.

The approved plan covers SBIC and seven subsidiaries. Authorities are drafting a bankruptcy roadmap focused on asset liquidation, debt settlement and transferring viable units into new ownership structures free from historic liabilities. Shipyards with ongoing contracts may continue operating during the transition.

While the move marks a major setback for Vietnam's state-led industrial strategy, officials argue it could also open the way for renewal. Sang said restructuring may allow shipyards to reorient toward next-generation, low-emission vessels as global demand shifts toward greener maritime technologies. [Maritime Fair Trade]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

ASEAN sets new 2026–2030 transport plan

(ms) ASEAN transport ministers met on 20 November 2025 in Nay Pyi Taw and approved a series of concrete policy frameworks that will shape regional connectivity, sustainability and cross-border transport over the next five years. The meeting concluded the End Review of the Kuala Lumpur Transport Strategic Plan (2016–2025), which recorded strong overall progress, and formally adopted its successor, the ASEAN Transport Sectoral Plan (ATSP) 2026–2030. The new plan sets operational priorities for integration, digitalisation, decarbonisation and infrastructure harmonisation.

Aviation was a major focus. Ministers noted continued implementation of the ASEAN Sustainable Aviation Action Plan and launched work on a Sustainable Aviation Roadmap for adoption in 2026, aligned with ICAO goals including net-zero emissions by 2050 and a 5 percent emissions reduction by 2030 through sustainable fuels. They also approved the Terms of Reference for implementing the Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Flight Crew Licensing and reviewed progress on the Fourth ASEAN Air Navigation Services Master Plan, which will guide modernisation of regional air traffic management.

In land transport, ASEAN adopted the EV Implementation Roadmap, which outlines coordinated steps for scaling EV manufacturing, charging networks and servicing standards across member states. Ministers also endorsed recommendations to accelerate digitalisation of public transport and last-mile delivery services, addressing large gaps in digital readiness between countries. To improve freight movement, ministers highlighted increased use of the ASEAN Customs Transit System in seven member states and ongoing work to expand ACTS to rail.

ASEAN also adopted the Strategic Plan on Rail Interoperability, which identifies legal, technical and operational reforms needed to enable seamless cross-

border rail operations—an important step as member states expand regional rail corridors.

In maritime transport, ministers approved the ASEAN Regional Strategy on Sustainable Ship Waste Management, which seeks to harmonise port procedures, strengthen reception facilities and reduce illegal discharges.

Engagement with partners produced several deliverables. ASEAN and New Zealand signed a new Air Services Agreement, expanding market access and connectivity. New long-term cooperation frameworks were also launched or updated with the EU, Japan, China, the Republic of Korea and the United States, covering safety, sustainability, smart mobility and transport digitalisation.

The 32nd ASEAN Transport Ministers Meeting will be held in the Philippines in 2026. [ASEAN]

EU drops WTO case against China as flows with Lithuania partially recover

(ms) The European Union has formally withdrawn its WTO complaint against China over alleged economic coercion targeting Lithuania, marking an end to a dispute that strained EU-China relations for nearly four years. In a notification to WTO members on December 2, Brussels said the case was being terminated because "key objectives have been met and relevant trade has resumed," though it acknowledged trade volumes remain well below pre-2021 levels.

The dispute originated after Lithuania permitted the establishment of a Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius in 2021—an act Beijing condemned as violating its One China principle. Soon after, Lithuanian exporters reported they had effectively been blocked from Chinese customs systems, with shipments plunging by more than 90 percent year-on-year. Beijing denied imposing a formal embargo, insisting any disruptions were commercial rather than political.

The EU launched a WTO case in 2022, arguing China's actions amounted to coercive discrimination and threatened the integrity of European supply chains. While the case never reached the ruling stage, the EU's pressure—combined with broader diplomatic stabilization—helped reopen channels for Lithuanian goods in 2024–25.

Despite Brussels' decision to close the file, critics note Lithuania's exports to China remain a fraction of their

2021 levels, questioning whether trade has genuinely normalized. EU officials counters that a settlement was pragmatic given improving conditions and the upcoming implementation of the bloc's Anti-Coercion Instrument, which provides new tools to deter future pressure.

The withdrawal signals a desire to stabilize EU-China economic relations amid wider geopolitical tensions, even as underlying disagreements over Taiwan and sovereignty persist. [South China Morning Post]

Japan, UK, and Italy advance trilateral next-generation fighter program

(dql) Japan, the United Kingdom, and Italy have taken a key step forward in their Global Combat Air Program (GCAP), a joint initiative to develop a sixth-generation fighter by the mid-2030s. Defense ministers Shinjiro Koizumi, John Healey and Guido Crosetto held a video conference on November 25 to review progress, reaffirm commitments, and coordinate the final steps needed to finalize the program's first international integration contract with EdgeWing before year-end. [Ministry of Defense, Japan] [Anadolu Ajansı]

GCAP combines expertise from Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, the UK's BAE Systems, and Italy's Leonardo, focusing on advanced sensors, survivability in contested environments, and a new propulsion system using high-temperature materials, thermal-management technologies, and additive manufacturing.

The program is central to Japan's future air-defense strategy, supports the UK's combat-air industrial capacity, and strengthens Italy's aerospace sector while deepening European-Asian defense cooperation. [Defence Blog] [Army Recognition]

Japan denies U.S. President Trump suggesting Prime Minister Takaichi to soften tone on Taiwan

(ay) The Japanese government has rejected a *Wall Street Journal* report claiming that U.S. President Donald Trump advised Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi not to provoke China over Taiwan during a recent telephone call. Chief Cabinet Secretary Kihara Minoru said on November 27 that the report was incorrect and that Tokyo had lodged a complaint with the

newspaper. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan] [NHK World]

According to the article, citing individuals briefed on the exchange, Trump had subtly suggested that Takaichi temper her public comments following her statement earlier in November that a "Taiwan emergency" involving the use of force could trigger Japanese security involvement. The WSJ framed Trump's concerns in the context of safeguarding last month's U.S.–China trade agreement, stating that tensions over Taiwan had become linked to the deal. [The Wall Street Journal, $] [Kyodo News]

Tokyo's denial comes amid deterioration of ties with China over her comments last month suggesting that a crisis in Taiwan could involve Japan. Since then, Beijing has launched a series of retaliatory measures to pressure Takaichi into retracting her remarks (see article in this edition, AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4).

Mongolia, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation sign regional cooperation agreements

(fs) Mongolia signed three major cooperation documents during the 24th Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Ministerial Conference, held on November 20 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, aimed at strengthening regional trade, innovation, digital development, and tourism.

By endorsing the CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation Partnership declaration, Mongolia reaffirmed its commitment to reducing trade barriers, improving regulatory transparency, and enhancing supply chain connectivity.

The country also joined the Innovation and Venture Investment initiative, designed to support startups, expand access to regional investment, and establish phased regional venture funds. In addition, Mongolia expressed its intention to participate in the CAREC Digital Corridor memorandum to advance digital connectivity, internet infrastructure, and cybersecurity standards.

Mongolia further endorsed a memorandum on smart, sustainable, and inclusive regional tourism, supporting cross-border travel products, digital visa systems, and broader private-sector engagement. According to the Ministry of Economy and Development of Mongolia, these agreements carry strategic importance for

advancing regional integration, modernizing logistics, and improving competitiveness.

Since 2001, CAREC has mobilized USD 51.02 billion for regional projects promoting economic growth and connectivity. [Montsame]

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development debars Mongolian companies over corrupt payments

(fs) The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has imposed a 4.5-year debarment on Max Impex LLC, Khan Altai Resource LLC and 22 affiliated companies after an investigation identified corrupt practices linked to an EBRD-financed project in southwestern Mongolia. The project involved a senior loan to Khan Altai for the purchase of mining equipment.

According to the EBRD's Office of the Chief Compliance Officer, both entities made improper payments to EBRD staff in an attempt to influence decisions related to the project and potential future financing. The staff members immediately reported the misconduct and returned the funds.

The debarment follows a settlement agreement in which the companies admitted responsibility and agreed to strengthen their compliance systems, undertake independent audits and report on implementation. Their cooperation and voluntary withdrawal from other EBRD projects resulted in reduced sanctions, but failure to meet obligations could extend the debarment by four years. [EBRD]

Joint U.S.-South Korea drills draw sharp criticism from North Korea

(sm) Pyongyang has formally criticized the recent expansion of joint military exercises conducted by South Korea and the United States thereby asserting that the intensified drill schedule threatens the security balance on the Korean Peninsula. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

The North's statement emphasized that the growing frequency and scale of allied training activities reflects what it sees as a shift toward heightened military pressure. [KNCA]

The reaction highlights the increasingly constrained environment for risk reduction and dialogue. Observers caution that more frequent allied exercises, combined with sharper responses from Pyongyang, may reinforce a cycle of reciprocal military action that leaves very little room for deescalation tactics.

North Korea's framing of the drills as destabilizing is likely to justify additional displays of its own capabilities, thereby complicating regional security planning and further narrowing the prospects for diplomatic engagement. This event reflects a broader trend in which deterrence measures are rising on all sides where political avenues remain limited.

EU and South Korea deepen digital partnership

(mo) The European Union and South Korea reinforced their digital partnership during the third EU–ROK Digital Partnership Council meeting held on November 28 in Seoul, co-chaired by Korean Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Science and ICT Bae Kyunghoon and European Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy Henna Virkkunen.

Both sides reviewed progress since the second council meeting in Brussels in March 2024 and agreed that the partnership has delivered important results across multiple digital fields, prompting a commitment to deepen cooperation with greater stakeholder involvement to strengthen industry collaboration.

The discussions focused on expanding joint research in semiconductors, 6G, artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, enhancing competitiveness, innovation and economic resilience, progressing regulatory alignment on AI under the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, increasing information sharing on data spaces, and intensifying cybersecurity cooperation on threat intelligence and supply-chain security, alongside continued joint engagement in international standardization bodies such as the International Telecommunication Union, with the next review meeting scheduled for Brussels in 2026. [European Commission 1] [European Commission2] [European Parliament]

East Asian finance chiefs push for stronger regional cooperation with ASEAN

(mo) South Korea, China, Japan and ASEAN agreed to deepen regional cooperation to counter economic uncertainties and pursue new growth opportunities during the ASEAN+3 Finance and Central Bank Deputies' Meeting held in Hong Kong on November 26-27.

International bodies, including the IMF and ADB, assessed that although the region's economy is outperforming initial expectations, long-term growth faces headwinds from protectionism, fiscal vulnerabilities, market volatility and potential AI-related investment adjustments.

Member nations emphasized enhanced coordination in trade, investment and finance, calling for both short-term measures to stabilize currency and financial markets and longer-term structural reforms to boost productivity. They also discussed advancing the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization — a 240 billion USD regional currency-swap safety net — toward a paid-in capital model. [The Korea Herald]

Ukraine denounces "Russian Hoax" after fake posters urging South Koreans to join Ukrainian Army appear online

(mo) Photos of posters urging South Koreans to enlist in the Ukrainian military circulated online last week, prompting Ukraine's government to dismiss them as a fabricated "Russian disinformation" effort. The images — showing a recruitment-style poster affixed to a streetlight in Seongnam, Gyeonggi Province — were uploaded on November 20 to Medium by a Philippine-based freelance journalist.

The poster, titled **"**Join the Ukrainian Army!**"** in Korean, falsely claimed that South Koreans who enlist would receive high pay, full equipment, their choice of battalion, eligibility for Ukrainian citizenship, combat experience, and even "the legal right to kill North Korean residents." It also displayed the real phone number and email address of the Ukrainian Embassy in Seoul.

Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs swiftly rejected the materials as part of Moscow's ongoing information warfare. [The Korea Herald]

SAARC Programming Committee meets

(lm) The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) held its 61st Programming Committee meeting online under Nepal's chairmanship. The session focused on routine administration: reviewing and preparing to finalize the 2026 budgets and activity plans of SAARC's specialized bodies and regional centers. Remarks by officials noted the organization's upcoming fortieth anniversary but introduced no new initiatives or policy shifts. [Kuensel]

India calls for modernization of global biosecurity frameworks

(dql) Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar warned that the misuse of biological weapons by non-state actors is no longer a "distant possibility," urging a comprehensive overhaul of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

Speaking at a conference marking 50 years of the BWC, he highlighted critical gaps, including the absence of a compliance system, permanent technical body, and mechanisms to track new scientific developments. Jaishankar stressed the need for verification systems and systematic reviews to ensure global biosecurity keeps pace with technological advances, while reaffirming India's support for international cooperation in the peaceful use of biological materials. [Ministry of External Affairs, India] [First Post]

In September, a NATO-backed Advanced Research Workshop on bacterial biological agents in the Euro-MENA region focused zoonotic pathogens—such as anthrax, brucellosis, plague, and tularemia—that pose both public health and bioterrorism risks. Discussions emphasized gaps in regional surveillance, the dual-use nature of certain bacterial agents, and the need for scientific transparency and responsible research oversight. [Global BioDefense]

India re-elected to global maritime body council

(dql) India has been re-elected to the Council of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for the 2026–27 term, reflecting its growing influence in global maritime governance.

India's election in Category B — "largest stake in international seaborne trade" — places it among ten other countries, including Australia, Brazil, Canada,

France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The election is seen as reflecting international confidence in India's maritime ambitions, including its Vision 2047, which envisions a USD 1 trillion investment in shipbuilding, shipping infrastructure, and maritime trade over the next 25 years. [The Indian Express] [The Tribune]

India's growing influence in IMO highlights its strategic role in global shipping governance, maritime security, and international trade, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.

Maldivian President Muizzu travels to UK for high-level briefing on private capital and climate finance

President Mohamed Muizzu has departed for the United Kingdom to participate in a high-level briefing convened by King Charles III on mobilizing private capital for sustainable development and global climate transitions. The session will bring together leaders of major financial institutions and heads of multilateral development banks to discuss how international cooperation can expand private-sector financing for climate-aligned growth.

The briefing is organized under the Sustainable Markets Initiative (SMI), a platform established by King Charles III to promote private-sector leadership on sustainability and to encourage long-term, environmentally responsible investment consistent with national climate goals and the 1.5°C pathway. [The Sun]

Pakistan proposes new regional maritime dialogue to strengthen representation at IMO

(lm) Pakistan has proposed creating a "Regional Maritime Dialogue" bringing together Gulf Cooperation Council states, Central Asian countries and African partners to coordinate positions on global shipping regulations. The initiative was announced at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in London, where Pakistan argued that fast-changing environmental, technological and safety requirements demand more structured cooperation across the Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean region.

The proposal aims to help participating states align on emissions rules, navigation standards and search-and-rescue coordination. Pakistan highlighted its existing responsibility for NAVAREA IX, the IMO-designated zone covering the Arabian Sea and Gulf waters under the global navigational warning system. Islamabad said the new platform could eventually operate as a coordinated bloc similar to the Small Island Developing States, which have increased their influence at the IMO by presenting unified positions.

Pakistan also outlined capacity-building plans, including a Regional Maritime University and training institute to prepare seafarers for updated IMO standards involving digital navigation, automation and emerging technologies. [Arab News]

Pakistan urges EU to keep GSP+ accessible as tariff changes hit exports and GI disputes intensify

(lm) Pakistan has called on the European Union (EU) to ensure that the next Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) framework remains development-focused, warning that recent tariff changes and new conditions risk undermining the program's purpose. GSP+ is the EU's trade-preferences scheme that grants highly preferential, often duty-free, access to the European market in exchange for a country's implementation of 27 international human-rights, labor, and governance conventions. Pakistan is one of its largest beneficiaries, making EU access central to its textiles-led export economy.

In a meeting with the visiting EU monitoring mission in Islamabad, Pakistan's commerce authorities stressed that the country has implemented all required conventions and emphasized the importance of predictable market access amid rising economic pressures. Islamabad raised particular concern over the EU's withdrawal of duty-free access for Pakistani ethanol earlier this year, noting that the reimposition of duties has sharply reduced the sector's competitiveness and affected the livelihoods of millions of sugarcane farmers.

The delegation also discussed the long-running geographical indication dispute over Basmati rice, urging the EU to ensure an impartial decision as Pakistan and India await the bloc's ruling on exclusive GI rights to the aromatic variety. Pakistani officials additionally encouraged consideration of further GI listings, including Sindhi Ajrak, Pink Salt, and mangoes,

arguing that these products merit protection due to cultural heritage and export potential.

The EU team also held extensive discussions with Pakistan's law and human-rights ministries. Brussels acknowledged Pakistan's legislative steps since 2014 — including protections for women, children, labor groups, and persons with disabilities — but highlighted remaining gaps in enforcement and institutional capacity tied to the 27 UN conventions linked to GSP+. Pakistani officials outlined progress in multiple areas, including the National Commission for Human Rights, gender-related initiatives, measures for journalist safety, reductions in capital offenses, implementation of the Torture and Custodial Death Act, and reforms in child-rights institutions and legislation.

