German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance
CPG

Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

No. 1, January/2026, 1

Brought to you by CPG

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first 2026 edition of Asia in Review (AiR). As we step into the new year, the AiR team sends you our best wishes for a happy, healthy, and successful 2026.

I hope you will enjoy our brief on the latest events, developments, and trends in domestic politics, international relations, and geopolitics across East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Special greetings are extended in this issue to everyone who celebrates Morocco's Proclamation of Independence Day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

Webpage: www.cpg-online.de, Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CPGTU

Main Sections

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

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

China: Xi Jinping's New Year address outlines economic priorities, technology goals and Taiwan position

(mis/ms) In his New Year address, President Xi Jinping outlined China's economic performance at the close of the 14th Five-Year Plan and set broad priorities for the next planning cycle, combining domestic policy messaging with references to national unity and China's international role. The speech, while framed as forward-looking, was delivered amid ongoing economic challenges at home and rising geopolitical tensions abroad.

Xi described 2025 as a milestone year, marking the completion of the 14th Five-Year Plan. He said China had met its main development objectives despite

domestic pressures and a complex external environment, projecting economic output of around CNY 140 trillion (USD 19.7 trillion). Looking ahead, he reiterated that the forthcoming 15th Five-Year Plan would prioritize "high-quality development," a concept that Chinese officials increasingly use to signal an emphasis on stability, industrial upgrading and risk management rather than rapid growth alone.

Technology and innovation were featured as core pillars of Xi's narrative. He pointed to progress in artificial intelligence, domestically developed chips, aerospace exploration and advanced military platforms as evidence that China is accelerating its push for technological self-reliance. According to Xi, these advances are not only economic drivers but also strategic assets as China seeks to secure its position in an increasingly competitive global order, in indirect reference to the ongoing tensions with the US. [AP]

Beyond economics, the speech placed strong emphasis on national unity, most notably on the matter of Taiwan. Xi reiterated that reunification with the island was an "unstoppable trend", language that came just a day after China concluded large-scale military drills simulating a blockade of Taiwan [AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5].

The New Year address was interspersed on state television with images of China's largest-ever military parade and references to second world war commemorations, reinforcing a narrative that links historical victory, military strength and national rejuvenation.

On the international stage, Xi portrayed China as a stabilizing force amid what he described as global "turbulence and transformation". He highlighted multilateral forums hosted by Beijing, new climate commitments and proposals to reform global governance. [Xinhua]

Taken together, Xi's New Year address blended reassurance at home with resolve abroad. While the official tone emphasized confidence, reform and shared prosperity, the surrounding political and military context suggests that 2026 may test Beijing's ability to balance economic stabilization, technological ambition and an increasingly forceful approach to sovereignty and security issues. [South China Morning Post] [The Guardian]

China: Tax policy on condoms and birth control pills reflects widening push to lift

birth rates

(mis/ms) China has taken another step in its effort to slow a deepening demographic decline by ending a decades-old tax exemption on contraceptives, a move that underscores how policymakers are reassessing long-standing population controls in the face of persistently low fertility.

From January 1, condoms and oral contraceptive pills have been brought under a 13 percent value-added tax, ending an exemption that had been in place since 1994. The change comes as China's population contracted for a third consecutive year in 2024, with births falling to 9.54 million—about half the level recorded a decade earlier.

The decision marks a sharp contrast with China's earlier population strategy. For more than three decades after the one-child policy was introduced nationwide in 1980, the state actively restricted births through administrative limits and financial penalties. That policy was formally ended in 2016, replaced first by a two-child policy and then, in 2021, by a three-child policy as concerns mounted over rapid ageing, a shrinking workforce and slowing economic growth.

Despite the shift in headline policy, birth rates have continued to fall, prompting authorities to broaden their approach. Beijing now describes its strategy as promoting "fertility-friendly" conditions rather than mandating family size. Measures rolled out over the past two years include monthly childcare subsidies, tax deductions for childcare expenses, longer maternity and paternity leave and the removal of personal income tax on some childcare services. Provincial governments have been given wide latitude to design their own incentive packages, resulting in uneven levels of support across regions.

More recently, policymakers have also signaled greater openness toward non-traditional families. Several provinces have eased rules to allow unmarried women to access maternity benefits, while courts have strengthened protections for children born outside marriage, reflecting recognition that delayed marriage and changing social norms are contributing to low fertility.

Still, the removal of tax exemptions on contraceptives has drawn criticism from public health experts. They warn higher costs could disproportionately affect students and lower-income groups, potentially increasing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections—an outcome that could

undermine broader social and health objectives. [Le Monde] [BBC] [Reuters]

China: Anti-corruption drive intensified after record number of senior officials ensnared in 2025

(mis) China's ruling Communist Party has signaled that its sweeping anti-corruption campaign will not only continue but intensify, after a record 65 senior officials were investigated last year. This stands in accordance with President Xi Jinping's insistence that corruption remains the greatest threat to the party's long-term rule.

In a front-page editorial published on January 3, the People's Daily said the party must maintain "high-pressure" discipline enforcement and warned officials against any expectation that the crackdown might ease. The commentary echoed themes from Xi's New Year's address, stressing "self-reform" as central to avoiding the historical cycle of rise and decline that has toppled past dynasties.

According to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the 65 "tigers" — officials at vice-ministerial rank or above — represent the highest annual total since Xi launched his anti-graft drive more than a decade ago, and a 12 percent increase from 2024. Those detained spanned provincial leaders, senior regulators, state-owned enterprise executives, university presidents and top financial officials.

The most recent case involved Zhang Shiping, a former vice-chairwoman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, who was detained seven years after retirement. Her case reflects a broader pattern in which investigations increasingly reach into previously untouchable institutions and target officials long after they leave office.

The campaign has also extended beyond civilian governance. Military and defense-related figures have featured prominently, with several senior generals expelled from the party in recent months, reinforcing Xi's message that "no area is off-limits" in the drive to tighten discipline.

Official data cited by Xinhua shows that in the first three quarters of 2025 alone, disciplinary authorities nationwide opened nearly 789,000 cases and punished more than 677,000 individuals. Efforts to track down fugitives and recover illicit assets abroad have also

accelerated under the “Sky Net” campaign, signaling a more internationalized phase of enforcement.

In 2025, China’s disciplinary watchdogs intensified efforts to tighten work standards and strengthen internal discipline, targeting excessive formalism, bureaucratic inertia, hedonism and waste, in line with the Party leadership’s eight-point rules on improving conduct. According to official figures, authorities investigated 251,516 cases involving breaches of these rules in the first 11 months of the year, resulting in disciplinary or administrative penalties for 225,347 officials nationwide. [Xinhua] [South China Morning Post]

China: Consumption dilemma persists despite expanding stimulus efforts

(ms) China is entering 2026 with renewed policy focus on boosting household spending, but persistent structural weaknesses continue to limit the effectiveness of consumption-led growth. Recent moves, including the allocation of CNY 62.5 billion (USD 8.9 billion) for an expanded consumer goods trade-in scheme, highlight policymakers’ concern that domestic demand remains too weak to offset slowing exports and industrial overcapacity.