Human-rights officials pointed to ongoing cooperation under the EU-funded Huqooq-e-Pakistan Project, which supports treaty reporting and institutional reforms, and reaffirmed that the Pakistan–EU partnership remains central to governance improvements and sustainable development. [Arab News]

Escalating militant violence and deepening rift between Pakistan, Afghanistan fuel regional security crisis

(lm/my/as) Pakistan and Afghanistan continue their deadlocked confrontation in which escalating military violence and the collapse of political dialogue continue to reinforce one another, driving the bilateral relationship into its most destabilized phase since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Months of failed engagement over Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) sanctuaries, combined with reciprocal accusations, retaliatory security measures and deeply entrenched mistrust, have produced a standoff that neither side appears willing—or able—to de-escalate.

The latest surge unfolded within a 48-hour window. On November 24, a suicide bombing on the Frontier Constabulary headquarters in Peshawar killed several personnel, intensifying Islamabad's longstanding claim that attacks inside Pakistan are being directed from Afghan territory. The following day, Pakistani authorities publicly accused both the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) of jointly planning the November 11 suicide attack at Islamabad's district court complex, asserting that the plot was coordinated in Kabul and executed by operatives who had moved repeatedly between the two countries.

Only hours after these accusations, Kabul claimed that Pakistan had carried out overnight airstrikes in Khost, Kunar, and Paktika, saying that nine children and a woman were killed—a charge Pakistan denies. The same day, Pakistan's information minister detailed arrests, cross-border travel routes and a recorded confession by the alleged handler of the Islamabad court bombing, insisting that "all the planning was done in Kabul." Kabul responded by condemning what it described as Pakistani airstrikes, vowing that any further actions would draw a response. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Border friction continued to intensify. On November 29, Pakistan's state media reported that Afghan border forces fired six to seven artillery rounds into Upper Kurram district, prompting retaliatory fire from Pakistani positions. Islamabad later said that the interim understanding negotiated earlier in Istanbul—meant to prevent the use of Afghan territory for attacks and to act as a stabilizing mechanism—had never been a conventional ceasefire and was now clearly unable to contain recurring incidents. Kabul, for its part, warned that Pakistani actions risked further escalation. [Arab News 3]

Following the alleged airstrikes, public messaging hardened on both sides. Kabul vowed retaliation, while Pakistan's defense leadership warned that Afghanistan risked "total isolation and ultimately collapse" if it continued to allow anti-Pakistan militant groups to operate from its territory. [Arab News 4] [Arab News 5]

Behind the military escalation lies a deeper rupture: the diplomatic track has collapsed. Two recent rounds of Pakistan–Taliban talks held first in Doha and later in Türkiye were designed to address Pakistan's core demand that Kabul take verifiable action against TTP networks operating on Afghan soil. Both rounds ended without progress. Islamabad insisted that attacks inside Pakistan were being planned from Afghan territory; Kabul rejected this and reframed the issue as an internal Pakistani security matter.

Efforts by Qatar and Türkiye to keep the Istanbul mechanism alive as a de-escalatory framework also faltered, leaving no functioning political channel capable of stabilizing the frontier or managing rapidly escalating incidents. [Arab News 6]

This diplomatic impasse coincides with a sustained surge in militant activity inside Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In Bannu, militants attacked the Ahmedzai police station, leading to clashes in which several fighters were killed before fleeing into nearby areas where they were intercepted by local tribes.

Security officials report that militant activity has become a near-daily occurrence across the province. In Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan's security forces announced that they had killed twenty-two TTP militants during an intelligence-driven operation under the Azm-e-Istehkam campaign, the country's renewed counterterrorism drive. These operations followed another fatal attack on a police checkpoint in Hangu district, underscoring the steady deterioration in Pakistan's internal security landscape since the collapse of a previous ceasefire with the TTP in 2022. [Arab News 7] [Arab News 8]

Pakistan has also linked broader regional violence to Afghanistan in its condemnations of recent international attacks. Islamabad warned of a "transnational" terror threat after a deadly shooting in Washington reportedly carried out by an Afghan national, and condemned the killing of three Chinese workers in Tajikistan near the Afghan border in an armed-drone assault that Dushanbe says originated from Afghan territory. [Arab News 9] [Arab News 10]

At the same time, Pakistan's decision to close all border crossings on October 12 has produced a sharp but targeted economic rupture. Islamabad argues that trade cannot continue while cross-border militancy persists, insisting that "blood and business cannot go together." The closures followed deadly clashes and earlier airstrikes on alleged TTP positions; Kabul denies facilitating militancy and says Pakistan's security crisis is an internal matter. For Afghanistan, the shutdown has accelerated its longer-term shift toward Iranian and Indian supply routes, with increased reliance on the Indian-run Chabahar port and new commercial arrangements with New Delhi. For Pakistan, the immediate fallout includes a fifty-seven percent drop in exports to Afghanistan in October and the immobilization of essential goods—including medicine shipments—at key crossings. The losses fall heavily on border communities dependent on daily labor and informal trade, sectors particularly exposed to abrupt restrictions on mobility. [Nikkei Asia] [Arab News 11]

Finland to close embassies in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar

(lm) Finland has announced it will shut down its embassies in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar in 2026, citing strategic, operational and resourcing considerations. According to Helsinki, the closures form part of a long-term restructuring plan in which diplomatic resources are being shifted toward markets deemed strategically more important. Earlier this year,

Finland opened a new Consulate General in Houston, and it plans to establish additional commercial offices in 2026 at locations where it previously maintained a presence. [Arab News]

Sri Lanka warns over modified separatist symbols used abroad to evade legal scrutiny

(lm) Sri Lanka has raised concerns that diaspora groups in Canada and the United Kingdom are displaying altered versions of flags associated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—a Sri Lankan armed separatist organization defeated in 2009 and banned in several countries—in an effort to avoid legal scrutiny. According to informed sources, activists have been using insignia that closely resemble the original tiger emblem but with slight modifications, making it more difficult for authorities to prove a direct link to the banned group.

The issue has emerged against a backdrop of long-standing diplomatic friction between Sri Lanka and Canada over LTTE-related activities within the Canadian Tamil diaspora. Canada, which hosts one of the largest Tamil communities outside Sri Lanka, has seen periodic public demonstrations using LTTE symbols; Colombo argues these displays revive separatist narratives and undercut reconciliation efforts. Ottawa maintains that the LTTE is a listed terrorist organization but must balance enforcement with domestic protections for freedom of expression, a tension that has repeatedly complicated bilateral engagement.

Recent developments—including the City of Brampton's recognition of November 21 as "Tamil Eelam National Flag Day" and the appearance of similar symbols during an event in London—prompted renewed concern in Colombo. Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath raised the matter with the Canadian High Commissioner, urging Ottawa to curb activities that promote separatist ideology. The Canadian side reiterated its recognition of Sri Lanka's sovereignty and stated that the federal government does not endorse any symbols linked to banned separatist organizations. [Daily Mirror]

Cambodia secures ADB USD 763 million water and sanitation program

(dql) Cambodia has secured a USD 763 million investment from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to overhaul its water and sanitation infrastructure. The program, part of ADB's Livable, Resilient, and Water-Secure Cities initiative, will extend clean water and sanitation services to over 2 million people across 14 cities and 12 districts. The investment includes a $20 million grant and focuses on inclusivity, with 15 percent of beneficiaries from low-income households.

While Cambodia has made progress in water and sanitation, with coverage reaching 83 percent in 2024, challenges remain in sewerage, drainage, and waste management. The program aims to enhance urban resilience, especially as climate risks and rapid urban growth threaten infrastructure. Cambodia's urban population is expected to grow by 48 percent by 2040, intensifying demand for services.

This project aligns with Cambodia's goals for sustainable development and poverty reduction. In addition, the ADB approved USD 93.6 million for rural water and sanitation improvements, benefiting 88,000 households. [Cambodianess]

China raises concerns over Malaysia's trade deal with US

(tl) China has formally voiced its concerns over trade deals Malaysia and Cambodia recently signed with the United States, marking one of Beijing's first direct complaints over Washington-linked agreements in Southeast Asia.

Chinese officials told Malaysia during a meeting last week that they had "grave concerns" over some parts of the pact, urging Kuala Lumpur to carefully reassess the arrangement based on long-term national interests. A similar message was conveyed to Cambodian officials. However, no details of their concerns had been disclosed.

Both agreements, inked during US President Donald Trump's visit to the region, include provisions encouraging Malaysia and Cambodia to align with Washington on national security-related trade rules, such as export controls, investment screening and sanctions. Beijing has cautioned countries against deals it viewed as undermining Chinese interests, but until now had not publicly confronted partners directly.

Under the signed trade agreements with the United States, Malaysia will grant preferential entry for US goods and services, while receiving 19 percent tariff

exemptions for some goods in return, but must also adopt Washington-aligned restrictions, including export controls, sanctions on sensitive technology and inbound investment for national security risks. Kuala Lumpur is also expected to prevent domestic firms from helping other countries bypass US trade measures.

Both Malaysia and Cambodia agreements additionally include commitments to strengthen defense-trade cooperation with the US and tighten enforcement against transshipment activities. [Free Malaysia Today]

Concerning with this matter, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim stated that Malaysia has formally addressed China's concerns, clarifying that the trade agreement with the US does not limit Malaysia's bilateral cooperation with Beijing. He said the same assurance was communicated directly to Chinese Premier Li Qiang, adding that China remains one of Malaysia's most important trading partners. [Malay Mail 1]

Moreover, Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Zafrul told Parliament that China feared the pact with the United States might duplicate or conflict with existing ASEAN-China commitments or result in preferential treatment for US companies. He said that Malaysia has clarified the legal intent of the agreement both in Kuala Lumpur and during Premier Li Qiang's recent visit, stressing that the Reciprocal Trade (ART) with the United States does not undermine obligations under ASEAN-China frameworks.

According to Tengku Zafrul, China responded positively and has proposed negotiating a broader MoU to strengthen bilateral trade and investment, especially in major sectors and among large firms. He said both countries, which are already comprehensive strategic partners, aim to expand cooperation beyond existing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) frameworks, including RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) and the upgraded ASEAN-China FTA 3.0. [Malay Mail 2]

National Unity Government representative warns that planned junta election will exacerbate trafficking risks

(su/anl) Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations appointed by the National Unity Government (NUG), Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, addressed the UN General Assembly's High-level Meeting on the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons on November 26. In his statement, he said human trafficking in Myanmar has

expanded since the 2021 military takeover, arguing that weakened rule of law, displacement, and ongoing conflict have created conditions enabling organized criminal networks to operate.

According to his remarks, around 3.6 million people are internally displaced nationwide, with women, children, and minorities— including Rohingya—facing heightened trafficking risks. He said the dismantling of judicial structures has allowed large-scale criminal operations, including cyber-scam compounds and cross-border trafficking schemes, to expand. He referenced UNODC reporting on "forced criminality" in Southeast Asia, noting that victims from multiple countries have been identified.

Kyaw Moe Tun welcomed regional cooperation efforts to address transnational crime and said NUG-aligned forces, including ethnic resistance organizations, had pledged cooperation with international partners in combating cyber-enabled trafficking. He also cited a recent statement by the Karen National Union calling for stronger international coordination on evidence collection and law-enforcement measures.

He warned that the military authorities' planned election would not resolve political instability and argued that it risked prolonging conditions linked to trafficking networks. He said the NUG and allied groups reject the planned polls and continue to advocate for a transition toward a federal democratic system. [Mizzima]

UN raises alarm over surveillance and safety risks in Myanmar election

In the parallel, the United Nations warned that the upcoming elections in military-ruled Myanmar, scheduled for December 28, cannot be free or fair. The UN cautioned that the junta may deploy mass electronic surveillance at polling stations.

The UN human rights office told reporters in Geneva that the military-controlled ballot will take place in an environment marked by violence, intimidation, and insecurity, putting voters at serious risk. It stressed that the absence of safeguards to protect civilians raises grave concerns for those who choose—or are coerced—into participating and added that the military is "actively suppressing participation," even as it moves forward with the vote. The office further noted that Myanmar's election commission has mandated full electronic voting, raising fears that ballots could be traceable. Such tracking could expose voters to retaliation or threats from both the military and opposing armed groups.

Rights groups similarly argue that the election lacks legitimacy, noting that democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi was deposed and imprisoned following the coup, and her popular National League for Democracy party has been dissolved. [Mizzima]

ASEAN Secretary-General Kao visits Manila to support Philippine ASEAN Chairmanship

(ghd) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn met on November 27 to formally coordinate preparations for the Philippines' assumption of the bloc's chairmanship in 2026. During the courtesy call, Marcos emphasized that the country's leadership will be anchored on "peace and security, shared prosperity, and people-centered progress" under the theme "Navigating Our Future, Together."

To ensure the successful hosting of the 48th and 49th ASEAN Summits scheduled for May and October 2026, the Office of the President has requested a budget of USD 298.1 million from Congress. The government has identified the newly refurbished Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City and the Mactan Expo Center in Cebu as the primary venues for the high-level meetings.

Dr. Kao, who was in Manila for a two-day working visit, also met with other key officials, including Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro, Trade Secretary Cristina Aldeguer-Roque, and Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian, as well as the chair of the 2026 ASEAN Business Advisory Council, to solidify private-sector engagement and logistical details. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin]

Bangladesh's interim leader urges Chinese firms to shift from infrastructure to manufacturing investment

(lm) Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has pressed Chinese financial and industrial actors to expand beyond large infrastructure projects and move into direct manufacturing investment, identifying it as the next phase of China–Bangladesh economic engagement. He told Yang Dongning, Vice-President of the Export-Import Bank of China, that Bangladesh wants Chinese companies to relocate factories and use the country as a production base for exports, citing its

large, young workforce and access to major seaports in the southeast.

Chinese institutions indicated that investors are increasingly targeting green technology, pharmaceuticals, textiles, AI and e-commerce, and especially jute-based industrial production. Chinese firms are exploring large-scale joint ventures that would use up to one million tons of Bangladeshi jute annually for energy generation, fertilizers and alternatives to plastics—signaling a shift from raw-material imports to integrated industrial processing inside Bangladesh.

Yunus also highlighted opportunities in solar manufacturing, particularly rooftop solar systems, and proposed converting closed state-run jute mills into manufacturing sites for Chinese investment. He further encouraged exploration of rail connections to southern China to support relocated factories and strengthen regional logistics chains. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh continues to press India on extradition cases as adviser says broader ties will continue

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government is maintaining firm pressure on India to extradite former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal—both convicted by the domestic International Crimes Tribunal-1 (ICT-1) in cases tied to the July–August 2024 mass-violence events—while simultaneously assuring that wider bilateral relations will not be derailed.

Dhaka has issued a renewed diplomatic note to India's Ministry of External Affairs under the Bangladesh–India extradition treaty, requesting the handover of both individuals. New Delhi has confirmed receipt of the request and said it is "being examined," without providing a timeline. Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain said Bangladesh does not expect an immediate reply but anticipates a formal response in due course. He noted that India did not answer the first extradition request submitted in 2024, prompting the new communication following ICT-1's November verdicts, which imposed death sentences on Hasina and Kamal and a prison term on the former inspector general of police who testified as a state witness.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain said Dhaka does not expect an immediate reply but anticipates a formal response in due course. He acknowledged that India did not answer the first extradition request

submitted in 2024, prompting the fresh communication following ICT-1's November verdicts, which handed death sentences to both Hasina and Kamal and imposed a prison term on the former inspector general of police who testified as a state witness.

Senior Bangladeshi officials say Dhaka expects the extradition process to begin with Kamal, signaling to India that his case presents the more procedurally straightforward, lower-sensitivity option while New Delhi continues its internal assessment of the broader and more politically charged request concerning Hasina. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

At the same time, Hossain stressed that unresolved bilateral issues—including Hasina's extradition, border killings, and the long-delayed Teesta water-sharing agreement—will not stall broader Bangladesh–India ties. He argued that Bangladesh's national interests require continued engagement and that "one issue is not dependent on the other." He added that the "warm relationship" during the former Awami League administration reflected cooperation between the two governments rather than wider public support, pointing out that longstanding grievances such as Teesta and border-security disputes remained unresolved during Hasina's 15-year rule. [Dhaka Tribune 3]

Arakan Army abducts 12 Bangladeshi fishermen after seizing two trawlers near St Martin's Island

(lm) 12 Bangladeshi fishermen from St Martin's Island were abducted today after the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic armed group operating in Myanmar's Rakhine State, seized two trawlers that had become stranded in the Bay of Bengal with engine failure. Local fishing association representatives confirmed that the fishermen were taken after the vessels began drifting south of St Martin's Island, Bangladesh's southernmost point and close to Myanmar's maritime boundary.

Local communities report growing anxiety as such detentions continue. The AA is currently believed to be holding more than 150 individuals, including both Bangladeshi and Rohingya fishermen, from previously seized trawlers. According to AA statistics, Arakan authorities released 188 Bangladeshi fishermen and 30 boats between January and mid-July this year in what they described as an effort to maintain stable relations. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh seeks to import additional hydropower from Nepal

(mml) Bangladesh is seeking to increase its electricity imports from Nepal by proposing the purchase of an additional 20 megawatts (MW) of hydropower, complementing the 40 MW it already imports during the June–November season. The proposal was tabled at the Nepal–Bangladesh Joint Steering Committee on Energy, which convened in Dhaka on November 27.