Household consumption accounts for roughly 40 percent of China’s gross domestic product, well below levels seen in advanced economies and far short of Beijing’s long-stated ambition to rebalance growth away from investment and exports. Despite repeated pledges from senior leaders, including President Xi Jinping, consumption growth has struggled to gain sustained momentum.

Several structural factors underpin the problem. A prolonged property downturn has eroded household wealth, while an uncertain employment outlook and subdued wage growth have encouraged precautionary saving. Youth unemployment, though less prominently reported than in previous years, remains elevated, weighing on discretionary spending. At the same time, deflationary pressures have reduced incentives for consumers to bring forward purchases.

Beijing has responded with targeted measures rather than broad-based cash transfers. The trade-in program, overseen by the National Development and Reform Commission, subsidizes purchases of home appliances, vehicles and, from 2026, digital devices such as smartphones and tablets. Officials argue the approach stimulates demand while supporting

industrial upgrading and green goals, particularly through incentives for new energy vehicles. [Bloomberg] [Reuters 1]

However, economists note that such schemes tend to pull forward consumption rather than generate lasting increases. Audits have already uncovered misuse of funds, including inflated prices and fraudulent claims, prompting authorities to promise tighter enforcement. More fundamentally, analysts say subsidies do little to address underlying income insecurity.

Recent data underline the challenge. Retail sales growth has slowed sharply, while services activity ended 2025 at its weakest pace in six months. Manufacturing output has shown brief, stimulus-linked rebounds, but new export orders remain soft and firms continue to cut prices amid intense competition.

Chinese leaders have acknowledged the imbalance between two strong supply and weak demand. Yet policy remains cautious, favoring incremental stimulus over sweeping welfare reform. As China prepares to launch its 15th Five-Year Plan, the central question is whether consumption can be structurally lifted—or whether the economy will continue to rely on investment and state support to sustain growth. [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3]

China: Chipmakers required to use more domestic equipment in new capacity

(ms) China has begun requiring semiconductor manufacturers to use at least 50 percent domestically produced equipment when adding new production capacity, according to reports by Reuters, underscoring Beijing's intensifying drive to build a self-sufficient chip industry amid sustained U.S. technology restrictions.

The rule, which has not been publicly announced, is being enforced through the state approval process for new or expanded fabrication plants. Chipmakers seeking permits must demonstrate via procurement tenders that at least half of the equipment for new capacity will be sourced from Chinese suppliers. Applications that fall short are typically rejected, although regulators allow flexibility where domestic tools are not yet available, particularly for advanced production lines.

The policy reflects a broader "whole nation" approach championed by President Xi Jinping, aimed at reducing dependence on foreign technology across the semiconductor supply chain.

While U.S. curbs directly target leading-edge technologies, the new mandate is reshaping procurement decisions even where foreign equipment from Japan, Europe, or the United States remains technically available. Officials have signaled that 50 percent is a minimum threshold, with an eventual goal of full localization.

Domestic suppliers such as Naura Technology and Advanced Micro-Fabrication Equipment are emerging as key beneficiaries, gaining ground in areas like etching and cleaning tools once dominated by foreign firms. China's leading foundry, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation, has increasingly turned to local partners as servicing foreign equipment has become more difficult under sanctions.

The push comes as Chinese officials step up international travel to reassure partners that Beijing remains open to cooperation, even as technological decoupling deepens. Analysts say the policy highlights Beijing's willingness to accept short-term inefficiencies to accelerate learning and innovation at home.

For global chip equipment makers, the rule signals a structural squeeze on access to the world's largest semiconductor market. For China, it marks a decisive shift from adapting to external pressure toward proactively redesigning its technology ecosystem around long-term sovereignty goals. [Index Box] [Modern Diplomacy] [Reuters]

China: USD 42 billion investment plan to support growth in 2026

(ms) China has approved a new batch of major infrastructure projects and central government investment plans for 2026 worth about CNY 295 billion (USD 42 billion), as Beijing steps up efforts to stabilize growth and lay the groundwork for its next five-year development cycle.

According to the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), around CNY 220 billion (USD 31.5 billion) has been allocated to 281 projects linked to major national development priorities and security-related strategies. These include large-scale underground pipeline networks and other core infrastructure intended to strengthen economic resilience.

An additional CNY 75 billion (USD 10.7 billion) has been earmarked for 673 projects focusing on ecological

protection, carbon reduction and environmental restoration. Officials said the early allocation is designed to speed up implementation and ensure projects can begin promptly in 2026.

The NDRC has also approved or authorized major projects across transportation, water management, energy and scientific research. Key initiatives include a new airport in Guangzhou, cross-sea ferry infrastructure connecting Zhanjiang and Haikou, water resource allocation and reservoir projects in Liaoning and Yunnan, as well as ultra-high-voltage power grid and hydropower developments in Zhejiang and Sichuan.

The investment package is intended to support a smooth launch of China's 15th Five-Year Plan for 2026–2030. In 2025, Beijing allocated about CNY 800 billion (USD 114 billion) to similar flagship programs, highlighting the government's continued reliance on infrastructure spending to cushion economic headwinds while strengthening energy, transport and resource security. [CGTV] [Reuters] [Xinhua]

China: New AI science platform enters operation reshaping how research can be conducted

(mis) China has launched a new artificial intelligence system designed to conduct advanced scientific research with minimal human oversight, marking a significant step in the country's push to integrate AI directly into core research infrastructure. The platform, which officially entered operation on December 23, is built to operate at national scale and is already accessible to more than a thousand institutional users across China, according to reports by the South China Morning Post and Interesting Engineering.

At the heart of the system is its deep integration with China's National Supercomputing Network (SCNet), a high-speed backbone linking more than 30 supercomputing centers nationwide. Through this network, the AI can draw on pooled computing resources on demand, allowing it to handle complex and computation-heavy research tasks that previously required extensive human coordination.

Unlike conventional research software, the new platform functions as an autonomous AI agent. Once given a natural-language instruction, it can independently break down research objectives, allocate computing power, run simulations, analyze large datasets and generate comprehensive scientific

reports. Chinese researchers say this approach dramatically shortens research cycles, reducing work that once took a full day to roughly an hour in some cases and describe it as a shift away from isolated "number crunching" toward AI-driven discovery, where data, tools and computing power are coordinated automatically rather than manually.

The launch builds on Beijing's broader "AI+" initiative announced in August, which calls for using AI to accelerate scientific discovery and industrial innovation. By moving beyond pilot projects to large-scale deployment, the platform signals China's intent to embed AI more deeply into national research and development systems.

Only at a broader strategic level does the system also carry implications for global technology competition. The South China Morning Post and Interesting Engineering note that the launch came shortly after the United States announced its own AI-led science initiative, the Genesis Mission, highlighting parallel efforts to harness AI and supercomputing for scientific advancement. At the same time, both outlets point to growing concerns about security and governance, as granting AI direct access to national supercomputing networks raises questions about data protection, cyber risks and the handling of sensitive research. [South China Morning Post] [Interesting Engineering]

China: New regulations to expand power grid to absorb growth in renewable energy

(ms) China has issued new policy guidance to accelerate investment in its power grid, aiming to improve the system's ability to absorb a growing share of renewable energy and support large-scale long-distance power transmission, according to documents released by regulators.

The guidance, jointly issued by the National Energy Administration and the National Development and Reform Commission, calls for building a high-quality grid capable of supporting more than 420 gigawatts of west-to-east power transmission capacity by 2030. It also includes plans for about 40 gigawatts of additional interprovincial balancing capacity to help manage fluctuations in supply and demand.

As of 2024–2025, China's west-to-east transmission capacity is estimated at around 300 to 330 gigawatts, delivered mainly through ultra-high-voltage (UHV) alternating current and direct current lines. China has

constructed more than 40 UHV transmission lines, making it the world's largest operator of long-distance power transmission infrastructure.

Total installed power generation capacity nationwide exceeds 2.9 terawatts, with renewables accounting for more than 50 percent of installed capacity. Wind and solar capacity alone surpassed 1.2 terawatts in 2024, but their contribution to actual power output remains constrained by intermittency and grid congestion, particularly in western provinces such as Xinjiang, Gansu and Inner Mongolia.

Regulators warned against inefficient overbuilding and encouraged greater participation by private capital in grid investment and construction. [China Daily] [Reuters]

China: Images fuel debate over mobile catapult system for military drones

(ms) Recent images from a Shanghai shipyard have triggered wide discussion among defence analysts after appearing to show China testing a new way to launch military drones without relying on traditional runways or aircraft carriers. The photographs, which have circulated widely on Chinese social media, show a series of heavy trucks linked together to form a straight launch track, with a large fixed-wing unmanned aircraft mounted at one end.

Such a configuration has led observers to speculate that the system may function as a truck-mounted electromagnetic catapult. In simple terms, an electromagnetic catapult uses powerful electrical forces to accelerate an aircraft to flying speed over a short distance, removing the need for a long runway. Similar technology is already used on China's newest aircraft carriers, but its appearance in a mobile, land- or ship-based form would mark a significant expansion in how and where drones could be deployed.

The trucks were seen at the dock alongside the Zhong Da 79, a commercial cargo ship that previously attracted attention after being photographed carrying containerised missile launchers and military sensors. This has fuelled speculation that the vessel may have been adapted for military purposes. If confirmed, the combination of a civilian ship and a modular drone launch system could point to a "merchant aircraft carrier" concept, in which commercial hulls are repurposed to launch unmanned aircraft for surveillance or limited combat roles.

Beyond maritime use, a transportable catapult could also be deployed on land. Such a system would allow drones to operate from remote islands, temporary coastal sites or areas where runways are unavailable or vulnerable to attack. This would fit with China's broader emphasis on dispersed and flexible military operations, particularly in contested maritime regions.

However, key uncertainties remain. It is not clear whether the drones seen are operational aircraft or test mock-ups, how much power the system requires, or how drones would be recovered after launch. While the images do not prove the concept is ready for deployment, they highlight China's ongoing efforts to reduce its reliance on fixed bases and expand the reach of its unmanned forces. [Militarnyi] [South China Morning Post] [TWZ]

China: Reusable Long March rocket planned for debut in first half of 2026

(ms) China plans to launch a reusable, cargo-focused rocket derived from its next-generation Long March family in the first half of 2026, marking another step in efforts to raise launch capacity and reduce costs. China Rocket, a spinoff of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, said the 5-meter-diameter vehicle will use liquid propellants and incorporate partial reusability.

The launcher appears to be based on the Long March 10 program developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, which underpins China's future crewed lunar ambitions. A cargo-oriented variant, often referred to as Long March 10B, is expected to lift around 11 tons to low Earth orbit and support deployment of China's Guowang mega constellation.

If successful, the flight would represent China's first orbital booster recovery, complementing parallel reusable rocket efforts by other state institutes and private launch firms as Beijing accelerates its spaceflight cadence. [Space News]

Japan: Data manipulation scandal at power plant deals setback to government's nuclear restart push

(dql) The Nuclear Regulation Authority, Japan's nuclear regulator, has suspended the safety review of Chubu

Electric Power's Hamaoka nuclear plant after determining that staff likely manipulated seismic data to ease approval for restarting two reactors. The company admitted employees may have selected earthquake-wave data favorable to passing quake-resistance tests, contradicting claims that the figures reflected an objective average.

The case is particularly sensitive because the Hamaoka plant sits near the Nankai Trough, where a major quake is anticipated. Regulators launched the probe after a whistleblower alert. The company has appointed outside lawyers to investigate and faces additional scrutiny following earlier reports of misconduct at the site.

The incident undermines trust in the operator and poses a political setback to the government's strategy of reviving nuclear energy under stricter post-Fukushima rules to support energy security and emissions goals. TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant and Hokkaido Electric's Tomari plant recently gained local backing and advanced toward restart. [Kyodo News] [Reuters]

TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) is Japan's largest electric utility and the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which suffered the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Japan: Crime rises for third year

(dql) Japan's 2025 crime white paper reports a third consecutive annual rise in criminal activity, with total reported offenses climbing over 30,000 to 737,679 in 2024. [Ministry of Justice, Japan, in Japanese]

Theft dominated, accounting for nearly 70 percent of cases (501,507). Fraud surged 25 percent to 57,324 incidents, driven largely by tokuryū groups specializing in scams. "tokuryū" refers to loosely organized, often small-scale criminal groups that specialize in particular types of crime—most commonly fraud, scams, or specialized financial crimes. Unlike the more hierarchical and traditional yakuza syndicates, tokuryū groups are less structured, usually operating in small cells or networks rather than under a strict chain of command.

Sexual and indecent assaults rose sharply by 45 percent, partly due to legislative clarifications in 2023. Homicides (970) and robberies (1,370) also edged higher.

Arrests increased for a second year to 287,273, including record highs in cybercrime (13,164), child abuse (2,649), and stalking (1,341). The overall arrest rate rose to 38.9%, while recidivism fell slightly to 46.2 percent continuing a four-year decline. Juvenile arrests, after decades of decline, have risen for three consecutive years, reaching 29,675 in 2024. [Nippon.com]

Mongolia: 300-day action plan approved to support recovery, protect incomes

(fs) The government approved a 300-day action plan on December 31 aimed at accelerating economic recovery. As part of the decision, the cabinet instructed ministries, government agencies, and local authorities not to increase state service fees and charges for individuals and businesses during the 2026 fiscal year. Local representative bodies were also urged to refrain from raising locally imposed taxes and fees.