Bangladesh began importing the initial 40 MW in June under a trilateral arrangement with India, following several years of delays caused by procedural hurdles and conditions set by New Delhi. The power purchase agreement was concluded last October between the Bangladesh Power Development Board, the Nepal Electricity Authority, and India's NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam.

During the committee meeting, both countries also discussed expanding cooperation in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and capacity-building initiatives, indicating broader cross-border ambitions for regional electricity trade. [The Daily Star]

Canada signals intention to expand economic cooperation during senior trade official's Bangladesh visit

(lm) Canada has reaffirmed its commitment to deepening bilateral economic cooperation following the first official visit to Bangladesh by its senior trade official responsible for international commerce. Discussions between Canadian and Bangladeshi officials focused on expanding sector-specific partnerships in agriculture, clean technology, and investment, all framed as areas where Ottawa sees potential for stronger commercial ties and more diversified trade flows.

The visit included engagements with major private-sector actors in both countries, reflecting a shared interest in reinforcing supply chains for key commodities such as wheat, pulses, canola, and fertilizer, as well as exploring new opportunities in manufacturing and industrial technology. Canadian firms—including the country's largest investor in Bangladesh—held consultations with Bangladeshi business counterparts on scaling commercial cooperation beyond current levels. [Dhaka Tribune]

Brunei Sultan strengthens bilateral ties during state visit to Vietnam

(dql) Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei wrapped up a three-day state visit to Vietnam on December 2, at the invitation of Vietnam's State President Luong Cuong. During the visit, the Sultan participated in an official welcome ceremony, held talks with President Cuong, and met with key Vietnamese leaders, including Party General Secretary To Lam, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, and National Assembly Chairman Tran Thanh Man.

Emphasizing that bilateral cooperation continues to deepen through joint ventures in agriculture, growing trade linkages, and energy collaboration, the Sultan reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

Vietnamese leaders expressed confidence that the Sultan's seventh visit would further advance the Vietnam–Brunei Comprehensive Partnership, highlighting Brunei's impressive national development, including strong economic growth and a top-tier ranking in the Human Development Index.

The two sides celebrated the positive progress in trade, with bilateral exchanges rising by 165 percent in 2024, surpassing their 2025 target of USD 500 million.

Looking ahead, both nations agreed to boost political trust, promote trade and investment, and explore new avenues for cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and the Halal industry. They also issued a Joint Statement reaffirming their commitment to further enhancing collaboration in all areas. [The Star] [Nhan Dan] [Viet Nam News]

Cambodia, Poland explore advancement of partnership in third round of bilateral consultations

(dql) Last week, Cambodia and Poland held their third round of bilateral consultations in Warsaw, focusing on expanding cooperation in economic ties, development support, and political engagement.

During their talks, Cambodian Secretary of State Chring Botumrangsay and Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Władysław T. Bartoszewski stressed the need for sustained dialogue to deepen the partnership. Both

sides highlighted growing trade, more frequent exchanges, and broader sectoral cooperation.

They noted that regular consultations, Poland's honorary consulate in Phnom Penh, and a diplomatic-passport visa waiver all signal a continuing consolidation of bilateral ties. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia and Israel sign labor cooperation agreement

(dql) Cambodia and Israel have signed a labor cooperation agreement that will facilitate future workforce exchanges, offering new employment opportunities for Cambodian workers, particularly in agriculture and construction. The agreement, signed on December 1 between Cambodia's Minister of Labor Heng Sour and Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar, establishes the first formal framework for bilateral labor cooperation.

The agreement aims to create safe and legal pathways for Cambodians seeking employment in Israel, with a focus on sectors where Israel has high demand, such as agriculture and construction. Workers will be able to earn competitive wages, with salaries reaching up to USD 2,000 per month. The deal also promises opportunities for Cambodian workers to gain hands-on experience with Israel's advanced agricultural technologies. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia, New Zealand deepen cooperation

(dql) Cambodia and New Zealand reaffirmed their commitment to deepen ties during talks between Prime Minister Hun Manet and Foreign Minister Winston Peters in Phnom Penh. The November 30 meeting was part of Peters' two-day trip to the Southeast Asian nation to strengthen diplomatic outreach in the region.

The two sides agreed to broaden cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, agriculture, education, tourism, and exchanges between their citizens. Hun Manet welcomed greater economic engagement, while Peters underscored New Zealand's continued support for Cambodia's development and peacebuilding efforts. [Khmer Times]

In a separate meeting, Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn on November 29 reaffirmed their intention to boost

cooperation both bilaterally and in wider regional forums. Their discussion emphasized shared goals of promoting regional peace, stability, and economic development. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Cambodia]

US moves to flag Chinese companies Alibaba, Baidu and BYD as military-linked

(ms) The Pentagon has moved to designate Alibaba, Baidu and electric-vehicle giant BYD as companies supporting China's military, according to an October 7 letter to Congress revealed end of November — a step that risks injecting fresh friction into US–China ties despite the recent trade truce agreed by Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping on October 30.

Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg told lawmakers that the three firms, along with five additional Chinese tech and semiconductor companies — Eoptolink, Hua Hong Semiconductor, RoboSense, WuXi AppTec and Zhongji Innolight — meet the criteria for inclusion on the Pentagon's Section 1260H list of "Chinese military companies" operating in the US. The list carries no automatic legal penalties but acts as a significant red flag for investors, federal contractors and compliance departments, often triggering cascading restrictions and reputational damage.

The Defense Department has not confirmed whether the companies have been formally added to the list, which was last revised in January. Still, the move marks one of Washington's most sweeping attempts yet to link major Chinese civilian tech firms to Beijing's military-civil fusion strategy.

Alibaba and Baidu strongly rejected the Pentagon's assessment, calling the claims "baseless" and insisting their products are purely civilian. China's Foreign Ministry accused Washington of "unjustifiable suppression" and vowed to protect Chinese firms' interests.

The timing is notable: earlier in November, a White House memo — also disputed by Alibaba — alleged the firm had provided tech support for Chinese military operations against US targets. The Pentagon's latest conclusion suggests that, despite high-profile diplomatic efforts to stabilize relations, technology rivalry and national-security scrutiny remain central to the bilateral agenda heading into 2026. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China turns back to US soybeans after bilateral call

(ms) China has sharply increased purchases of US soybeans following a phone call between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping, marking the clearest signal yet that Beijing is repositioning toward a new trade accommodation with Washington. The shift coincides with China's sudden suspension of soybean shipments from five Brazilian plants — a move that, while officially attributed to contamination issues, is widely viewed as occurring within the context of renewed US–China trade alignment.

According to traders cited by Reuters, China booked at least 10–15 cargoes of US soybeans — worth roughly USD 300 million — in deals signed immediately after the November 25 Trump–Xi call. All shipments are set for January departure from Gulf Coast and Pacific Northwest ports. The buying surge comes despite US soybeans being substantially more expensive than Brazilian supplies, with Chinese importers paying premiums of USD 2.2–2.3 per bushel above Chicago futures, compared to around USD 1.8 for Brazilian cargoes.

Trump said Xi had "more or less agreed" to accelerate and expand Chinese purchases of US goods, and US officials later indicated Beijing is expected to buy 87.5 million tonnes of American soybeans over the next three and a half years. State-owned COFCO has already secured nearly 2 million tonnes since late October. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters]

Against this backdrop, China's November 26–27 suspension of soybean imports from five Brazilian facilities — two Cargill units and plants operated by Louis Dreyfus, CHS Agronegócios and 3Tentos — has drawn heightened scrutiny. Chinese customs officials said they found pesticide-treated wheat mixed into a 69,000-tonne Brazilian cargo, calling it a "serious violation" of safety rules. Brazil's agriculture ministry emphasized that only five out of 2,000 authorized plants were affected and that trade relations remain strong.

Still, analysts note that Beijing has long used sanitary regulations as both legitimate enforcement tools and strategic levers in managing supply dependence. The timing — days after Trump and Xi signaled progress toward a broader deal — suggests China may be subtly privileging US shipments to support the political momentum.

Traders say affected Brazilian cargoes may be diverted to alternative markets, while other Brazilian plants can

continue supplying China. But the broader trend is unmistakable: China's soybean sourcing is being reshaped not by market pricing but by diplomatic recalibration, as Washington and Beijing edge toward a trade framework that could reconfigure global agricultural flows in the months ahead. [Bloomberg] [South China Morning Post]

French President Macron to visit China, surprisingly without EU delegation

(ms) French President Emmanuel Macron is set to visit China from 3 to 5 December for a three-day state visit that will include stops in Beijing and Chengdu. The trip will feature a closed-door meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping followed by an expanded session with several French ministers, according to the Élysée. The visit aims to advance bilateral engagement while addressing broader strategic issues in China–EU relations.

In a departure from recent practice, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will not accompany Macron. Her absence marks a break from previous joint appearances with Macron during engagements with Xi, including in Paris in 2024 and Beijing in 2023. According to French officials, the visit will proceed as a "strictly bilateral" one, though Macron will brief EU partners afterwards. Trade remains an EU competence, and Paris indicated that Macron would act in alignment with agreed EU positions.

The visit takes place as the European Union seeks to manage a widening trade deficit with China and navigate ongoing frictions linked to market access, industrial overcapacity, and Chinese investigations into EU agricultural exports. Paris expects discussions to focus on reciprocal economic adjustments, with France and the EU pressing for stronger Chinese domestic consumption and reduced export surges.

Foreign policy issues will feature prominently, particularly China's stance on Russia's war in Ukraine. European governments have expressed concern over Beijing's provision of components used by Russia's defense sector. Macron is expected to reiterate the EU view that China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, bears responsibility to support international stability. [Euro News] [South China Morning Post]

Russia signals plans to expand oil and LNG supplies to China despite new US sanctions

(ms) Russia states interest to increase oil exports to China and deepen cooperation on liquefied natural gas (LNG), Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said at a Sino-Russian business forum in Beijing on November 25. China and India remain Russia's two largest buyers of crude following the collapse of Russian exports to Europe in 2022, with China currently importing more than 2.1 million barrels per day via seaborne shipments and pipelines.

Novak said Moscow is discussing expanded pipeline and maritime deliveries with Chinese partners, noting that intergovernmental agreements allow supply extensions through Kazakhstan until 2033. His remarks follow new U.S. sanctions imposed last month on Rosneft and Lukoil, Russia's two largest oil producers—measures President Vladimir Putin has publicly dismissed as having little effect on Russia's export capacity. Russian crude shipments have remained relatively steady so far this year.

Energy cooperation also extends to LNG, where Russia is under heavier sanctions pressure. China's CNPC holds a 20 percent stake in the Yamal LNG project, while the Silk Road Fund owns nearly 10 percent of Arctic LNG 2. The latter has struggled with tanker availability after U.S. sanctions restricted Russia's access to ice-class vessels, but China received its first sanctioned cargo from Arctic LNG 2 in late August. Moscow has continued to market discounted cargoes, with Chinese buyers reportedly paying 30–40 percent below benchmark prices.

Earlier in October, Russia's energy minister said LNG supplies from Arctic LNG 2 and Sakhalin 2 to China are set to rise and described "serious joint progress" between the two sides. Combined with new discussions on expanding oil flows, the statements underline Russia's reliance on China as its principal long-term energy outlet—and Beijing's continued willingness to absorb Russian crude and LNG despite sanctions pressure from the United States. [Egypt Oil&Gas] [Reuters]

Russia grants 30-day visa-free entry to broad categories of Chinese visitors

(ms) Russia has expanded visa-free access for Chinese nationals, with President Vladimir Putin signing a

decree on December 1 allowing stays of up to 30 days for tourists, business travelers, academics, artists and athletes. The measure, which takes effect immediately, mirrors Beijing's earlier decision to grant similar visa-free entry to Russian citizens and will remain in force until September 14, 2026.

The policy reflects the deepening strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing, formalized in their 2022 "no limits" agreement and further strengthened as Russia has grown increasingly dependent on Chinese trade to offset Western sanctions imposed after its invasion of Ukraine.

The exemption does not apply to Chinese migrant workers, long-term students or logistics and transport personnel—sectors where Russia maintains tighter immigration controls.

The move is expected to boost tourism and business exchanges, with both governments signaling interest in expanding cross-border mobility despite geopolitical tensions with the West. [Reuters]

Dutch's Nexperia calls on Chinese units to restore cooperation as supply chain rift widens

(ms) Dutch chipmaker Nexperia appealed publicly to its Chinese subsidiaries on November 27 to resume communication and help restore normal production, as the internal rupture caused by the Dutch government's takeover of the company on September 30 continues to disrupt global semiconductor supply chains.

In an open letter dated November 28, Nexperia B.V. said it had made "repeated and multiple attempts" to contact its Chinese units through calls, emails, and proposed meetings, but had received no response. The company warned that its inability to coordinate operations with its Dongguan-based packaging facilities is prolonging shortages of the basic automotive chips for which Nexperia is a critical global supplier.

Beijing imposed export controls on Nexperia-finished chips on October 4 in retaliation for the Dutch seizure, interrupting shipments to European automakers. Although exemptions issued later in October partially eased the bottleneck, wafer production and packaging flows remain disrupted after Nexperia's Chinese arm declared itself independent from European management. In turn, the Dutch headquarters halted

wafer shipments to China on October 26, citing non-payment and governance concerns.

Diplomatic efforts to stabilize the situation have gained some traction. During a November 26 video call, China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and EU Trade Commissioner Maros Sefčovič agreed to push for a company-led resolution, marking the first time Beijing endorsed direct negotiations between Nexperia's Dutch and Chinese units. However, China reiterated that the Dutch government's partial suspension of the takeover — announced on November 20 — was only a "small step," far short of its demand for full withdrawal of administrative and judicial measures.

With both sides still locked in a governance standoff, officials warn that uncertainty will continue to haunt supply chains. Despite producing simple components, Nexperia's chips are used in high volumes across the automotive sector, and the company has cautioned that stability will not return until cooperation between its European and Chinese entities is restored. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [The New York Times]

China to reopen embassy in Damascus as Beijing and Syria seek to rebuild ties amid reconstruction push

(ms) China will reopen its embassy in Damascus in early 2026, Syrian officials said on November 24, marking the most significant step in restoring bilateral relations since Beijing closed its mission during the collapse of the Baathist regime in December 2024. The announcement follows a high-level visit by Syria's new foreign minister, Asaad al-Shaibani, to Beijing on November 17, where both sides signalled a "new phase" in cooperation centred on reconstruction, trade and diplomatic normalization.

Syrian Foreign Ministry official Ashhad Salibi told Anadolu that China has pledged 380 million yuan (USD 52 million) in humanitarian aid and issued instructions to fast-track preparations for reopening the embassy. Damascus has pressed Beijing to move quickly, citing years of visa difficulties for Syrian businesspeople and students. Restoring the diplomatic mission is expected to ease economic engagement and facilitate Chinese project deployment in sectors including agriculture, energy, transport, infrastructure and technology.

The talks come as the Syrian transitional government seeks broad international reintegration following the end of the Assad era. Officials say they aim to pursue

“balanced, strategic relations with all countries,” with China’s rapid-build capacity and cost advantages seen as central to reconstruction efforts.

Chinese firms have already begun exploratory discussions, including a November 28 meeting between the Syrian state-run cement group Omran and a BITEC investment delegation on upgrading production lines and expanding building-materials output — a key pillar of reconstruction.

Beijing, however, has its own conditions. During al-Shaibani’s visit, Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged Syria to act against Uyghur militant groups that were integrated into anti-Assad formations and remain active in the country — a long-standing national-security concern for China. Analysts note that Beijing’s willingness to deepen reconstruction cooperation may hinge on Damascus addressing these groups.

Syrian officials strongly denied reports that Damascus agreed to hand over 400 Uyghur fighters to China, saying such discussions “never occurred.”

Regional analysts say the reopening of the embassy signals that China is prepared to cautiously re-engage, balancing reconstruction ambitions with security sensitivities. For Syria, Chinese investment and diplomatic normalization represent vital steps toward economic recovery and stability after years of conflict and political transition. [Anadolu Ajansi] [Global Cement] [South China Morning Post]

Kenya turns to China for USD 1.5 billion highway expansion as Beijing resumes major infrastructure roles

(ms) Kenya and two Chinese state-owned firms will begin construction on a USD 1.5 billion highway expansion on November 29, marking China’s return to large-scale infrastructure financing in East Africa after several years of reduced activity. The project will upgrade key sections of the transport corridor linking the Port of Mombasa with Nairobi, western Kenya, and landlocked neighbors such as Uganda. It will be implemented under a public–private partnership structure, with funding split 75 percent debt and 25 percent equity—an approach increasingly used as concerns over sovereign borrowing and debt sustainability rise.