The government cited recent economic indicators showing growth of 5.9 percent and inflation at 8.2 percent, close to the central bank's target. The balance of payments is in surplus, and foreign exchange reserves have reached USD 6 billion. Growth has been supported by continued expansion in agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, alongside a recovery in the mining sector in the third quarter. [Montsame]

Government raises pensions, social welfare benefits

In parallel, the government increased all old-age pensions by USD 22.50 from January 1. The increase applies uniformly to all pensioners, including recipients of social insurance and military pensions, to avoid widening gaps between higher and lower pensions.

The government also revised several social welfare benefits. Monthly subsistence allowances for adults with disabilities who have lost 50 percent or more of their working capacity, and for children with disabilities requiring permanent care have risen from USD 111.60 to USD 134.70.

Social welfare pensions for elderly citizens, children under 18 who have lost a breadwinner, and certain large or single-parent households have increased to USD 1,217.40. Caregiver allowances will also rise, including benefits for those caring for children with severe disabilities.

In addition, the minimum full pension will be set at USD 216.80, while the minimum proportional pension

will be USD 184. As a result, the average pension is expected to increase from USD 239.90 to USD 262.50. [iToim]

Mongolia: Government targets USD 1 billion in tourism revenue in 2026

(fs) Prime Minister Gombojav Zandanshatar said Mongolia aims to welcome one million tourists and generate USD 1 billion in tourism revenue in 2026, speaking during regional meetings in Khuvsgul province (north of the country) ahead of a national leaders' summit. He noted that tourism revenue reached USD 700 million this year and identified the sector as a key source of foreign-exchange earnings.

Zandanshatar outlined the emergence of a "golden triangle of tourism" encompassing Khuvsgul, Arkhangai, Selenge, and Bulgan provinces, highlighting the region's combined potential in tourism and agriculture. He stated that coordinated regional development could significantly strengthen local economies.

The Government Secretariat is preparing a joint meeting of provincial governors, Ulaanbaatar city officials, and local administrators on January 15, where a results agreement is expected to be signed. Earlier, on January 5, the Prime Minister held an online briefing with cabinet members and more than 300 counties and district leaders, with participation from all 21 provinces and the capital.

To support tourism growth, the government plans to prioritise infrastructure development in Khuvsgul province. Some projects include continuing the road toward Khankh, launching the Shine-Ider route, and constructing the Khankh-Khatgal road from the eastern direction, in line with an environmentally sustainable eco-tourism strategy. [GoGo]

Mongolia: Renewable energy share to be raised to 30 percent by 2030

(fs) Mongolia currently meets 18.3 percent of its total electricity consumption from renewable energy sources and aims to increase this share to 30 percent by 2030, according to the Ministry of Energy. To achieve this goal, the government is implementing a package of renewable energy expansion projects scheduled for full completion by 2027.

The total financing for the package amounts to USD 66.22 million, including USD 40 million in loans from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), USD 14.6 million in grants, and USD 5.62 million from the state budget. Four renewable power stations have already been commissioned in Govi-Altai and Zavkhan provinces under this program.

In addition, a large-capacity energy storage project for the power grid, financed with USD 103 million in ADB loans and grants, has been completed. Separately, environmental, social, and technical studies are under way for the Egiin Gol hydropower project, which is estimated to cost USD 827.6 million. Once operational, the plant could reduce annual electricity import payments to Russia by approximately USD 48-52 million. [Bloomberg TV]

North Korea: Mass production of anti-tank missiles scales up

(dql) North Korea has reportedly started mass-producing an upgraded Bulsae-4 long-range, electro-optical anti-tank missile, with deliveries expected in the first half of 2026. Pyongyang claims production capacity will rise 2.5-fold, amid reports of the missile's use by Russian forces in Ukraine.

While North Korea presents the Bulsae-4 as a significant frontline enhancement, analysts caution that it does not fundamentally change battlefield dynamics, though it remains modern by regional standards.

The missile incorporates features similar to the US Javelin and China's HJ-10, including top-attack capability, "fire-and-forget" targeting, and non-line-of-sight engagement. Open-source reports suggest it has been employed against mobile artillery behind Ukrainian lines. Comparable tactics have appeared globally, such as Hezbollah using Almas missiles against Israeli air defenses in 2024 and Iran deploying Spike missiles against radar systems in 2025.

North Korea is also diversifying launch platforms, including pickup-mounted multi-missile systems and potential man-portable versions, with modular launch containers enhancing flexibility. The production surge is part of a broader expansion of North Korea's missile industry, funded largely by estimated tens of billions in annual arms sales to Russia, which faces its own production shortfalls under sanctions and battlefield losses. [Military Watch Magazine] [United 24]

South Korea: Court extends detention of former President Yoon over martial law case

(dql) The Seoul Central District Court has renewed the detention of former president Yoon Suk Yeol, extending his custody for up to six more months as he stands trial over his failed effort to impose martial law in late 2024.

Prosecutors accuse Yoon of abusing presidential power and endangering national security, including allegedly ordering surveillance drone missions over North Korea to bolster his justification for military rule. The court said the extension was granted due to fears he could tamper with evidence.

This marks Yoon's third arrest since last year, tied to overlapping cases involving insurrection, obstruction of justice, and procedural violations surrounding his martial law attempt. He was briefly released in March 2025 after an earlier warrant was overturned but was rearrested in July as investigations expanded. [Yonhap News Agency] [Channel News Agency]

In the separate obstruction-of-justice case, a verdict is due on January 16. Prosecutors have requested a 10-year sentence (see AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5).

South Korea: Ruling party lawmaker quits amid election bribery probe

(dql) Ruling Democratic Party lawmaker Kang Sun-woo has withdrawn from the party after being accused of accepting KRW 100 million (USD 69,400) from a Seoul city councilor during the 2022 local elections. Police opened a bribery investigation following a complaint from opposition legislators, with prosecutors alleging the money was delivered through an aide. Kang said she left the party to avoid further political fallout and pledged to cooperate with investigators. [Yonhap News Agency]

The scandal gained momentum after an audio recording surfaced of Kang discussing the issue with fellow DP lawmaker Kim Byung-kee, who has since resigned as the party's floor leader after mounting public backlash over multiple ethics allegations and fresh claims that he was aware of — but failed to act on — a reported KRW 100 million (USD 74,000) payment connected to the party's 2022 local-election

nomination process (see AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5).

In addition to Kang's resignation, the Democratic Party formally expelled her and moved to impose disciplinary action against Kim. [Korea JoongAng Daily] [KBS 1]

Separately, the police have merged 11 complaints against Kim into a broader investigation now handled by the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency's public crime unit. Besides his involvement in Kang's case, the probe covers a wide range of suspected misconduct, including alleged attempts to influence personnel decisions at e-commerce giant Coupang involving a former aide, possible violations of anti-graft rules over a luxury meal and hotel voucher, and accusations of abusing authority to secure favors for his son linked to the National Intelligence Service. [KBS 2]

South Korea: Climate minister's chip cluster remarks stir bipartisan backlash

(dql) Climate minister King Sung-whan has sparked rare bipartisan backlash from both his own ruling Democratic Party (DP) and the opposition People Power Party (PPP) after publicly questioning whether the city of Yongin is the right site for the country's massive KRW 622 trillion (USD 429.9 billion) semiconductor cluster being developed by the country's two leading semiconductor manufacturers Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix.

DP and PPP lawmakers warned that his comments could unsettle business plans, undermine confidence in a flagship industrial project, and damage South Korea's position in the intensifying global competition over advanced chips.

The controversy arose after the minister suggested that the mega-complex — whose projected power demand is equivalent to output from about 15 nuclear reactors — might be better located in a region with stronger electricity supply. The ministry later said his remarks were misunderstood and were intended to highlight the need for more efficient power systems such as self-sufficient microgrids.

Some ruling-party lawmakers from North Jeolla interpreted the remarks as support for relocating the project to their region, triggering political maneuvering ahead of local elections. Lawmakers representing Yongin rejected relocation arguments, citing technical

constraints such as grid stability and risks from coastal conditions. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Anti-Corruption watchdog chief quits early amid uproar over handling of former First Lady case

(dql) President Lee Jae-myung accepted the resignation of Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission chief Ryu Chul-whan, ending his term a year early amid political pressure and public criticism.

Ryu, appointed under former president Yoon Suk-yeol, had faced strong backlash over the commission's decision to clear former First Lady Kim Keon-hee of allegations that she accepted a luxury handbag, ruling that the anti-graft law did not apply to presidential spouses.

The case drew public anger and controversy deepened after a senior official involved in the probe died by suicide. Ryu's absence from Cabinet meetings since early December further fueled speculation that he was being pushed out. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Education Ministry unveils sweeping student mental health plan amid rising teen suicides

(co) Education authorities unveiled a comprehensive plan to expand student mental health support, as teenage suicides rose from 197 cases in 2021 to 221 in 2024, with more than half occurring in the Seoul metropolitan area.

The plan focuses on early intervention and long-term care by deploying mental health professionals nationwide, expanding emergency response teams and counseling services, and strengthening preventive education, as officials warn student mental health has become a pressing social issue rather than an individual one. [The Korea Herald]

Taiwan: Partisan deadlock over government's special defense budget persists

(acl/dql) In his New Year's Day address, President Lai Ching-te urged opposition parties to set aside partisan differences and pass a proposed USD 39.8 billion special defense budget, citing China's "rising expansionary ambitions." Lai said the budget, alongside drafted legal revisions, is intended to strengthen national security, enhance Taiwan's overall defense posture over the next eight years, and support the domestic weapons manufacturing industry. [Office of the President, Taiwan]

Lai's remarks came shortly after China conducted large-scale military exercises around Taiwan early last week and after the opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), which together hold a legislative majority, blocked the review of the special budget for the fifth time on December 30 (see AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5).

Lai stressed the importance of respecting constitutional order and warned against political deadlock, urging lawmakers to prioritize the public interest over partisan conflict. He added that continued obstruction could undermine international confidence in Taiwan's self-defense and risk sending a signal of political division to Beijing. [Focus Taiwan 1] [Taiwan News]

Lai also dismissed opposition efforts to impeach him as "a waste of time," arguing that such a motion could not clear the two-thirds legislative threshold required for approval. The KMT and TPP passed a motion on December 26 to initiate impeachment proceedings, citing Lai's refusal to promulgate amendments increasing revenue allocations to local governments (see AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5). Lai urged lawmakers instead to focus on reviewing the national budget. [Focus Taiwan 2]

In response, the KMT said Lai's speech "failed to address any of the opposition party's demands" and argued he had neglected key public issues over the past year, including high housing prices, low wages, public safety, and energy stability. While Lai has repeatedly called for cross-party cooperation in the name of national unity, the party insisted that he must first respect legislative oversight.

The KMT added that national defense spending should be balanced with social welfare and subject to strict scrutiny, noting that opposition lawmakers have criticized the special defense budget as opaque and lacking clear details on its proposed allocations. [Taipei Times] [Focus Taiwan 3]

Budget stalemate

In line with this stance, on January 2, KMT and TPP lawmakers again blocked the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP's) attempt to move the the 2026 national budget proposal forward and instead backed an alternative agenda.

The opposition has refused to review the budget for months in protest over the Cabinet's refusal to fund recently passed laws granting raises to military personnel and restoring parts of public-sector pensions—measures the DPP administration has declined to implement on constitutional and fiscal grounds. [Focus Taiwan 4]

Opposition passes symbolic censure of premier

In addition, the opposition-controlled parliament approved a symbolic censure motion against Premier Cho Jung-tai, accusing his administration of mishandling constitutional disputes, public-sector funding issues, and regulatory appointments — failings the opposition says have deepened institutional gridlock and partisan confrontation.

KMT and TPP also backed a separate motion urging National Security Council chief Joseph Wu to resign after a former aide was convicted of leaking sensitive information to China, while criticizing Wu for refusing to cooperate with legislative oversight.

The DPP opposed both measures, noting their largely political character. The votes took place after the opposition again blocked a DPP-sponsored resolution condemning recent Chinese military drills around Taiwan — a move the government warned undermines unity at a time of heightened cross-strait pressure and complicates efforts to advance defense and central government budget reviews. [Taipei Times 2] [Focus Taiwan 5]

Taiwan: Former president Ma Ying-jeou acquitted in party asset sales case

(dql) The High Court has reaffirmed the acquittal of former president Ma Ying-jeou in a long-running case over the current main opposition party's asset sales in the mid-2000s, finding that prosecutors failed to prove breach of trust in disputed transactions involving major party-owned media and property holdings.

The court upheld an earlier ruling that Ma did not exercise managerial authority over the Kuomintang's (KMT's) investment arm responsible for the deals, and

that the evidence against two senior party figures involved in the sales was insufficient.

The case traces back to a complaint filed in 2006 by You Si-kun — the then-chairman of the currently ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) — with prosecutors' anti-corruption unit, whose successor agency later dropped the investigation in 2014 without charges.

Prosecutors revived the case in 2017 after new material was submitted, including findings from the Ill-gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee, which had been created by the DPP government to review Kuomintang assets.

In response to the latest ruling, Ma Ying-jeou's office said the proceedings stemmed from DPP-driven efforts and sustained media and prosecutorial scrutiny, arguing that the court's decision has now vindicated him. [Taipei Times] [Focus Taiwan]

The decision closes another chapter in a politically sensitive dispute linked to efforts by DPP administrations to scrutinize and reclaim historical KMT assets — an issue that has remained a recurring flashpoint in Taiwan's transitional justice and partisan rivalry.

Taiwan: President Lai names ex-submarine squadron chief to head electronic warfare agency

(dql) President Lai Ching-te has promoted former submarine commander Chao Chien-kuo to vice admiral and appointed him to lead Taiwan's Communication Development Office, the military unit responsible for electronic warfare, signals intelligence, and advanced communications systems. Chao previously commanded the Navy's 256th Submarine Squadron—the principal submarine-operating unit within Taiwan's naval forces.