Kenya’s Public–Private Partnerships Directorate said the government has little room for additional sovereign debt, prompting the shift toward mixed

financing. One phase, valued at USD 863 million, will expand 139 kilometers of existing single-lane highway into dual carriageways. A second phase, worth USD 678.6 million, will widen a further 94 kilometers into a six-lane expressway. Construction is expected to be completed by December 2027, followed by a 28-year toll concession for investors to recover costs.

The deal follows President William Ruto's visit to Beijing in April 2025 and forms part of China's effort to reposition itself in Africa after reducing lending in 2019. Beijing pledged USD 50 billion in credit and investment over three years at a summit in 2024, signaling renewed strategic engagement on the continent. [Africa Business Insider] [Reuters]

India protests after Arunachal-born passenger says she was blocked in Shanghai transit

(ms) India and China exchanged formal protests after Pema Wangjom Thongdok, a UK-based Indian citizen, said she was blocked from transiting through Shanghai Pudong Airport because her passport lists her birthplace as Arunachal Pradesh. China claims the Indian state as its own territory, a position New Delhi firmly rejects.

Thongdok, travelling from London to Japan on November 21, said immigration officers declared her passport invalid, mocked her nationality, withheld her passport, and prevented her from boarding her connecting flight despite a valid visa. She was able to leave only after contacting the Indian consulate, following an 18-hour delay.

India called her treatment "arbitrary" and said it violated international civil aviation conventions guaranteeing 24-hour visa-free transit. China denied any harassment, saying authorities followed regulations and provided rest facilities, while reiterating its claim over Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu condemned the episode as a breach of international norms and an affront to Indian citizens. [BBC] [The Indian Express]

India considers guarantees to secure Canadian pulse imports

(dql) India is exploring ways to guarantee continued pulse crop imports from Canada to ensure its domestic supply, Indian High Commissioner to Canada Dinesh Patnaik unveiled during a visit to Saskatchewan last week.

The announcement comes as India and Canada are set to restart negotiations on a comprehensive trade deal amid improving diplomatic ties under Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney early next year. [The Hindustan Times]

Canada, a leading global supplier of lentils and peas to India, faces challenges as India imposed a 30 percent import duty on yellow peas in November, while China has already set 100 percent duties on Canadian peas. Canadian farmers are reportedly considering reducing pea cultivation in 2026 due to these tariffs, which make the crop less profitable.

Patnaik emphasized that India will continue to require foreign pulse sources over the long term and does not want Canadian farmers to permanently exit the market. Import restrictions, he noted, are intended to support Indian farmers by raising domestic prices. [Reuters]

India eyes trade deal with U.S. by end of year

(dql) India expects to conclude a trade agreement with the United States by year-end, with most technical issues already settled and any outstanding matters expected to be resolved through political intervention, according to Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal, speaking at an event of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The push for a deal comes as Washington recently imposed tariffs of up to 50 percent on Indian goods, partly to pressure New Delhi to curb its purchases of Russian oil and to lower Indian barriers in politically sensitive sectors, including agriculture.

Agrawal emphasized that the emerging framework aims to tackle these reciprocal tariff disputes and stabilize the trade relationship.

His remarks comes as India's trade deficit reached a record USD 41.68 billion in October, driven by higher gold imports and a decline in exports to the U.S., though officials describe the situation as manageable. [Reuters]

Amid efforts to secure a near trade deal, India signed a INR 7,995 crore (USD 970 million) deal with the U.S. for five-year sustainment support of the Indian Navy's MH-60R helicopter fleet under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. Signed in New Delhi, the package includes spares, technical support, training, and periodic maintenance, with facilities to be developed in India to enhance self-reliance and support the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

The arrangement is expected to boost operational readiness and maintainability of India's all-weather, anti-submarine capable helicopters, enabling deployment from both ships and dispersed locations. It also opens opportunities for indigenous production and service development through MSMEs and local firms. [The Statesman]

Meanwhile, highlighting the growing India-U.S. partnership in space research, the joint NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite mission by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and NASA has entered its science-operations phase. The satellite's 12-metre radar antenna was successfully deployed, calibration completed and systems commissioned — and on its 100th day in orbit, the first S-band radar images were released, showing the satellite's ability to image land, vegetation and other Earth surfaces.

With this, NISAR begins regular Earth-observation cycles using its dual-frequency radar (L-band and S-band), enabling all-weather, day-and-night monitoring. Its data will support climate tracking, forest and land-use analysis, disaster-management, ice and glacier monitoring, and other environmental applications. [The Times of India]

Separately, Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated Skyroot Aerospace's Infinity Campus in Hyderabad and unveiled Vikram-I, India's first privately developed orbital rocket. The Infinity Campus, a 200,000-square-foot facility, is designed to produce one rocket per month, while Vikram-I marks Skyroot's transition from sub-orbital to full commercial orbital launches, strengthening India's presence in the global space economy.

Modi noted the emergence of over 300 space startups, driven by young engineers and scientists, and emphasized India's growing role in meeting global demand for small satellites and cost-effective launch solutions. He linked the growth of the space sector to India's broader startup ecosystem, deep-tech manufacturing, and emerging strength in sectors like semiconductors and nuclear energy, framing these

developments as part of a vision for India to assert global technological leadership in the 21st century. [NDTV]

India: Defence and security partnership strengthened ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit

(ppms/dql) India and Russia held an Expert Panel Meeting on Military and Military Technical Cooperation in New Delhi from November 26 to 28, reaffirming the "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" between the two nations. The high-level meeting was co-chaired by officials from India's Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) and the Deputy Chief of FSMTC (Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation), focusing on enhancing ongoing military cooperation and accelerating technical collaboration crucial for the Indian Armed Forces' modernization and equipment maintenance.

These defense-level talks preceded the announcement by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that Russian President Vladimir Putin will pay a State Visit to India on December 4-5 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The visit, which will mark the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, is aimed at providing an opportunity for the leadership to review progress in bilateral relations and outline a vision for further strengthening the "special and privileged strategic partnership."

Discussions during the summit are expected to cover the finalization of several bilateral agreements, new initiatives across various sectors, and an exchange of views on complex global situations, including the conflict in Ukraine and developments in the Middle East.

Furthermore, underscoring the enduring defense ties, a four-member delegation from the Russian Land Forces also visited Indian Army formations during the November expert panel meeting to share expertise on the "Integrated Safety and Security of Defence Infrastructure." [ANI News] [Indian Express]

India-Russia military logistics pact set for ratification

Meanwhile, the Russian State Duma is set to ratify the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) with India, enabling both countries' armed forces to share fuel, spares, maintenance facilities, airbases, and naval ports. Signed in February 2025, the pact requires

formal ratification before implementation and is expected to feature prominently during Putin's.

The RELOS will facilitate seamless support for Russian and Indian warships and aircraft, enhance joint exercises, and assist humanitarian and disaster relief operations. For India, it ensures maintenance access for aircraft such as the Sukhoi-30MKI and naval vessels operating in the Far East and Arctic regions. For Russia, the pact expands its ability to sustain maritime deployments in the Indian Ocean. [The Tribune] [CNBC TV 18]

Reportedly, India is also set to discuss the potential purchase of Russian Su-57 fighter jets and the S-500 advanced missile defense system during Putin's visit. These talks fall under the framework of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between the two countries, highlighting ongoing high-level defence collaboration. [Reuters]

India-UK joint military counter-terrorism exercise concluded

(dql) The eighth edition of the biennial 'Ajeya Warrior' exercise between Indian and British troops concluded in Rajasthan on November 30, emphasizing peace-enforcement operations in counter-terrorism scenarios.

The exercise involved simulated operations in urban and semi-urban environments, sharing of standard operating procedures, and integrated command-level drills. Troops exchanged expertise in areas such as counter-IED operations, small uncrewed aircraft system usage, urban tactics, and company-level skills.

The collaboration also included cultural exchanges, fitness, and recreational activities to strengthen camaraderie. British High Commissioner Lindy Cameron highlighted the exercise as part of UK-India Vision 2035, aimed at demonstrating deepening defence ties and a shared commitment to peace, stability, and a rules-based international order. [Government, UK] [The Week]

Indonesia, India push defense industrial cooperation and joint capabilities in New Delhi talks

(ms) Indonesia and India moved to expand practical defense cooperation during ministerial talks in New Delhi on November 27, focusing on defense-industrial collaboration, joint training, and coordinated capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. Indonesian Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin and Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh underscored that both governments want faster, more structured progress in areas where cooperation has lagged, particularly defense production and technology transfer.

A central outcome was Indonesia's support for creating a Joint Defense Industry Cooperation Committee, which would formalize work on co-development, certification alignment, and supply-chain linkages—an area Jakarta sees as essential as it seeks to modernize its armed forces and reduce reliance on extra-regional suppliers. Indian submarine expertise, including its Scorpene-class production experience, was identified as a potential cooperation track relevant to Indonesia's long-term maritime modernization plans.

The ministers also agreed to expand joint exercises and officer exchanges, building on existing engagements such as Garuda Shakti, Samudra Shakti, and Super Garuda Shield, which have grown in scale as both militaries adapt to a more contested Indo-Pacific security environment. Discussions included cyber resilience, maritime domain awareness and medical-defense cooperation, such as specialist training and pharmaceutical R&D.

The meeting reflects a shift toward more operational and industry-focused cooperation rather than symbolic partnership statements, aligning Indonesia's modernization priorities with India's emerging defense-export strategy. [Antara] [Ministry of Defense, Indonesia]

Indonesian President Prabowo hosts Dutch Queen Máxima to advance financial inclusion agenda

(ms) Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto met Queen Máxima of the Netherlands in Jakarta on November 27 as the Dutch royal concluded a three-day visit undertaken in her capacity as the UN Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Financial Health (UNSGSA). The meeting marked the highest-level engagement of her mission, which focused on accelerating Indonesia's financial inclusion and resilience agenda.

Queen Máxima's visit included field assessments in Central and West Java, where she met informal workers and micro-entrepreneurs facing limited access to credit and digital financial services. At the Merdeka Palace, Prabowo and Máxima held a closed-door discussion with senior economic officials, including Coordinating Economic Minister Airlangga Hartarto and Bank Indonesia Deputy Governor Destry Damayanti.

According to Indonesian government readouts, both sides underscored the need for a more structured national strategy to promote financial health, with Prabowo highlighting principles of "justice, equal access, and social sustainability." Discussions centered on widening credit channels for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), improving consumer protection amid rising financial fraud, expanding access to affordable housing finance, and strengthening financial literacy.

The UNSGSA office noted that Indonesia has made significant progress in digital payments and microfinance over the past decade but continues to face gaps in savings behavior, household resilience, and inclusion of informal-sector workers. Queen Máxima encouraged deeper coordination among regulators and the development of interoperable digital finance infrastructure. [Independent Observer] [The Jakarta Post]

The meeting reaffirmed Indonesia's commitment to building an inclusive and sustainable financial ecosystem. Officials expect the visit to accelerate reforms in digital financial services, SME financing, and social-protection delivery—areas the Prabowo administration has identified as central to reducing inequality and strengthening long-term economic resilience.

Indonesia expands Middle East economic footprint

(ms) Indonesia is accelerating its Middle East diplomacy following a series of high-level engagements, including the UAE's 54th National Day reception in Jakarta and a recent Indonesian delegation meeting in Isfahan, Iran—visits that produced new commitments and signaled Jakarta's growing strategic ambitions in the region.

In Jakarta, the UAE confirmed that its total investment in Indonesia has surpassed USD 14 billion, alongside a 20 percent rise in bilateral trade to USD 5.5 billion.

Development cooperation has also reached USD 260 million, underscoring the depth of the relationship. UAE Ambassador Abdulla Salem Al Dhaheri highlighted expanding ties in energy, technology and infrastructure, aligned with the UAE's rapid innovation drive, which includes the first Arabic-language Falcon AI model and a newly launched 5-gigawatt AI technology complex.

Indonesia views the partnership as central to strengthening its clean-energy transition and export diversification. The Cirata Floating Solar Power Plant—developed with Masdar—has become a flagship renewable project, with plans under consideration to expand its capacity. The Indonesia–UAE CEPA, effective since 2023, is expected to lift Indonesian exports by up to USD 4.2 billion by 2030.

Simultaneously, Indonesia is broadening economic cooperation with Iran, following meetings between Ambassador Roliansyah Sumirat and the governor of Isfahan. Jakarta seeks deeper collaboration in high-tech industries, investment, and private-sector partnerships. Sumirat emphasized reducing external economic dependency and encouraged province-level cooperation, business-to-business ties, and joint trade events. Tourism initiatives and implementation of existing agreements are also being advanced.

As Indonesia prepares to mark 50 years of diplomatic ties with the UAE in 2026 and expands its engagement with Iran, Jakarta is positioning itself as a more assertive economic actor in an increasingly multipolar Middle East. [Indonesia Business Post] [Tehran Times]

Stand-Off between Japanese and Chinese coastguards near disputed islands

(dql) Chinese and Japanese coastguard vessels clashed near the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea on December 2, with each side giving conflicting accounts. China said it drove a Japanese fishing boat away, while Japan reported intercepting two Chinese coastguard ships approaching the vessel. [BBC]

The islands, under Japanese control but claimed by China, are a key flashpoint due to their strategic location and surrounding natural resources.

The incident comes amid frosty Sino-Japanese ties following Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks last month suggesting that military force in the Taiwan Strait could constitute a "survival-

threatening situation" for Japan, potentially warranting the deployment of its armed forces. Beijing has strongly protested, halting Japanese seafood imports, advising citizens against travel to Japan, and cutting intergovernmental and cultural exchanges. [SCMP]

In the latest development of this row over Takaichi's Taiwan remark, a coalition of Japanese lawmakers promoting friendship with China met Chinese Ambassador Wu Jianghao in Tokyo on December 1, signaling efforts to ease bilateral tensions while disputes over islands persist.

The discussion reportedly touched on Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's recent Taiwan remarks, which have strained ties, and the group expressed intentions to visit China by year-end to maintain dialogue.

The meeting, attended by ruling Liberal Democratic Party heavyweight Yuko Obuchi, complements official channels, including Wu's November 25 talks with Japan's Vice-Foreign Minister Takehiro Funakoshi, highlighting a parallel effort to keep communications open despite rising political friction. [The Straits Times]

Japan considers missile export to Philippines

(dql) Japan has reportedly held preliminary discussions with the Philippines on exporting its Type-03 Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (Chu-SAM), reflecting Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's push to loosen long-standing restrictions on defense exports.

The missile transfer could proceed once Japan formally removes a rule limiting defense exports to noncombat uses, a change promised under Takaichi's coalition agreement with the center-right Japan Innovation Party. No new legislation is needed as the National Security Council can revise implementation guidelines to authorize the exports. [Army Recognition]

The Chu-SAM, capable of intercepting aircraft and cruise missiles, is in service with Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force, while an advanced version targeting ballistic and hypersonic threats is expected by 2028. Japan has gradually expanded arms exports since ending its postwar embargo in 2014, recently exporting Patriot interceptors to the United States (see AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4).

The planned relaxation of export rules raises domestic concerns over pacifism, as it would permit lethal weapons sales without extensive parliamentary

oversight. Takaichi's government, supported by conservative coalition partners, is moving assertively on security measures amid regional threats, particularly China's maritime assertiveness. Japan and the Philippines are also exploring the transfer of retired Japanese destroyers to bolster Manila's maritime defense. [The Mainichi]

Meanwhile, Japan and the Philippines — in the latest demonstration of deepening military cooperation — conducted on November 29 their third Bilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity, a one-day naval drill that emphasized advanced communication, real-time coordination, and improved Maritime Domain Awareness. Both navies practiced helicopter cross-deck landings and joint maneuvering tactics, demonstrating growing interoperability and operational sophistication. [ABS-CBN]

Japanese public sentiment toward U.S. dips

(dql) A recent Cabinet Office survey has revealed a sharp decline in Japanese public sentiment toward the United States, following the imposition of higher tariffs on Japanese imports by President Donald Trump's administration.

The survey, conducted between September 25 and November 2, found that only 70.8 percent of respondents considered Japan-U.S. relations "good" or "quite good," a drop of 14.7 percentage points from the previous year.

This is the second-lowest approval rating since the survey began in 1998. The drop reflects growing frustration with the U.S. administration's trade policies, including the tariffs that have strained bilateral relations. Additionally, the proportion of Japanese respondents expressing an affinity toward the U.S. also fell by 7.9 percentage points, to 77 percent.

Japan and Iran discuss bilateral ties, nuclear issue

(dql) Japan's Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu and Iran's counterpart, Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, held a phone call on Monday to discuss bilateral relations, regional developments, and issues of mutual interest.