The office oversees surveillance and monitoring of electronic communications—including satellite signals—and operates under a partially classified budget due to the sensitivity of its mission. Human intelligence remains under the separate Military Intelligence Bureau.

The move is seen as strengthening leadership in Taiwan's electronic warfare domain while also boosting morale within the navy amid progress on the indigenous submarine program, with the Narwhal

expected to undergo initial diving trials soon. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Intelligence report warns of sharp rise in China-linked cyberattacks on critical infrastructure

(dql) Taiwan's National Security Bureau reports that cyber intrusions linked to China averaged roughly 2.63 million attempts per day in 2025 — a 6 percent rise from the previous year — with a sharp uptick in attacks on energy systems and emergency and medical services.

The bureau highlighted that Chinese operators are continually adapting tactics and that cyber activity often intensifies alongside People Liberation Army drills, indicating coordinated pressure on Taiwan's defenses. The highest concentration of incidents occurred around May 20, the anniversary of President Lai Ching-te's inauguration.

More than half of the cases involved the exploitation of software and hardware vulnerabilities to gain access or disrupt operations, while other methods included Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) campaigns, disinformation, supply-chain intrusions, and ransomware.

Five groups — BlackTech, FlaxTyphoon, Mustang Panda, APT41, and UNC3886 — were identified as among the most active actors. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Security measures increased for ruling party legislator after personal data published in China

(dql) Taiwan's National Police Agency says security will be reinforced for ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislator Puma Shen after Chinese state media disclosed his personal details, including the locations of his office and residence, and solicited further information from the public.

Shen has long been singled out by Beijing, which portrays him as a staunch independence advocate and has threatened to detain him abroad.

Authorities said protection arrangements will be adjusted according to risk assessments to ensure Shen can continue his legislative work safely and warned the

public not to cooperate with hostile actors or engage in surveillance activities, noting that such actions could trigger prosecution.

Shen described the disclosure campaign as part of China's effort to intimidate and divide Taiwan, arguing that its impact will diminish as the public becomes more aware of Beijing's intentions. [Taiwan News] [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Ex–Coast Guard officer jailed for leaking military secrets to China

(dql) A Taiwanese court has sentenced a former Coast Guard officer to seven years and eight months in prison for passing classified military and state information to Chinese intelligence in exchange for cryptocurrency payments. The officer, who served in a Southern Patrol unit, was recruited in 2022 and over nearly two years photographed and transmitted confidential defense materials to a Chinese handler, receiving payments in Tether.

The court ruled that his actions endangered national security and eroded public trust, noting financial pressures as a motive but emphasizing the seriousness of the breach. Mitigating factors — including his confession and return of illicit proceeds — were reflected in the sentence, which remains open to appeal. The Coast Guard confirmed that he was suspended and later removed from his post. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Offshore wind farm vessel traffic center launched to enhance maritime safety

(acl) Taiwan has opened a new Offshore Wind Farms Vessel Traffic Service Center at Taichung Port to improve maritime safety around expanding offshore wind projects. The center enlarges the monitored area to about 4,000 sq km and provides real-time vessel tracking, radio and AIS communication, and automated alerts for abnormal movements. Officials said AI-based anomaly detection will be added, and four supporting radar stations are planned by 2027. The facility is designed with backup power and dual networks and is linked to monitoring systems in nearby Changhua. [Focus Taiwan]

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

Bangladesh: Majority of parties submit nominations for February parliamentary election

(lm) The nomination phase for Bangladesh's February 12 parliamentary election has largely settled the contours of the electoral field, with candidates from 51 of the country's 59 registered political parties submitting papers before the deadline. According to the Election Commission, 2,568 aspirants filed nominations across 300 constituencies, including just over 2,090 party-backed candidates and about 480 independents—a sharp decline in independent participation compared with previous elections. The Awami League of ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which dominated Bangladeshi politics for much of the past decade, remains formally excluded as its registration is still withheld, alongside seven other registered parties that did not submit nominations, several of them former allies of Awami League–led governments.

Among participating parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the main opposition and historical archrival of the Awami League - submitted the highest number of nominations, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami – the largest Islamist party and a former BNP ally - Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and the Jatiya Party led by G. M. Quader. At the same time, uncertainty has surrounded a small number of parties linked to the former governing coalition, including the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu), which publicly declared a

boycott despite Election Commission data initially showing limited nomination activity. [The Daily Star 1]

Following the close of filings, the Election Commission completed scrutiny of nominations, declaring 1,842 papers valid and rejecting 723—around 28 percent of all submissions. Most rejections affected independent candidates, primarily due to invalid or insufficient voter signatures, a legal requirement for independents to demonstrate minimum local support. An appeals process is now under way until January 9, with decisions due between January 10 and 18. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

Within this broader procedural picture, candidate demographics highlight persistent structural features rather than isolated anomalies. Women account for only 109 of all aspirants—just over 4 percent—and 30 contesting parties have fielded no female candidates at all. While this imbalance has drawn criticism from election reform and women's rights advocates, it sits alongside other systemic barriers, including financial costs, organizational gatekeeping, and party-level nomination practices, that shape who ultimately reaches the ballot. [The Daily Star 4]

Bangladesh: Writ petition challenges legality of February election, referendum under interim government

(lm) A writ petition has been filed before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court seeking a stay on the scheduled parliamentary election and referendum set for February 12. The petition challenges the legality of conducting national polls under the current interim administration and seeks judicial intervention to suspend the election schedules issued on December 11, 2025, by the Election Commission.

Filed as a public interest litigation by a Supreme Court advocate, the petition argues that neither the Constitution of Bangladesh nor the Representation of the People Order—the principal statutory framework governing elections—recognizes an "interim government" as a lawful authority to oversee national elections or referendums. On this basis, the petitioner requests that the court issue directives requiring elections to be conducted under a caretaker government arrangement. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Opposition leadership transition collides with alliance discipline breakdown ahead of elections

(ms/lm) Bangladesh's main opposition party is entering the final pre-election phase under conditions of simultaneous leadership consolidation and alliance-level instability, following the death of former prime minister Khaleda Zia earlier this month. Her passing, which prompted a period of state mourning and occurred less than two months before the February 12 parliamentary elections, has accelerated a long-anticipated transition of authority within the opposition camp. [AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5]

The leadership transition centers on Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), historically one of the country's two dominant political forces besides the ousted Awami League of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Although Tarique has exercised de facto control over party strategy, alliances, and messaging for several years from abroad, his formal assumption of the chairmanship is expected in mid-January. The transition follows his recent return to active political engagement after years in self-imposed exile and the formal restructuring of his personal and communications offices within the party. [Prothom Alo] [The Daily Star 1]

At the organizational level, the party has finalized candidate nominations in 286 of Bangladesh's 300 constituencies, deliberately leaving 14 seats to alliance partners as part of a broader opposition coalition strategy. This approach reflects a political landscape reshaped by the exclusion of Awami League from the electoral process and has positioned the opposition as the likely largest parliamentary force.