During the talk, Araghchi highlighted the current status of Iran's nuclear program, emphasizing the U.S.

withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, insisting that "the US that must return to diplomacy by restoring Iran's trust." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran]

Motegi, for his part, reiterated Japan's commitment to promoting peace and stability in West Asia and welcomed political initiatives aimed at resolving regional and international issues. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

The ministers also reviewed bilateral cooperation, consular, and humanitarian matters, stressing the importance of ongoing consultations to strengthen the long-standing friendly ties between Tehran and Tokyo. [Trend News Agency] [The Caspian Post]

Japan seeks Saudi Arabia's partnership to reduce reliance on Chinese rare earths

(dql) On December 1, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi called on Saudi Arabia to collaborate on rare-earth mineral development during the Future Investment Initiative forum in Tokyo. She warned of "excessive dependence" on other countries, particularly China, for critical materials essential for electric-vehicle motors and wind turbines, citing past supply risks including China's 2010 rare-earths restrictions on Japan.

Takaichi emphasized strengthening supply chains with "like-minded countries" and promoting a free and open international order based on the rule of law. Saudi Arabia, with over USD 2.5 trillion in mineral deposits and active investment through its Public Investment Fund (PIF), expressed readiness to partner with Japan in securing critical minerals.

The initiative comes amid rising tensions between Japan and China over Taiwan, highlighting Tokyo's strategic push to diversify supply chains away from Beijing. The PIF, also active in sectors from oil and mining to technology and entertainment, views such collaborations as part of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation and global investment strategy. [Nikkei Asia] [Reuters]

Japan, New Zealand to sign military supply agreement

(dql) Japan and New Zealand plan to sign an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) in

mid-December, enabling their militaries to exchange food, fuel, and other supplies. The agreement, likely to be signed on December 18 during New Zealand Defense Minister Judith Collins' visit to Japan, is aimed at strengthening bilateral defense cooperation amid China's growing maritime assertiveness in the Pacific.

New Zealand will become the ninth country to have an ACSA with Japan. The two countries have conducted joint drills in the past, including escorting a Japanese destroyer through the Taiwan Strait, and plan to continue collaboration on defense equipment, including Japan's Mogami-class frigates. [The Japan News] [Japan Today]

Meanwhile, on November 27, Japan and New Zealand held the 16th Defence Dialogue in Auckland. The delegations exchanged views on regional affairs, national defense policies, and cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region. [Ministry of Defense, Japan]

Laos-Vietnam relations in focus as Vietnamese Party secretary To Lam begins state visit

(ms) Vietnamese Party General Secretary To Lam began a state visit to Laos on December 1, receiving a formal welcome from Lao Party chief and President Thongloun Sisoulith at the Presidential Palace in Vientiane. The trip, which coincides with Laos' fiftieth National Day.

Vietnam and Laos maintain one of the region's most institutionalized bilateral relationships, shaped by long-standing party-to-party coordination, security cooperation, and extensive economic ties. Vietnam is among Laos' largest investors and trading partners, and regular high-level exchanges continue to guide the strategic direction of the partnership.

During his visit, Lam will hold official talks with Thongloun, meet other senior Lao leaders, deliver a policy speech, and co-chair a high-level meeting between the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). Both sides are expected to sign new cooperation documents aimed at strengthening connectivity projects in transport and energy, as well as expanding collaboration in trade, investment, and human resources development. Bilateral trade reached nearly USD 2.5 billion in the first ten months of 2025, an increase of more than fifty percent year-on-year, while Vietnam's investment portfolio in Laos now includes 274 projects worth over USD 5.8 billion.

The visit follows the November 28 handover of the upgraded Laos–Vietnam combat alliance monument in Xaysomboun, funded with USD 1.39 million in Vietnamese assistance. The site, expanded with new public and commemorative facilities, is intended to serve official ceremonies and reflects the two governments' continued emphasis on historical cooperation as part of their broader bilateral agenda. [Lao News Agency 1] [Lao News Agency 2] [Lao News Agency 3]

Laos sends first full-train cassava starch shipment to China via cross-border railway

Laos has dispatched its first full trainload of cassava starch to China via the Laos–China Railway (LCR), marking a milestone in the country's growing agricultural export sector. The shipment, totaling 1,000 tons and produced entirely by a local Lao factory, departed Vientiane South Station on November 29 and is expected to reach Zhengzhou in central China's Henan Province after an approximately 80-hour journey.

The delivery was organized by China Railway Container Transport Co., Ltd., which coordinated planning, loading, transport and tracking. The shipment underscores both rising Chinese demand for Lao agricultural goods and Laos' increasing reliance on the LCR to reduce transport times and expand market access.

The railway has now handled more than 16 million tons of freight since opening, including over 1.7 million tons of Lao agricultural products destined for China. Cassava has emerged as one of Laos' fastest-growing exports: in September 2025 alone, Laos exported 2,061 tons of cassava flour worth USD 916,997 to the Chinese market.

Officials say the milestone reflects Laos' efforts to position itself as a regional logistics hub and strengthen agricultural value chains through improved cross-border connectivity. [The Laotian Times]

Laos and Cambodia advance energy partnership in high-level bilateral talks

(ms) Laos and Cambodia have agreed to deepen energy cooperation following a series of high-level

meetings in Vientiane from November 26 to 28. Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn co-chaired the 15th Cambodia–Laos Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation with Lao Foreign Minister Thongsavanh Phomvihane, where both sides identified energy as a central pillar of their partnership.

Cambodia thanked Laos for its continued electricity supply and reaffirmed plans to expand joint projects. The two countries have steadily increased energy cooperation: during a March 2024 visit by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet to Laos, the pair oversaw agreements enabling Cambodia to purchase renewable power from Lao hydropower, wind, and pumped storage facilities. In January 2024, they completed a 500-kilovolt transmission line from Champasack to the Cambodian border, allowing more efficient transfers. Laos currently supplies about 445 megawatts through a 115-kilovolt line, and Cambodia aims to raise imports to 6,000 megawatts by 2030.

The talks also covered political and border issues, with both sides committing to more frequent exchanges following recent visits by Prime Minister Hun Manet, Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, and Senate President Hun Sen. Officials noted progress in border demarcation and reiterated joint efforts to turn their shared frontier into an area of peace, development, and cooperation. [The Laotian Times]

Ongoing bilateral discussions on 1962 Malaysia-Singapore Water Agreement

(ea) Singapore has confirmed that discussions with Malaysia on matters related to the 1962 Water Agreement (62WA) are ongoing, according to Foreign Affairs Minister Dr Vivian Balakrishnan. The 62WA is now the only remaining bilateral water accord between the two countries and will remain in force until 2061, following the expiry of the earlier 1961 agreement in 2011.

At the 10th Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat in 2023, both governments reaffirmed their commitment to the agreement. They agreed to reconvene a Joint Technical Committee to continue discussions on safeguarding water quality and boosting the yield of Malaysia's Johor River to ensure a sustainable supply under the 62WA.

The agreement allows Singapore to draw up to 250 million gallons of raw water per day from Malaysia at a fixed rate, while Malaysia may purchase treated water

from Singapore at a higher set price. Both sides are committed to resuming talks on raw and treated water pricing while maintaining their longstanding positions on the right to review these rates. These issues are expected to be revisited at the annual Leaders' Retreat later this month. [Malay Mail]

Japan donates patrol vessel to strengthen Maldives' port surveillance

(lm) Japan has donated a 25-meter patrol vessel to the Maldives Customs Service to strengthen surveillance and security across the country's international ports. The platform, provided under Japan's Economic Cooperation Grant Aid, will be jointly operated by the Maldives Customs Service and the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard, which is responsible for maritime security and coastal protection. Training for its deployment took place in both Japan and the Maldives with 23 Customs officers participating. [The Sun]

Maldivian ambassador returns to Pakistan after earlier recall over unauthorized meeting

(lm) Maldives' high-level envoy to Pakistan, Mohamed Thoha, has resumed his post in Islamabad one year after he was brought back to Male' for meeting Afghanistan's representative in Pakistan without government clearance.

Thoha had been in Male' since November of last year for discussions with the Foreign Ministry and returned to Pakistan on November 16 after completing those consultations. Thoha, who previously served in Saudi Arabia and was transferred to Pakistan in mid-2024, had been recalled after meeting Afghanistan's envoy Sardar Ahmad Shakeeb in November 2024, a move viewed as unauthorized engagement with a representative of the Taliban administration. Maldives does not recognize Taliban rule and follows the United Nations' standard of recognizing Afghanistan's accredited representative at the UN. [The Sun]

China, Mongolia to expand light industry cooperation

(fs) The Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry of Mongolia announced plans to cooperate with China to introduce advanced technologies for processing animal and animal-derived raw materials. The initiative will be carried out in cooperation with the Industrial and Technological Park and the Academy of Sciences of Hebei Province.

During a meeting attended by ministry officials and Vice President of the Hebei Academy of Sciences Di Minghui, the two sides agreed to collaborate on projects including the establishment of a leather processing plant and a veterinary inspection laboratory. They also committed to developing a cooperation plan aligned with Mongolia's national development policies and to creating a joint research and analysis laboratory in the near future. [Montsame]

Mongolia, Tajikistan discuss expanding sectoral and economic cooperation

(fs) Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia Battsetseg Batmunkh met with Ambassador of Tajikistan to Mongolia Khairullo Ibodzoda on November 25.

Batmunkh reaffirmed Mongolia's commitment to deepening cooperation with Central Asian partners and noted that the steady political dialogue of recent years has supported more substantive engagement. She highlighted potential areas for expanded collaboration, including agriculture, light industry, and renewable energy, and expressed support for advancing joint projects and programs.

Ibodzoda reiterated Tajikistan's interest in strengthening economic ties and emphasized the importance of holding the first meeting of the Mongolia-Tajikistan Intergovernmental Commission in the near future to facilitate broader cooperation. [Montsame]

Japan, Mongolia hold public-private consultative meeting

(fs) The 12th Consultative Meeting of Mongolian and Japanese public and private sector representatives convened in Tokyo, bringing together more than 170 officials and business delegates. The meeting was co-chaired by Mongolia's Deputy Prime Minister Gankhuyag Khassuuri and Japan's State Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Yamada Kenji.

Participants discussed cooperation in green and digital finance, critical minerals, renewable energy, climate change mitigation, innovation, and science and technology. Mongolia presented its development policies and expressed interest in attracting Japanese investment and introducing advanced technologies.

Since 2007, the consultative meetings have alternated between Ulaanbaatar and Tokyo. The next session will be held in Mongolia in 2026. [Montsame]

India evaluates feasibility of importing coking coal from Mongolia

(fs) India is examining the possibility of importing coking coal from Mongolia as part of its efforts to diversify supply sources. The country, the world's second-largest crude steel producer, imports about 85 percent of its coking coal, with Australia providing more than half. Rising demand is prompting the government and steelmakers to explore alternative suppliers.

Mongolia exports coal through two major routes: a longer corridor via Russia and another through China. India does not consider the China route viable in the long term, given Mongolia's strategic importance to Beijing and the potential for restricted access. [Reuters]

Logistics remain the primary obstacle, and India has not yet received planned trial shipments. Back in May, state-run Steel Authority of India sought 1 metric ton of Mongolian coal to assess feasibility (see AiR No. 19, May/2025, 2), but that shipment has not been received yet.

Cities of Mongolia, USA sign cooperation memorandum

(fs) A delegation led by Chairman of the Ulaanbaatar City Council (capital city of Mongolia) A. Bayar completed an official visit to Salt Lake City, Utah, where a memorandum of cooperation was signed.

The agreement, signed by Bayar and Salt Lake City Mayor Jenny Wilson, aims to elevate bilateral ties, particularly in economic development, education, urban planning, and tourism.

Bayar highlighted opportunities for cooperation within Ulaanbaatar's newly established Agro-City special

economic zone, noting that factories built there could serve not only Mongolia but also neighboring countries. Wilson welcomed the delegation and expressed commitment to turning the memorandum into concrete projects. [iToim]

Thai foreign minister says Myanmar election will not be free or credible

(su) Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said on November 26 that Myanmar's upcoming election, scheduled to begin on December 28, will not meet standards of freedom or credibility. Speaking to reporters in Bangkok, he said Thailand is unlikely to be in a position to recognize the polls, which will exclude areas outside military control and will not involve detained political leader Aung San Suu Kyi or the dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD).

Sihasak compared the planned vote to Myanmar's 2010 election, describing it as "imperfect" but suggesting that even limited political openings could create opportunities for future reforms. He urged Myanmar's authorities to release Aung San Suu Kyi, citing humanitarian concerns, and said her prolonged detention raises questions about her health and well-being.

Thailand hosts millions of Myanmar nationals who have fled conflict or economic hardship since the 2021 military takeover. Analysts have dismissed the planned multi-phase election as a mechanism for legitimizing continued military rule, with voting to be held only in territory secured by junta forces or aligned groups. [Mizimma]

Myanmar welcomes end of U.S. Temporary Protected Status

(su) Myanmar's military authorities have welcomed the U.S. government's decision to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Myanmar nationals, saying citizens based in the United States are encouraged to return home.

At a November 26 press conference, the National Defense and Security Council said the U.S. announcement reflected what Washington described as "improved conditions" in Myanmar, citing the lifting of the state of emergency, preparations for a

multiparty election, reduced clashes with ethnic armed groups, and increased administrative stability.

TPS had been granted to Myanmar nationals in 2021 following the military takeover. According to U.S. authorities, the decision to withdraw it follows a Department of Homeland Security review, which noted ongoing humanitarian challenges but pointed to developments in "governance and stability." Approximately 4,000 Myanmar nationals in the United States are affected. The move is part of a broader reversal of TPS protections for several countries under the Trump administration.

Human rights organizations criticized the decision, arguing that conflict persists across multiple states and that martial law remains in effect in many areas. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also questioned the feasibility of holding "free and fair" elections under current conditions. [Eleven Myanmar] [Mizzima]

Belarus president's visit to Myanmar sees 16 bilateral economic agreements signed

(su) Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko arrived in Naypyitaw on November 27, becoming the first foreign head of state to visit Myanmar since the 2021 military takeover. The visit follows two earlier trips that junta leader Min Aung Hlaing made to Belarus this year and reflects what both sides described as their "closest and highest" level of cooperation to date.

During bilateral talks on November 28, Min Aung Hlaing asked Belarus to continue supporting Myanmar's bid to join the Eurasian Economic Union. Both sides agreed to upgrade Myanmar's consulate in Minsk to an embassy and to establish a Belarusian diplomatic mission in Myanmar. Officials also discussed expanding military-technical cooperation and endorsed a 2026–2028 roadmap for bilateral development and political coordination. Lukashenko expressed support for Myanmar's planned general election and pledged continued cooperation in priority areas identified by the authorities.

To coincide with the visit, the Myanmar–Belarus Business Forum was held in Yangon on November 27, attended by senior junta ministers, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Soe Thein, and a Belarusian delegation led by Foreign Minister Maxim Ryzhankov as well as ministers for agriculture, industry, and health. The two sides signed 16 agreements covering

cooperation in transport, agriculture, industry, healthcare, banking, and standards and certification. Business representatives also held sector-specific discussions on finance, logistics, agro-industry, and health services.

On the sidelines, Myanmar's ministers met their Belarusian counterparts to negotiate sectoral cooperation and prepare for the next meeting of the Myanmar–Belarus Joint Committee. Additional agreements were signed under the 2026–2028 development cooperation roadmap and the Myanmar–Belarus Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation. [Eleven Myanmar] [Irrawaddy]

NGOs expose USD 485 million in Swedish pension investments linked to Myanmar junta

(anl) Three civil society groups — the Swedish Committee for Burma, Justice for Myanmar, and Fair Finance Guide — have reported that Swedish pension funds have invested SEK 4.6 billion (USD 485 million) in 12 companies that sell arms to or conduct business with Myanmar's military junta.

According to the study, the Seventh Swedish Pension Fund (AP7) accounts for the largest share of these investments. AP7, which manages pensions for six million Swedes, has invested SEK 2.7 billion (USD 290 million), including SEK 620 million (USD 65 million) in Indian defense firms Bharat Electronics and Hindustan Aeronautics, both identified as exporters of weapons and military equipment to Myanmar. The report also highlighted investments by AP7 and other funds in Thailand's PTT and Japan's KDDI, companies previously linked to business with the junta.

AP7 said the fund routinely reviews its portfolio and has already excluded several companies based on available information. He acknowledged the severity of Myanmar's situation and said AP7 was "very aware" of the risks posed by certain firms. However, he noted that in some cases allegations were difficult to verify, and some companies had not previously been identified in this context.

AP7 added that it will complete its own assessment within two weeks and that it is "very possible" some of the companies named in the NGO report will be removed from its portfolio. Sweden's largest pension fund confirmed that a review is underway and that decisions on divestment could be made within weeks. [Mizzima] [Channel News Asia]

India and Nepal agree on joint drive to address encroachment along no-man's land

(lm) Nepal and India have agreed to launch a coordinated campaign to address longstanding encroachment along the no-man's land separating the two countries, following a meeting between border-security officials in Kalaiya. The decision comes after repeated complaints that residents on both sides have been occupying and cultivating parts of the restricted strip, which is intended to remain free of settlement and private use. [The Kathmandu Post]

North Korea intensifies DMZ construction drive amid heightened inter-Korean tensions

(sm) North Korea appears to have significantly advanced work on defensive structures along the Demilitarized Zone, with satellite imagery indicating that roughly three quarters of the border has been refortified. Recent images show a marked increase in activity across multiple sectors including the expansion of cleared areas, the installation of new fencing systems, and the placement of additional ground obstacles. The latest phase of construction suggests that the project has entered a more intensive period with efforts focused on creating a continuous line of reinforced positions along the boundary. [NK News]

Satellite assessments show that the refortification effort has reshaped most of the 210km boundary with approximately 74 percent of the DMZ now lined with newly cleared corridors, extended fencing, protective barriers and anti-tank obstacles constructed over the course of the year.

Many of these updates were made near the Military Demarcation Line, where new clearings and defensive structures have appeared across multiple sectors, reflecting a coordinated effort that accelerated after June. As inter-Korean channels remain stagnant and tense, the North's emphasis on physical barriers underscores its current approach to managing the border and reduces the limited areas where military or diplomatic interaction previously occurred. [News 1]

This evolving layout of the DMZ carries broader implications for relations between Seoul and Pyongyang. With more sections of the boarder built up

with new barriers and cleared zones, the practical avenues for communication or coordination along the line of control become increasingly narrow. These structural changes make it more difficult to maintain the informal mechanisms that once helped clarify incidents or support limited engagement.

As work continues near the Military Demarcation Line, the strengthened border stands as a physical reminder of the strained inter-Korean ties and adds a new layer of complexity to any future attempts at easing tensions. [NK News]

France completes surveillance mission to track North Korea's illegal sea transfers

(dql) Last week the French frigate *FS Prairial* completed a major patrol near Japan to detect illicit ship-to-ship transfers of oil, coal, and other prohibited goods — an important tool for Pyongyang to sustain its weapons programs. According to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the mission began in late October. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

France, which has participated in these patrols eight times since 2019, remains one of the most active contributors. [DeftechTimes]

North Korea has long relied on covert mid-sea cargo swaps to evade U.N. trade restrictions. These operations take place far from major shipping lanes, where vessels rendezvous in isolated waters and often disable their tracking systems to avoid detection.

North Korea strengthens ties with Russia through bridges and arms shipments

(sm/dql) Recent developments highlight continued deepening of the strategic partnership between Pyongyang and Moscow, encompassing both infrastructure projects and the resumption of arms shipments.

North Korea, Russia move ahead with bridge build-out across Tumen River

Russia and North Korea appear set to begin installing major decking structures on their new road bridge over the Tumen River with the project estimated at roughly USD 100 million. Recent satellite imagery shows steady progress on both sides of the border including the emergence of multiple bridge piers in the

North Hamgyong Province of North Korea. The next phase of work is expected to focus on laying large, prefabricated deck sections, signaling that the project is moving into the most visible stage of development. [NK News]

The bridge is emerging as one of the most significant infrastructure undertakings in regard to bilateral ties in recent years, reflecting a period of accelerated strategic cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow. As Russia seeks expanded connectivity due to its own international isolation, improved overland access to North Korea may support trade flows, logistical coordination and more consistent movement of goods and personal. For Pyongyang the project provides a rare opportunity to diversify cross border infrastructure beyond its near total reliance on routes through China.

It is noted by observers that the bridge also carries broader geopolitical implications. A functioning road link could facilitate more sustained Russia-DPRK exchanges at a time when both governments are tightening their military and economic cooperation. The infrastructure may eventually support expanded trade networks or serve as an alternative supply corridor for sanctioned goods, thereby complicating monitoring and enforcement efforts. As construction accelerates, the bridge stands to become a tangible symbol of the shifting alignment between Pyongyang and Moscow and a potential new factor in shifting regional predictions. [NK News]

North Korean ports linked to continued ammunition shipments to Russia

Meanwhile, satellite imagery indicates that Russian cargo ships previously sanctioned for transporting weapons to Russia have resumed visits to North Korea's Rason port. The vessels Lady R and Angara made multiple trips in October and November, potentially moving thousands of containers of ammunition. Analysts estimate that recent voyages could carry up to 7,000 containers, though actual loads depend on weight limits.

Open-source investigations have tracked these ships over the past 20 months, linking them to as many as 15,800 containers of munitions, possibly delivering 4.2–5.8 million rounds of ammunition to Russia. Ukraine's Defense Intelligence claims North Korea supplies up to 40 percent of Russia's ammunition for the war in Ukraine. [United 24 Media]

Pakistan outlines plan to expand halal-meat exports to Malaysia

(my) Pakistan has endorsed a new export roadmap aimed at raising halal-meat shipments to Malaysia to USD 200 million within three to five years, a significant scale-up from last year's export value of only USD 38,000.

A central feature of the plan is the designation of the halal-meat sector as an "industry", which is expected to unlock access to financing instruments, regulatory support mechanisms, and targeted incentives. The roadmap focuses on aligning Pakistan's production, processing, and certification systems with Malaysian import requirements, which are considered among the more stringent in the region. [Arab News]

New Pakistan-U.S. joint venture launched to expand critical minerals exploration and domestic processing

(lm) Pakistan has announced a new US–Pakistan joint venture aimed at expanding exploration, mining and domestic processing of critical minerals, marking a further step in Islamabad's efforts to attract foreign investment into a sector it views as strategically important for economic diversification.

The partnership brings together Himalayan Earth Exploration (HEE)—a Pakistani private firm backed by local construction groups—and Nova Minerals, a US-listed mining exploration company traded on NASDAQ and the ASX. According to Pakistani officials, the venture will begin with USD 100 million in US investment and expand through phased financing as projects move from geological surveys to commercial extraction and local refining.

Islamabad has recently intensified outreach to international partners after hosting an international minerals summit earlier this year attended by firms and officials from the United States, Saudi Arabia, China, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and others. Pakistan holds sizable copper, gold, lithium and rare-earth deposits, yet the mining sector currently contributes only around 3 percent to GDP and remains underdeveloped due to regulatory bottlenecks, limited infrastructure and security constraints in certain regions.

Earlier this year, another American company, US Strategic Metals, signed an agreement with Pakistan's

Frontier Works Organization for the export of readily available minerals such as antimony, tungsten, copper, rare earths and gold to the United States. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Russia review energy and trade cooperation as Intergovernmental Commission concludes

(lm) Pakistan and Russia concluded the 10th session of their Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) in Islamabad with a set of new cooperation agreements and a review of ongoing collaboration in energy, trade, education, science, and disaster-response.

The discussions covered a broad range of sectors. On energy, the two sides noted "positive engagement" in oil and gas, including opportunities in LNG and LPG supply frameworks, as well as potential cooperation in hydropower, renewable energy, and flood-resilience technologies. Pakistan and Russia also discussed strengthening bilateral trade, diversifying exports, and increasing business-to-business links. They agreed to advance pilot cargo movement along agreed corridors and "confirmed their intention to operationalize a pilot train," which both sides view as a step toward improving logistics.

The talks also highlighted cooperation in pharmaceuticals such as insulin localization, and in metallurgy, heavy machinery, and mining. In education, both sides are working toward mutual recognition of degrees, joint research, academic mobility, and the establishment of Russian language centers in Islamabad and Karachi. Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority and Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations agreed to explore joint work in early-warning systems, emergency response, and resilience building.

At the end of the session, both sides signed the official IGC protocol and three new memoranda of understanding: one between the Associated Press of Pakistan and Russia's Sputnik news agency; one between Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority and Russia's Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology; and one between the Competition Commission of Pakistan and Russia's Federal Antimonopoly Service. [Arab News]

Pakistan encourages Azerbaijani investment in oil and gas sector

(lm) Pakistan has urged Azerbaijan to explore investment opportunities in its oil and gas sector as part of efforts to deepen economic ties and attract foreign capital. The appeal came during talks in Islamabad between Pakistan's prime minister and a visiting Azerbaijani economic delegation, where both sides reviewed bilateral trade, investment, and sectoral cooperation.

Discussions covered energy, defense production, minerals, infrastructure, agriculture-related industries, hospitality, and information technology. Pakistan reiterated its proposal to create a jointly funded Pakistan–Azerbaijan investment company and welcomed Azerbaijani interest in the White Oil Pipeline Project, a key domestic pipeline linking Karachi to central Pakistan that is intended to reduce road congestion and improve energy transport efficiency. The government also encouraged Azerbaijan's state oil company to consider upstream opportunities in Pakistan.

Azerbaijan expressed interest in finalizing a 2025–2028 cooperation roadmap. Pakistan, meanwhile, seeks broader foreign partnerships to leverage its oil, gas, and critical mineral reserves and to strengthen its role as a trade and transit hub for Central Asian states via the Arabian Sea. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Denmark discuss trade and energy cooperation

(lm) Pakistan's commerce authorities met with Denmark's envoy to review how both sides can deepen cooperation in trade, investment, and energy as Islamabad works to stabilize its economy after the 2023 crisis. In the meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan outlined its broader economic adjustment efforts under the USD 7 billion International Monetary Fund program and emphasized that foreign-exchange reserves and remittances have begun to improve. Danish representatives briefed Pakistan on an ongoing three-year partnership that supports energy planning, data systems, and grid efficiency, coinciding with Pakistan's shift toward solar and other renewable solutions that have reduced pressure on the national grid.

The discussions also covered agriculture, information technology, and certification issues that continue to shape foreign companies' willingness to enter the Pakistani market. Danish businesses expressed interest in Pakistan's expanding IT sector, which produces around 80,000 graduates per year and offers

comparatively low operating costs. Pakistan, in turn, encouraged greater participation by Danish firms in upcoming trade exhibitions in Lahore and Karachi and highlighted emerging export potential in segments such as cosmetics and personal-care products, which have recently gained a foothold in African markets. [Arab News]

Turkish delegation advances energy and mineral cooperation as Pakistan seeks investment for offshore and onshore exploration

(lm) Türkiye's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Alparslan Bayraktar, arrived in Islamabad with a senior delegation for meetings aimed at expanding cooperation in oil, gas and mineral exploration. The visit follows Pakistan's ongoing effort to secure foreign investment in upstream energy and mining as the country faces persistent fuel shortages and high import dependence. Türkiye already has several energy companies operating in Pakistan, and officials on both sides described the visit as an opportunity to advance ongoing initiatives.

Ahead of the trip, the Turkish minister said Ankara was preparing to finalize an accord with Pakistan covering both offshore and onshore exploration, including participation in what would be Pakistan's first deep-sea drilling project. Deep-sea drilling has never been carried out in Pakistan, and previous attempts were discontinued because of cost, technical limitations and policy discontinuity. According to the minister, initial cooperation is expected to focus on two onshore blocks and one offshore zone.

The visit comes shortly after Pakistan approved a new offshore exploration consortium that would make a Turkish company, Turkish Petroleum Overseas Company, the operator of the Eastern Offshore Block-C once agreements are finalized. Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee has already cleared the allocation of participating interests among Pakistani and Turkish partners. The approval is part of a broader revival of offshore activity, including the award of bids for twenty-three offshore blocks in Pakistan's first such licensing round since 2007. The country's offshore area spans roughly 300,000 square kilometers but has seen only eighteen wells drilled since 1947.

Both governments also highlighted cooperation in minerals. According to Pakistani officials, the Turkish delegation includes a major mining-sector firm,

signaling interest in deposits such as copper, gold and rare earth elements. Meetings in Islamabad this week follow discussions between Pakistan's petroleum minister and the Turkish ambassador, where officials noted that Turkish Petroleum, Türkiye's state energy company, is already participating in joint exploration initiatives. [Arab News]

Pakistan pushes sectoral cooperation with Bahrain as Gulf trade pact enters final stage

(as/lm) Pakistan used Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's two-day visit to Bahrain to advance economic and security cooperation ahead of the expected conclusion of the Pakistan–GCC Free Trade Agreement — a tariff-reduction pact with the Gulf Cooperation Council, the six-member bloc comprising Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman.

Islamabad urged Bahraini investors to expand their presence in information technology, artificial intelligence, agribusiness, minerals, energy, tourism and health care. It also emphasized the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) — Pakistan's civil–military body created to fast-track foreign investment — as the central channel for new projects. Bahrain, in turn, signaled interest in fintech and banking cooperation, including potential collaboration between central banks.

Both governments aim to raise bilateral trade from over USD 550 million to USD 1 billion within three years, using the trade pact and eased visa rules to accelerate investment and labor movement. Pakistan additionally proposed direct shipping links between Bahrain's Khalifa Bin Salman Port and either Karachi — its main commercial port — or Gwadar, a deep-sea port in Balochistan that Islamabad promotes as a regional logistics hub. The visit builds on contracts worth USD 13 million signed earlier this year at the Pakistan–Bahrain Investment Summit.

Security cooperation formed a second pillar of the talks. The two countries examined expanded collaboration in military training, logistics, defense production and manpower programs. Their interior ministries also discussed counter-narcotics cooperation, improved law-enforcement coordination and closer information sharing. With more than 120,000 Pakistanis living and working in Bahrain, both sides additionally addressed labor mobility, skills development and cooperation in technical education

and digital governance. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4] [Radio Pakistan]

Pakistan Army completes counterterrorism training program for Iraqi contingents

(as) Pakistan's military has completed a specialized counterterrorism training program for visiting Iraqi Army contingents at the National Counter Terrorism Centre. The program is described as part of ongoing defense cooperation between the two countries, emphasizing capacity-building and preparedness against militant threats. [Radio Pakistan]

Pakistan and Qatar explore strategic tech partnership to expand startup financing

(lm) Pakistan and Qatar have begun discussions on a strategic technology partnership aimed at improving financing, incubation and investment options for Pakistani startups. Pakistan's IT ministry said the talks in Doha focused on enabling the Qatar Development Bank to support early-stage Pakistani firms and deepen cooperation across key digital sectors.

Both sides explored collaboration in artificial intelligence, cloud services, cybersecurity, digital skills development and cross-border incubation programs. The discussions also covered industrial digitalization, IoT testing environments and programs that would allow startups to participate in incubation facilities in both countries. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia expand cooperation across ports, technology and defense

(lm) Pakistan and Saudi Arabia advanced a broad agenda of economic, maritime and security cooperation last week across several parallel engagements.

In London, both sides discussed new port and shipping initiatives, including a proposed Sister Port agreement between Karachi Port and Jeddah Islamic Port and possible joint ventures between the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation and Saudi Arabia's Bahri. Pakistan also presented investment options under its

long-term Maritime Vision 2047 and reported progress on training opportunities for Pakistani seafarers on Saudi vessels, with Riyadh expected to share a draft memorandum on a long-term maritime partnership. [Arab News 1]

In Riyadh, the two countries explored deeper cooperation in sports diplomacy, with Pakistan's cricket authorities offering training programs, junior-level exchanges and support for developing cricket infrastructure in Saudi Arabia as the Kingdom expands its sports sector. [Arab News 2]

Security ties also strengthened. Pakistan's Special Services Group and Saudi forces completed the Al Battar-II joint exercise in Tabuk, focusing on urban combat and counterterrorism drills. The training follows the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement signed in September, which commits both states to mutual defense and has become a key pillar of the bilateral relationship. [Arab News 3]

Visit to Pakistan by Egypt's foreign minister focuses on defense cooperation and Gaza diplomacy

(lm) Egypt's foreign minister Dr. Badr Ahmed Mohamed Abdelatty arrived in Islamabad to deepen Pakistan–Egypt cooperation across defense, economic and political domains, building on a renewed phase of engagement that follows last month's meeting in Cairo between Pakistan's army chief, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, and Egypt's president. During the visit, Dr. Abdelatty also held talks with Pakistan's foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, who serves concurrently as deputy prime minister, as well as with President Asif Ali Zardari.

In Rawalpindi, Field Marshal Munir and Dr. Abdelatty reaffirmed plans to intensify military-to-military contacts, expand training cooperation and maintain regular high-level coordination in light of evolving regional security dynamics. Both sides underscored that defense cooperation remains a central pillar of the relationship. [Arab News 1]

Parallel political meetings reviewed economic cooperation after years of limited momentum. President Zardari encouraged greater Egyptian investment in sectors such as energy, logistics, construction, agriculture, mining and IT, emphasizing long-standing political ties and expanding opportunities. Islamabad and Cairo agreed to reconvene the Pakistan–Egypt Joint Ministerial

Commission, which last met in 2010, with a new session planned for early 2026.