However, this central-level consolidation has coincided with mounting tensions at the alliance and grassroots levels. Multiple alliance partners report that local party leaders and activists are contesting elections as rebel or independent candidates in constituencies formally allocated to allied parties, despite repeated warnings and disciplinary measures by the central leadership. According to alliance sources, the opposition party refrained from fielding candidates in eight constituencies under seat-sharing agreements, yet local-level defiance has persisted, in some cases even after expulsions.

Alliance nominees describe voter confusion, disrupted campaign coordination, and intimidation by rival candidates linked to the same opposition party. These dynamics have made rebel candidacies the primary electoral challenge for alliance-backed candidates,

often eclipsing competition from rival political blocs. At least nine party leaders have reportedly been expelled for violating central instructions, though enforcement has remained uneven.

The situation has prompted direct appeals by alliance leaders to the party's top leadership to intervene personally, warning that continued indiscipline risks undermining the credibility and effectiveness of the opposition alliance. Senior officials have publicly threatened lifetime expulsion for continued defiance, underscoring efforts to reassert centralized control as the leadership transition is finalized. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Islamist party signals openness to unity government with former ally ahead of February polls

(lm) With Bangladesh heading toward parliamentary elections on February 12, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh – the country's single largest Islamist party - has said it is open to joining a post-election unity government, positioning itself as a potential coalition actor in a sharply reconfigured political landscape.

Jamaat carries a highly contested historical legacy: the party opposed Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War and was accused of collaborating with the Pakistani military during the conflict. Several of its senior leaders were later convicted by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, and in 2013 the party was barred from elections after a court ruled its charter incompatible with the country's secular constitution. These restrictions were lifted in August 2024 – following the ouster of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina - by the interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus, enabling Jamaat's return to electoral politics.

Historically, Jamaat governed as a junior coalition partner of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), most notably during the 2001–2006 BNP-led government. However, that alliance formally unraveled in recent years: the BNP dissolved its long-standing 20-party alliance in 2022, effectively ending structured electoral cooperation with Jamaat. Since then, and especially after the political upheaval of August 2024, the two parties have operated independently, making any renewed cooperation contingent on post-election arithmetic rather than pre-election alignment.

Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman said the party has held talks with several political actors and would prioritize political stability and anti-corruption in any coalition arrangement, adding that the prime minister should

come from the party winning the most seats. Opinion polling cited by Reuters suggests Jamaat could place second to the BNP, potentially giving it leverage in coalition negotiations.

Rahman also addressed foreign policy sensitivities, disclosing a confidential meeting with an Indian diplomat earlier in 2025. The disclosure comes as India recalibrates its engagement strategy following the ouster of Hasina, whose government New Delhi had closely supported. Rahman questioned why the meeting was kept private and said Jamaat favors open, balanced relations with all countries. He explicitly rejected any tilt toward Pakistan, a statement aimed at distancing the party from its historical associations dating back to 1971.

Rahman further said that a government including Jamaat would be uncomfortable working with President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who was elected unopposed with Awami League backing in 2023; Shahabuddin has separately indicated a willingness to step down mid-term. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Jamaat's overture comes as the party continues to raise concerns about the election environment. At a meeting of its central executive council on January 5, Jamaat leaders said conditions for a free, fair and neutral election were not yet in place, citing allegations that some government officials were acting in favor of particular political parties and pointing to ongoing political violence. The party urged the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies to ensure full administrative neutrality and improved law and order ahead of the February polls. [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Student-led party seeks expanded seat-sharing deal with Islamists while internal resignations expose fractures

(lm) The National Citizen Party (NCP), a student-led political party that emerged directly from the July–August 2024 mass uprising, is negotiating to contest between 35 and 40 parliamentary seats within an alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party. Alliance discussions have so far resulted in 29 constituencies being provisionally allocated to the NCP, though full withdrawals by other allied parties have been finalized in only eight seats, with negotiations continuing in at least 21 constituencies. Party leaders have indicated that talks are ongoing and

that the final allocation is expected to be settled shortly, potentially ahead of mid-January, when the alliance aims to conclude its broader seat-sharing arrangement. [The Daily Star 1]

The NCP's electoral push has unfolded alongside a deepening internal crisis. In the days following confirmation of the Jamaat-linked deal, senior leader and joint convener Khaled Saifullah resigned from all party posts, becoming the seventh high-level figure to step down within less than a week. His resignation follows that of Arif Sohel, a prominent figure from the 2024 uprising, who publicly criticized the party for failing to consolidate a credible "third force" and instead reproducing factionalism and power-driven politics associated with Bangladesh's established parties. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

Party leaders have defended the alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami as a pragmatic response to security risks and organizational weakness, particularly after unsuccessful negotiations with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the country's main opposition party. Internal critics, however, argue that the partnership undermines the NCP's reformist credentials, citing Jamaat's historical role during the 1971 Liberation War, concerns over democratic norms and minority rights, and fears that alignment with an established Islamist force dilutes the party's post-uprising identity. [AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5]

Despite the internal turbulence, the NCP has continued to finalize candidate selections. Its confirmed nominees include student leaders associated with the July movement, party organizers, professionals, and defectors from established parties. Alliance sources indicate that beyond the currently allocated seats, the NCP is seeking up to ten additional constituencies, aiming to contest roughly 40 seats nationwide, with the outcome partly dependent on whether other Islamist partners remain within the coalition. [The Daily Star 1]

Bangladesh: Court schedules hearing in sedition case linked to alleged post-uprising destabilization plot

(lm) A Dhaka special court has set January 21 as the date for a charge-framing hearing in a sedition case filed against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 285 others, marking the case's transition from investigation to formal trial proceedings.

The case was initiated in March 2025 by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Bangladesh's central

criminal investigative body, which alleged that the accused were involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the interim government that took office after the July–August 2024 mass uprising that ousted Hasina's administration. According to the CID, the alleged plot involved preparations for large-scale violence described by investigators as an attempt to trigger "civil war."

Investigators claim the conspiracy was discussed during an online meeting held in December 2024, in which participants allegedly formed a platform referred to as the "Joy Bangla Brigade" and discussed efforts to restore the former government by force. The CID's investigation report, submitted in August 2025, expanded the list of accused from the initial 73 to 286 individuals, including political figures and alleged overseas supporters. Authorities state that several hundred participants from both inside and outside Bangladesh joined the virtual meeting. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Enforced disappearance inquiry confirms systematic political targeting under ousted leader

(lm) An interim government-appointed Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has concluded that enforced disappearances between 2009 and 2024 constituted a systematic, centrally coordinated tool of political repression under the previous administration. The commission verified 1,569 cases from 1,913 complaints, classifying 287 victims as "missing and dead," while 1,282 later resurfaced after periods of illegal detention. On the basis of underreporting and corroborated survivor testimony, it estimates the true number of disappearances may range between 4,000 and 6,000.