Deputy Prime Minister Dar and Dr. Abdelatty announced the establishment of a Pakistan–Egypt Business Council to institutionalize private-sector cooperation. Pakistan will provide an initial list of 250 companies for commercial matchmaking with Egyptian counterparts, followed by another 250 six months later, ahead of a Pakistan–Egypt Business Forum scheduled to convene in Cairo in mid-2026. [Arab News 2]

Gaza diplomacy formed an important part of the visit. Dr. Abdelatty and his Pakistani counterparts reviewed joint efforts to sustain the fragile ceasefire signed in Sharm el-Sheikh, including cooperation on humanitarian access and ongoing negotiations. Dr. Abdelatty invited Pakistan to contribute expertise and resources to reconstruction efforts and to participate in the forthcoming international Conference on the Early Recovery and Reconstruction of Gaza. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

Pakistan and Nigeria move to fast-track bilateral trade pact and ease visa rules

(lm) Pakistan and Nigeria – Africa's largest economy with more than 230 million people and a GDP exceeding USD 477 billion – have agreed to accelerate work on a bilateral trade agreement and simplify visa procedures for investors and tourists, as Islamabad deepens its diplomatic and commercial outreach to African states under its "Engage Africa" policy. The understanding was reached during a meeting in Abuja between Pakistan's senior commerce representative and Nigeria's foreign minister, where both sides emphasized the need to elevate economic cooperation and expand sectoral engagement.

Pakistan and Nigeria, partners since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1961, reaffirmed their shared interests within forums such as the Commonwealth and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In their discussions, both sides highlighted opportunities in energy, agriculture, textiles, pharmaceuticals, information technology, and halal trade. The technical teams responsible for finalizing the bilateral trade agreement have been instructed to resolve pending issues swiftly, reflecting what both governments described as strong political will to strengthen ties.

As part of the broader engagement, Pakistan has encouraged business-to-business exchanges, including

the participation of nearly 20 Pakistani firms in the recent Beauty West Africa Exhibition in Nigeria. Pakistan also extended an invitation to Nigeria's president to visit Islamabad as part of efforts to consolidate momentum in the relationship. [Arab News]

Pakistan, Australia agree to deepen cooperation against illegal immigration

(my) Pakistan and Australia have agreed to expand cooperation against illegal immigration following a virtual meeting between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Australian Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke, according to official reporting. Both sides decided to establish a Joint Working Group to coordinate security and law-enforcement efforts, enhance information sharing and develop training programs for Pakistani police and paramilitary personnel. The cooperation will also involve Australian security agencies working with Pakistani bodies such as the Federal Investigation Agency and the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency, reflecting a shared focus on migration management, cyber-crime and wider transnational security challenges. The two ministers also reviewed non-security matters, including preparations for an upcoming tour of the Australian cricket team to Pakistan. [Radio Pakistan]

Philippine Coast Guard maintains vigilance over Chinese vessel at Scarborough Shoal

(ghd) On November 28, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has intensified its presence in the South China Sea, deploying its flagship vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua (MRRV-9701) to monitor a Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessel with bow number "4305".

According to a PCG spokesperson, the BRP Teresa Magbanua issued radio challenges to the CCG vessel as the latter was monitored 42.77 nautical miles south of Scarborough Shoal, or 103.15 nautical miles southwest of Capones Island, Zambales – an area within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The PCG highlighted its ongoing commitment to monitoring the area to protect Filipino fishermen and assert sovereign rights, despite the persistent presence of foreign vessels. The operation underscores the Philippines' strategy of maintaining

visibility and documenting activities in disputed waters to ensure regional stability. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines boosts maritime defense network through engagements with Japan, India, France and Australia

(ghd) The Philippines significantly bolstered its maritime security capabilities through a series of simultaneous defense engagements with key international partners: Japan, India, France and Australia. These activities, ranging from goodwill visits and joint exercises to specialized training, underscore Manila's strategy of deepening alliances to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) destroyer JS Harusame (DD-102) arrived at Naval Operating Base Subic, Zambales, on November 26 for a four-day goodwill visit. The Philippine Fleet hosted JMSDF officers, including a courtesy call between fleet leadership that discussed follow-on staff-to-staff talks to boost naval cooperation and interoperability. [Inquirer1] [Manila Bulletin1]

On the same day, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Indian Navy conducted their second maritime cooperative activity (MCA) of 2025 in the South China Sea. The exercise involved the Philippine guided-missile frigate BRP Jose Rizal (FF-150) and the Indian Navy frigate INS Sahyadri (F-49), plus supporting air and surface assets. Activities focused on coordinated maneuvering, communication drills and other interoperability tasks. [Manila Bulletin2]

The AFP also completed a bilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity with French naval forces in waters off Eastern Mindanao involving Philippine and French ships sailing together to enhance tactical coordination and readiness in southern sea lanes. Media coverage and AFP statements describe the drills as aimed at strengthening operational ties and maritime security in the southern Philippines. [Manila Bulletin3]

Australia delivered a second phase of drone-operator training to the Philippine Coast Guard. According to government releases and media reports, PCG personnel completed advanced fixed-wing drone training in Australia in mid-November, building on earlier Australian donations of drones and initial training earlier in 2025. The training is intended to boost maritime domain awareness, search-and-rescue capability and law-enforcement surveillance in the

Philippines' maritime zones. [Inquirer2] [Manila Bulletin4]

Philippines, Canada target early 2026 for trade talks

(ghd) The Philippines and Canada are preparing to launch formal negotiations for a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the first quarter of 2026. According to Philippine Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Undersecretary Allan Gepty, both nations aim to finalize the reference paper, which defines the scope of the talks, before the end of 2025.

This potential agreement would be the Philippines' first FTA with a North American country and is viewed as a strategic move to diversify trade partners amidst rising protectionist policies in the US. Additionally, the Philippines expects progress on the ASEAN-Canada FTA in the coming year. [PhilStar]

Philippines, US to incorporate cyber operations in 2026 war games

(ghd) The Philippines and the US are set to integrate advanced cyber defense operations into the 2026 Balikatan ("shoulder-to-shoulder") exercises.

Specifically, next year's drills will feature specialized training ranges and sophisticated threat-emulation software. This move signals a strategic shift from simply discussing digital threats to actively rehearsing how to defend critical networks and systems under simulated fire. The initiative aims to embed cyber defense across all levels of government and foster a "deeper, more resilient technical partnership" that connects battlefield interoperability with the protection of national infrastructure. This development aligns with Manila's recent efforts to bolster its digital defenses, including the creation of a military "cyber command" and the implementation of the National Cybersecurity Plan 2023–2028, as the country faces increasing pressure in the digital domain. [South China Morning Post]

Philippines, Ukraine reaffirm ties and eye stronger cooperation

(ghd) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held a bilateral phone conversation on November 27, reaffirming the warm diplomatic relations between their nations. The leaders agreed to deepen cooperation in key sectors such as food security, agriculture, and digitalization, committing to deploy technical teams to follow up on these initiatives immediately.

A significant portion of the dialogue focused on diplomatic expansion. Zelenskyy proposed the establishment of a Philippine embassy in Ukraine to facilitate closer interactions, a suggestion Marcos welcomed and supported. Zelenskyy also briefed Marcos on Ukraine's ongoing efforts, in coordination with the US, to achieve a "guaranteed peace." Furthermore, the two discussed enhancing engagement between Ukraine and ASEAN, a timely topic as the Philippines prepares to assume the bloc's chairmanship in 2026. [Inquirer]

Canada, South Korea strengthen defense ties

(dql) South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Chairman Gen. Jin Yong-sung held his first phone call with Canadian JCS Chair Gen. Jennie Carignan on November 28, discussing ways to enhance bilateral defense cooperation.

Describing Canada as an "old-time friend" of South Korea, Jin emphasized the importance of strengthening defense ties through personnel exchanges and joint military exercises to advance shared strategic goals.

Both sides agreed to continue working closely together and plan to meet in person to further discussions aimed at ensuring regional peace and stability. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea advances civil nuclear talks, secures U.S. reduced tariffs on automobiles

(mo) South Korea is moving forward on multiple fronts with the U.S., from nuclear energy cooperation to trade, signaling deepening strategic and economic ties.

South Korea urges U.S. to begin talks on civil uranium enrichment and fuel reprocessing

South Korea has called on the U.S. to swiftly begin consultations that could enable Seoul to enrich uranium and reprocess spent nuclear fuel for peaceful purposes.

The request was made by First Vice Foreign Minister Park Yoon-joo during talks in Washington on December 1 with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, marking the first high-level follow-up dialogue since the release of the allies' joint summit fact sheet on November 14 covering trade and security issues.

The two sides agreed to launch working groups on nuclear energy cooperation and South Korea's bid to build nuclear-powered submarines, as attention turns to implementing U.S. commitments supporting the process that would grant Seoul limited civil nuclear fuel-cycle capabilities within international nonproliferation frameworks. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

Meanwhile, President Lee Jae-myung dismissed proposals for South Korea to develop nuclear weapons, calling such a move "impossible" due to the lack of international and U.S. approval and the risk of severe economic sanctions. The remarks came amid renewed calls from opposition lawmakers following U.S. support for South Korea's civil uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing for peaceful purposes.

Lee and Foreign Minister Cho Hyun emphasized that pursuing nuclear armament would force South Korea to leave the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and risk becoming a "second North Korea." The president warned that unrealistic discussions on nuclear weapons were threatening to hinder legitimate nuclear fuel cycle initiatives, urging political actors to avoid "irresponsible" speculation. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

U.S. confirms cut in tariffs on South Korean automobiles to 15 percent

On the economic front, the U.S. has officially confirmed that its 25 percent tariffs on South Korean automobiles have been reduced to 15 percent, effective retroactively from November 1, following the implementation of a bilateral trade and investment deal.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick announced the move after South Korea advanced legislation tied to its pledge to invest USD 350 billion in the American economy (see article in this edition), a key condition agreed during the October 29 summit between

President Lee Jae Myung and President Donald Trump in Gyeongju.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed on November 14, the tariff cut takes effect from the beginning of the month in which the supporting bill was introduced — a bill submitted to South Korea's National Assembly on November 26 by the ruling Democratic Party.

Beyond automobiles, Washington will also remove tariffs on airplane parts and adjust South Korea's reciprocal rates to bring them in line with Japan and the European Union. [Yonhap News Agency 3]

South Korea bolsters defense ties with Norway, Sweden

(dql) South Korean Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back and Norwegian Defense Minister Tore O. Sandvik held talks in Oslo on November 28, agreeing to expand cooperation in future warfare domains including AI, unmanned systems, and advanced defense technologies. Both sides committed to identifying new areas of collaboration through regular defense consultations.

Ahn encouraged Norway to consider South Korea's Chunmoo rocket artillery system for its long-range precision strike acquisition program, while welcoming Oslo's recent purchase of 24 additional K9 self-propelled howitzers from Hanwha Aerospace.

Sandvik highlighted growing Asia–Europe security linkages amid global instability, stressing Norway's interest in deepening bilateral arms industry cooperation and noting the country's strategic role in Arctic security. Ahn also sought Norway's continued support for Seoul's North Korea policy and denuclearization efforts on the Korean Peninsula. [Yonhap News Agency]

In earlier meeting on November 27, Ahn held talks with his Swedish counterpart, Pal Jonson, in Stockholm to discuss strengthening defense sector cooperation and arms industry collaboration. Ahn noted the significance of his visit as the first South Korean defense chief to visit Sweden, marking the first South Korea-Sweden defense ministerial meeting in 14 years.

Both ministers agreed to focus on collaboration in advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, aerospace, drones, and counter-drone systems. [The Korea Herald]

Serbia, South Korea launch talks on Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

(mo) Serbia and South Korea have begun negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with the first round of talks taking place in Seoul from December 1 to 4, covering ten key areas including tariff concessions, rules of origin, customs procedures, and broader economic cooperation.

Seoul views Serbia as a strategic gateway to the EU and Balkan markets and an increasingly important partner as South Korean firms expand into Serbia's electric vehicle, battery, renewable energy, automotive components and materials sectors, with companies such as Yura, Kyungshin Cable and Superior Essex (LS Group) already operating there.

Recent cooperation also includes memorandums of understanding with Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power on nuclear energy and hydrogen and a 1-gigawatt solar power plant project led by a Hyundai Engineering consortium.

Trade between the two countries remains modest but growing. In 2024, Serbia exported about USD 95 million to South Korea, mainly copper ores and cleaning products, while imports reached USD 295 million, including cable components, processors and plastic insulating parts.

Officials say the CEPA aims to enhance Korean firms' market access and reduce supply-chain risks while deepening bilateral economic ties. [The Korea Times] [See News]

South Korea, Iran hold policy talks to boost bilateral cooperation after asset freeze lifted

(mo) South Korea and Iran held working-level policy talks in Tehran on November 31, led by Chung Kwang-yong, director general for Africa and Middle Eastern affairs at Seoul's foreign ministry, and Ali Asghar Mohammadi, Iran's director general for East Asia and Oceania, to explore ways to strengthen bilateral ties as relations continue to recover following the lifting of the Iranian asset freeze in 2023.

The two sides discussed practical cooperation in administration, culture and education, as well as coordination on international issues and developments on the Korean Peninsula and in the Middle East, with Chung urging progress in areas where tangible outcomes can be achieved.

After the talks, Chung met Iran's deputy foreign minister Majid Takht Ravanchi to review bilateral matters and requested Tehran's cooperation to ensure the safety and convenience of South Koreans residing or traveling in Iran. [Yonhap]

China donates USD 146,000 in support materials for women and children in Sri Lanka

(lm) China's All-China Women's Federation has donated goods valued at LKR 43 million (USD 146,200) to support program for women and children in Sri Lanka. The handover took place at Parliament, with officials from both countries describing the donation as part of longstanding bilateral cooperation on women's empowerment and child welfare. The support follows earlier discussions between Sri Lankan lawmakers and the federation in 2023 and 2024, during which China pledged further assistance for school uniforms and related initiatives. [Daily Mirror]

Cyclone Ditwah forces postponement of Indian Army chief's visit to Sri Lanka while International Fleet Review shifts into large-scale Indian-led relief mission

(ss/lm) Cyclone Ditwah has reshaped Sri Lanka's defense-diplomacy calendar and transformed the country's 75th-anniversary International Fleet Review (IFR) into a major humanitarian assistance platform. The storm—one of the most severe natural disasters to hit Sri Lanka in decades—has killed more than 350 people, left hundreds missing, and generated nationwide flooding, forcing India to reorient planned military engagements toward emergency relief operations.

India's Chief of Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, was scheduled to visit Colombo from December 1–2 in a trip that would have coincided with India's first formal commemoration of Operation Pawan, the 1987–1990 Indian Peace Keeping Force deployment. The visit has now been postponed due to the scale of

destruction, according to senior Indian officials. Indo–Sri Lankan military relations have been strengthening under a five-year defense cooperation memorandum of understanding, but immediate priorities have shifted toward crisis response. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2] [Times Now]

India has deployed extensive assets under Operation *Sagar Bandhu*, including three naval vessels—among them the indigenous aircraft carrier *INS Vikrant*—as well as Indian Air Force C-130 and IL-76 aircraft and teams from the National Disaster Response Force. These units are transporting relief supplies, conducting rescue operations, and supporting Sri Lanka's overwhelmed emergency services. Before redeploying for humanitarian operations, *INS Vikrant* delivered dry rations, fresh supplies, and essential items to Colombo.

The IFR, held from November 27 to 30, proceeded in altered form due to the cyclone. The event had brought together warships from India, Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Maldives, and Russia, underscoring Colombo's intent to showcase regional naval partnerships. Satellite imagery and naval reporting suggest that parts of the program were curtailed as participating ships—including *INS Vikrant*—were redirected toward humanitarian duties. [X] [Ada Derena 1] [Ada Derena 2] [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka and Türkiye reaffirm plans to deepen bilateral cooperation

(lm) Sri Lanka and Türkiye have reiterated their intention to expand political and economic cooperation following a meeting in Ankara between Sri Lanka's ambassador and a senior Turkish foreign affairs official.

Both sides highlighted more than seven decades of diplomatic ties and agreed to intensify work on economic priorities set during the Sri Lanka–Türkiye Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation held in Colombo in mid-2025. The discussion centered on strengthening trade and investment, developing sectoral cooperation, and advancing collaboration in areas such as science, technology, education, tourism, and labor mobility. [Daily Mirror]

Danish parliamentary delegation visits Taiwan to strengthen cooperation

(dql) A Danish parliamentary delegation visited Taiwan last week for the second consecutive year, focusing on enhancing regional security and expanding Taiwan-Denmark cooperation. The four-member group was led by Kasper Roug, vice chairman of the Parliamentary Taiwan Friendship Group.

During their five-day visit, the delegation held meetings with Taiwan's Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim and attended a banquet hosted by Deputy Foreign Minister François Wu. The group also met with key officials, including Deputy Legislative Speaker Johnny Chiang, Deputy Defense Minister Po Horng-huei, and Energy Administration Deputy Director-General Chen Chung-hsien. Discussions centered on Taiwan's political and economic landscape, cross-Strait tensions, and broader regional security concerns.

This visit follows a similar trip in November 2024, marking the first such visit from Denmark since 2019. [Scandasia]

Cambodian-Thai border situation remains tense amid conflicting claims and parallel technical cooperation

(bk/msz) Tensions along the Thai–Cambodian border have remained elevated since late November, with several new incidents, official disputes, and public misinformation emerging between November 25 and December 1, even as both governments continue selected technical cooperation on boundary management.

The most substantial development occurred on November 26, when Thailand and Cambodia completed a 16-day joint survey to install 166 temporary reference markers along an 8.3-kilometer stretch between boundary pillars 52 and 59 in Pong Nam Ron district of Chanthaburi province. Both sides stressed that this temporary boundary marking does not change the legal frontier but serves to align geographic reference data under internationally recognized technical standards. The next phase will involve a joint drone survey to produce high-resolution mapping for the Joint Border Committee before discussions begin on constructing a planned border-management fence, which Thai authorities insist would not constitute new demarcation. [The Nation]

This cooperative technical work has unfolded alongside renewed friction. Since November 25, Thai and Cambodian authorities have issued contradictory statements regarding several earlier November incidents, including the November 12 exchange of fire in Sa Kaeo province and the November 10 landmine discovery in Si Sa Ket province. Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains that Thai personnel fired first in Sa Kaeo, while the Royal Thai Army (RTA) asserts that shots came from Cambodian territory toward a Thai observation post, prompting warning fire from Thai personnel. A Thai forensic inspection, conducted jointly with the ASEAN Observer Team, reported bullet marks consistent with incoming fire on Thai positions. The RTA has also reiterated that the landmines discovered on November 10 appeared newly laid inside Thai territory, contrary to Phnom Penh's claim that they were remnants of older minefields. [AiR No. 47, November/2025, 4]

On December 1, tensions resurfaced in the public sphere when a Facebook user claimed that Cambodian soldiers had occupied Pha Insi, a clifftop in Ban Kruat district of Buri Ram province. Border Patrol Police inspected the site the same morning and reported no sign of foreign troops, no military movement, and no terrain changes. The RTA stated that the post caused unnecessary alarm and confirmed that there was no violation of Thai sovereignty. Authorities have opened an investigation into the source of the misinformation and urged residents in border areas to rely on official information rather than unsourced online reports. [Bangkok Post]

During the same period, Cambodia announced a reduction in its participation in Thailand's hosting of the 33rd Southeast Asian Games, scheduled from December 9 to 20 in Bangkok and Chon Buri. Having initially planned to compete in 21 sports, Cambodia stated in late November that it will now participate in 13, citing security considerations for its athletes and officials amid the current border climate. Thai authorities have not publicly commented on the decision. [Thai PBS World]

Thailand prepares major rice deal with China as bilateral ties deepen after historic royal visit

(lm) Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul will meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang on December 14 in Bangkok to finalize a memorandum of understanding for Beijing to purchase 500,000 tons of Thai rice, according to Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow. The

agreement is expected to be signed on the sidelines of the Mekong–Lancang Cooperation forum, a regional framework linking China with mainland Southeast Asian states. While the rice MoU will be the centerpiece of the meeting, both governments are also preparing to discuss wider cooperation issues. [Bangkok Post]

The planned meeting with Beijing follows what China's ambassador Zhang Jianwei described as a historic milestone: the recent state visit to China by Thailand's King and Queen from November 13 to 17, the first such visit by a Thai monarch since diplomatic relations were established fifty years ago. Hosted by President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, the trip highlighted the strategic importance both governments place on their relationship, taking place even as Thailand observed a national mourning period for the late Queen Sirikit. Discussions focused on long-term cooperation, including the China–Thailand railway project, agricultural trade, and emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, the digital economy, aviation, and space. Both sides also emphasized cultural and educational exchanges, with Beijing framing the visit as laying the groundwork for deeper cooperation over the next half-century. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand and New Zealand adopt five-year action plan ahead of planned Strategic Partnership upgrade

(lm) Thailand and New Zealand have signed a five-year Joint Plan of Action to guide cooperation from 2026 to 2030, marking the first formal action plan between the two countries and preparing the ground for upgrading relations to a Strategic Partnership in 2026. The agreement, announced in Bangkok, sets out collaboration under four areas: political and security cooperation, economic and trade development, cultural exchange, and regional and multilateral engagement. It includes commitments to strengthen efforts against transnational crime and money laundering, expand agricultural cooperation, and work toward tripling bilateral trade by 2045.

The plan also expands education and mobility initiatives, including a tenfold increase in New Zealand's scholarship offerings for Thai postgraduate students, additional exchange programs, the resumption of direct flights, and access for eligible Thai travelers to New Zealand's automated eGate system. Both governments will deepen cooperation on Mekong-related initiatives and work more closely on global platforms. [Bangkok Post]

China and Vietnam complete 39th joint naval patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin

(hn) Ships 09 and 17 of Brigade 171 returned to Ho Chi Minh City after completing the 39th annual joint patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin between the Vietnamese and Chinese navies.

Since 2006, these coordinated patrols have aimed to enhance cooperation and stability. During the November 19–20 mission, the two sides carried out joint activities such as boundary-line patrols, search and rescue drills, communication training, formation maneuvers, and naval salutes. Rear Admiral Nguyễn Văn Quân stated that the patrol strengthened mutual trust and supported peace, stability, and development.

The activity reflects agreements between high-level leaders and promotes greater understanding and cooperation between the two countries' armed forces. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnam]

Vietnam and Cambodia deepen political, economic, and border cooperation during high-level visit

(hn) Deputy Prime Minister Bùi Thanh Sơn visited Cambodia from November 27–28, meeting senior Cambodian Party and Government leaders to strengthen the stable and comprehensive partnership between the two countries. During courtesy meetings with Senate President Hun Sen and Prime Minister Hun Manet, he praised the strong progress in Vietnam–Cambodia relations, particularly in Party-to-Party ties, security–defense cooperation, and rapidly growing economic collaboration. Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation in politics, trade, investment, education, science–technology, and people-to-people exchanges, while enhancing coordination between border provinces.

Sơn urged Cambodia to work closely with Vietnam on major connectivity projects such as the Ho Chi Minh City–Mộc Bài–Bavet–Phnom Penh expressway, improving border gates and trade infrastructure, and tackling transnational crimes. He also requested support for Vietnamese-origin communities in Cambodia and solutions for remaining border issues. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnamplus]

Huawei and ZTE Gain Ground in Vietnam as Hanoi Shifts Toward Chinese Technology

(ms) Huawei and ZTE have secured several 5G equipment contracts in Vietnam this year, according to procurement data reviewed by Reuters, marking a shift from Hanoi's earlier reluctance to adopt Chinese technology in sensitive infrastructure. The awards include a Huawei-linked USD 23 million contract in April and multiple ZTE antenna tenders worth more than USD 20 million. The deals come as Vietnam's ties with China warm, while relations with the United States have cooled following new U.S. tariffs on Vietnamese goods.

Although Ericsson, Nokia, and Qualcomm continue to supply Vietnam's core 5G systems, Chinese vendors have begun gaining footholds with state-owned operators in peripheral parts of the network. Western officials have raised concerns that even limited Chinese involvement could undermine trust in Vietnam's network security and complicate future cooperation on advanced technologies. Diplomatic discussions in Hanoi have examined whether Chinese-supplied segments could be isolated, though experts note that equipment providers may still retain access to network data.

Vietnam's openness to greater Chinese participation also aligns with broader progress on cross-border infrastructure projects and reflects both pricing advantages and Hanoi's interest in deeper economic integration with Beijing. The trend underscores Vietnam's effort to balance major-power relationships while managing the growing technological competition between China and the United States. [Reuters]

Poland completes ratification of EU-Vietnam investment protection agreement, strengthening bilateral ties

(hn) Polish President Karol Nawrocki has officially signed the act ratifying the EU-Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA), marking the final step for Poland to become the twentieth of the twenty-seven EU member states to complete ratification. The ratification process in Poland saw full support from all political parties, with the bill being unanimously approved in the Sejm (lower house) on October 17 and in the Senate on November 6, reflecting a strong political consensus on the importance of deepening

cooperation with Vietnam, one of Poland's most significant partners in Southeast Asia.

This milestone follows high-level agreements reached during Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính's official visit to Poland in January, during which Poland committed to completing the EVIPA ratification process within the year. The agreement is seen as a key step in strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries (1950–2025).

The ratification of EVIPA is expected to elevate Poland–Vietnam relations to a new level, creating momentum for enhanced collaboration in multiple areas, especially economic, trade, and investment activities. It underscores both nations' commitment to deepening mutual trust, expanding bilateral exchanges, and fostering a long-term strategic partnership in line with the shared goals of sustainable development and regional integration. [Vietnamnews] [Thegulfobserver]

Vietnam and Portugal strengthen cooperation on politics, economy, and culture during 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties

(hn) Vietnam places high importance on deepening cooperation with Portugal across politics, economy, trade, culture, education, and judicial affairs, affirmed Phan Đình Trạc, Politburo member and head of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee's Commission for Internal Affairs, during his visit to Portugal from November 22–27 to mark fifty years of diplomatic relations.

The delegation met with senior Portuguese officials, including parliamentary and judicial leaders, and exchanged views on bilateral relations, anti-corruption, judicial reform, law-making, and regional and international issues. Both sides discussed expanding cooperation in culture, tourism, labor, maritime economy, green energy, and infrastructure, with Portugal expressing willingness to support Vietnamese goods entering Europe and EU projects under the Global Gateway initiative. Trạc proposed continued coordination on fiftieth-anniversary activities, launching political consultations to advance ties, and sought Portugal's support for EVIPA ratification and lifting the EU "yellow card" on illegal fishing. He also highlighted the Vietnamese Embassy's inauguration as a bridge between Asia-Pacific and Europe, supporting

the Vietnamese community in Portugal, and fostering stronger bilateral relations. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnam]

Vietnam strengthens comprehensive cooperation with New Zealand and Australia during deputy Prime Minister's official visits

(hn) Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Trần Hồng Hà visited New Zealand and Australia from November 20–25 to strengthen comprehensive cooperation with both countries.

Both sides reaffirmed the importance of their newly upgraded Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships and agreed to accelerate implementation of concrete action programs, promote market access for agricultural products, enhance supply chain diversification, and encourage business and high-tech investment.

They also committed to deeper cooperation in science, technology, digital transformation, agriculture, and climate change adaptation, with New Zealand and Australia pledging ongoing financial and technical support for Vietnam's climate and energy transition goals.

Additionally, the leaders agreed to strengthen education and labor cooperation, support direct flights, and facilitate more scholarships and favorable conditions for Vietnamese communities in both countries. [Vietnamnews] [Vietnamplus]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

3 December 2025 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, United Kingdom

A bigger Single Market before enlargement: how to integrate the Western Balkans ahead of accession

This hybrid panel will examine the European Commission's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, exploring how reforms, trade, and investment can accelerate the region's integration into the Single Market. Experts will discuss investment hurdles, geopolitical and supply chain challenges, and the prospects for candidate countries to fully participate in the EU economy by 2027. For more information and registration, visit [Bruegel].

4 December 2025 @ 3:00-4:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

How Gen Z is reshaping protest in North Africa

Young people across North Africa are once again mobilizing, echoing global Gen Z–led movements demanding accountability and a greater voice in shaping their futures. This online panel will explore how emerging youth-driven activism in Tunisia and Morocco is reshaping politics, governance, and the prospects for meaningful reform in the region. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

4 December 2025 @ 8:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Enhancing Taiwan's energy resilience: A cross-strait and beyond seminar

Taiwan's ability to withstand a potential PRC-imposed quarantine or blockade hinges on strengthening its energy security. This webinar will examine recent blackout lessons, progress on grid resilience, and the broader trajectory of Taiwan's energy transition. For more information and registration, please see [Atlantic Council].

5 December 2025 @ 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), The Heritage Foundation, USA

A New American Statecraft for Winning the New Cold War

This webinar will outline why the United States needs a revitalized maritime strategy of naval statecraft to deter China, strengthen resilience to economic coercion, and position itself for long-term competition. It will discuss how leveraging U.S. advantages at sea can reshape institutions, reinforce global posture, and regain the strategic edge. For more information and registration, please see [The Heritage Foundation].

5 December 2025 @ 9:30-10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

International Industrial Cooperation: Perspectives from Poland

This fireside chat with Konrad Golota, Poland's Undersecretary of State overseeing the state-owned defense sector, will explore the Polish defense industry's rapid growth and its response to evolving regional threats. It will also explore emerging opportunities for deeper industrial cooperation with transatlantic partners. For more information and registration, please see [CSIS].

8 December 2025 @ 3:00-4:30 p.m. (GMT+7), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The 2025 Sabah Election: Parsing the Polls

In this post-election briefing, experts will unpack the results of the November 29 Sabah state election, assess their wider implications, and examine how they may reshape federal–state relations going forward. For more information and registration, visit [ISEAS].

9 December 2025 @ 4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

China's Struggle for Influence in Central Asia. How is Beijing aiming to reshape the region?

China's expanding footprint in Central Asia may appear unstoppable, but on the ground, it is increasingly contested by local actors whose resistance is reshaping Beijing's ambitions. This webinar examines how China's rise in the region is negotiated rather than imposed, and what this means for Central Asia's evolving economic and security landscape and its ties with major global powers. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

9 December 2025 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+7), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Pacific Economic Cooperation Council's (PECC) State of the Region Report 2025-2026

This hybrid seminar will present the key insights from Pacific Economic Cooperation Council's (PECC's) State of the Region Report 2025–2026, drawing on an expert survey of more than 500 leaders across 24 economies on the Asia-Pacific's economic outlook. It will discuss why respondents foresee subdued global growth, highlight the top risks led by rising protectionism and trade tensions, and examine how structural shifts are reshaping global trade.

For more information and registration, visit [ISEAS].

9 December 2025 @ 3:00-4:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

hree Years of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act: Assessing the Impact

This webcast will present new research on the global impacts of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which has blocked over 10,000 shipments since its implementation. Experts will examine the law's evolving influence on forced-labor legislation worldwide and its future trajectory. For more information and registration, please see [CSIS].

9 December 2025 @ 9:30-11:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

Building a Golden Age for the U.S.-Japan Economic Partnership: Ensuring Security,

Stability, and Prosperity in the Indo-Pacific

This webcast will examine how the United States and Japan can sustain and deepen their economic engagement amid intensifying domestic pressures and shifting Indo-Pacific dynamics. Leading experts will assess emerging regional trends and outline new opportunities for cooperation on trade, investment, economic security, and third-market business development. For more information and registration, please see [CSIS].

Recent Book Releases

Sven Beckert, ***Capitalism: A Global History***, Penguin Press, 1344 pages, published November 25, 2025. For a review, see [The New York Times].

Devesh Kapur, Arvind Subramanian, ***A Sixth Of Humanity: Independent India's Development Odyssey***, HarperCollins India, 760 pages, published October 22, 2025. For a review, see [Asian Review of Books].

Geoffrey Robinson, Douglas Kammen, ***Exposed: A Visual History of the Destruction of the Indonesian Left***, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 320 pages, published October 15, 2025. For a review, see [Asian Review of Books].

Francisco Rodríguez, ***The Collapse of Venezuela: Scorched Earth Politics and Economic Decline, 2012–2020***, University of Notre Dame Press, 538 pages, published March 15, 2025. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs].

Calls

The **Swiss Society for African Studies (SGAS/SSEA)** and the **Association for African Studies in Germany e.V. (VAD)** invites paper proposals for their conference "African Perspectives on Global Treansformations," scheduled for August 26-28, 2026. The deadline for abstract submission is January 11, 2026. For more information, see [African Perspectives].

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 **Senior Coordinator – Governance and Policy Support**. The deadline for application submission is December 23, 2025. For more information, see [FAO].

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 Security and General Assistance Division**. The deadline for application submission is December 14, 2025. For more information, see [UN].

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 Monetary Fund (IMF)** seeks a 2025 Research Analyst. The deadline for application

submission is December 31, 2025. For more information, see [IMF].

TI International (RTI) seek as **Director – Technology & AI Automation**. The deadline for application submission is December 11, 2025. For more information, see [RTI].

Team:

Aika Sagheer (as), Alex Bushnell (ab), Amy Carlotti Lu (acl), Apolinarion AJ Schramm (ajs), Aung Naing Lin (anl), Ashley Teh Hui Ying (ay), Azra Selvi Kapu (ask), Busawan Kachonnarongvanish (bk), Dániel Babcsán (dnb), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Edda Árnadóttir (ea), Elif Cagatay (ec), Felix Serna Calvo (fs), Gemelee Hirang Domnik (ghd), Giulia Metyas (gm), Grey Pilarczyk (gp), Hoa Khanh Ngo (hn), Henning Glaser (hg), Lucas Meier (lm), Marina Martinez Lopez (mml), Marina Ortiz Ortiz (mo), Morten Strantzen (ms), Muhammed Yulmaz (my), Myat Sandar Zaw (msz), Nat Ng Ther Li (nl), Po Po Myint Shein (ppms), Savannah Morris (sm), Sibghat Ullah (su), Sreepreya Srinivasan (ss), Thoon Nadi Lynn (tl), Venus Phuangkom, Yamonyongyos Anankajeerapong (ya), Yeo Hui Qi (yq), Yi-Chen Lin (yl)

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German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance - CPG
Room 207, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

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