The report identifies a pronounced political pattern. 75 percent of victims with known political affiliation were linked to Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, while 68 percent of those who never returned were associated with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and allied groups. Overall, opposition-aligned actors accounted for approximately 96.7 percent of cases with identifiable political identity, indicating targeted repression rather than indiscriminate abuse.

The commission documents differentiated methods of repression. Jamaat- and student-wing members were more likely to experience cycles of secret detention, surveillance, and criminal prosecution before reappearing. By contrast, individuals linked to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party were disproportionately

represented among permanent disappearances and presumed extrajudicial killings. Victims' bodies were reportedly disposed of in rivers around Dhaka or buried in unmarked mass graves, several of which have since been identified.

On responsibility, the commission finds that the scale, duration, and inter-agency coordination involved make it implausible that the system operated without authorization at the highest political level. It attributes responsibility to state security forces acting under direct political command, explicitly framing this as an assessment of command responsibility rather than individual criminal guilt at this stage. The Rapid Action Battalion is cited most frequently in complaints, followed by the police and the Detective Branch, with joint operations across agencies common.

The commission has recommended international forensic assistance, including DNA identification, to support victim identification and future prosecutions. Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has ordered the mapping of all known sites linked to disappearances and extrajudicial killings and requested follow-up recommendations and action plans. [The Daily Star 1] [Arab News]

Parallel accountability pressures are also emerging from civil society. Students Against Discrimination, a nationwide protest platform that played a central role in the July–August 2024 uprising, has announced plans to submit a list of police officers to the International Crimes Tribunal, including station officers-in-charge, district-level superintendents, and higher-ranking commanders under whose authority protesters were killed. The tribunal, originally established to prosecute crimes committed during the 1971 Liberation War, is increasingly being positioned as the principal domestic forum for accountability related to the 2024 violence.

At the same time, the student platform has called for a presidential ordinance granting blanket legal immunity to students, workers, and civilians for actions taken during the uprising, the unconditional release of detained activists, and legal protection for members of the armed forces, paramilitary units, and civilian officials who refused to act against protesters or were perceived to have supported the uprising. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Senior secretary turnover expected ahead of parliamentary election

(lm) Bangladesh's administration is preparing for changes to at least six secretary-level posts as a series of mandatory retirements, including post-retirement leave, fall due between late December 2025 and January–February 2026. The Ministry of Public Administration has begun reviewing eligible senior officials to fill the resulting vacancies.

Officials said some outgoing secretaries have sought contractual extensions to serve until the end of the current government's term, though such extensions are considered unlikely in most cases. One exception concerns the Health Services Division, where a secretary already serving on a contractual basis has received an extension until late February.

The turnover comes as Bangladesh approaches a parliamentary election, a period during which changes to senior administrative posts are more sensitive. Under existing rules, once the election schedule is announced, appointments affecting officials involved in election-related duties typically require the consent of the Election Commission, while routine retirements may proceed without approval. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Five private university students jailed over putting up posters of banned Islamist organization

(lm) Bangladeshi authorities have sent five private university students to jail after arresting them for putting up posters of the banned Islamist organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Police said the group was detained on December 31 after CCTV footage linked them to the poster campaign, and a case was filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act. The posters, described as an "open letter," alleged an international conspiracy involving the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, and called for resistance and political unity in the name of Islam. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Workplace fatalities rise sharply, informal sector bears the brunt

(lm) At least 1,190 workers were killed and 222 injured in workplace accidents across Bangladesh in 2025, marking a sharp increase from 905 deaths in 2024, according to a new report by the Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE). OSHE's analysis shows that around 84 percent of accidents occurred in the informal sector, which remains largely

outside effective labor-law enforcement. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: First comprehensive national urban development policy approved

(ms) Bangladesh's interim government has approved the National Urban Development Policy–2025, the country's first comprehensive framework to guide urban growth after more than two decades of delays.

The policy was approved at an Advisory Council meeting chaired by Muhammad Yunus, with officials saying it aims to support more planned, inclusive and climate-resilient cities. Although around 32 percent of Bangladesh's population now lives in urban areas, the country previously lacked a unified national policy to manage urbanization.

Under the new framework, cities will be classified into four categories, ranging from megacities to small towns. Industrial activity will be discouraged in megacities to reduce population pressure, while investment will be promoted in other regions. Metropolitan cities are expected to act as regional hubs, with smaller towns supporting trade, agro-processing and services.

A National Urban Development Council will be formed to oversee implementation. The policy, while not legally binding, provides long-needed guidance for future laws and city planning. The document was drafted with support from UNDP and funding from the United Kingdom. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government advances foreign lease of main container terminal amid unresolved constitutional review

(lm) The interim government is proceeding with plans to lease the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) at Chattogram Port—Bangladesh's largest and most strategically significant container facility—to Dubai-based global port operator DP World, despite an unresolved constitutional court challenge to the legality of the concession process.

As the next procedural step, the Public-Private Partnership Authority will convene a two-day technical workshop in Dhaka to review the Request for Proposal and draft concession agreement. The process is being

advanced under a government-to-government public–private partnership framework, a structure that limits competitive bidding by anchoring the concession to a state-level agreement rather than an open tender.

The legal status of the concession remains unsettled. In December 2025, a two-judge bench of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh issued a split verdict on a writ petition challenging the leasing decision. One judge held that awarding the terminal to a foreign operator violated applicable laws and policies, while the other dismissed the petition on procedural grounds, citing lack of standing and insufficient demonstration of security risk. Under Bangladeshi constitutional procedure, such a split decision requires referral to the chief justice for assignment to a third bench, which has not yet delivered a final ruling.

Government lawyers argue that, in the absence of a formal stay or injunction, administrative steps may legally continue while judicial review remains pending. This position has been reaffirmed by a formal certificate issued by the Office of the Attorney General stating that no court order currently bars further action. Petitioners' counsel disputes this interpretation, arguing that advancing the process before final adjudication risks prejudicing judicial review and undermining the authority of the court.

The initiative to lease the terminal to a foreign operator originated under the previous administration of ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and has been carried forward by the interim government, indicating policy continuity on port commercialization despite the broader political transition following the 2024 uprising that ousted Hasina. [The Daily Star]

India: Opposition, ruling parties launch campaign and counter-campaign over new rural employment law

(dql) The opposition Congress party has announced the first phase of a nationwide campaign titled "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" (Save the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act campaign), which will take place from January 10 to February 25.

The campaign calls for the withdrawal of the recently enacted Vishwakarma Bharat Grameen Rozgar Aay Vikas Mahayojana (VB-GRAM-G) Act and seeks to restore the MGNREGA as a rights-based law, the right to work, and the authority of panchayats.

Congress general secretaries K. C. Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh argue that the new legislation centralizes decision-making in the Union government, removes citizens' legal entitlement to employment under the rural jobs program, and erodes the administrative role of local self-government bodies.

They added that the party will explore legal options to challenge the law and will hold consultations with chief ministers from member parties of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance—the Congress party-led political alliance—to coordinate a common position among opposition-ruled states.

The Congress leadership also contends that the Act weakens India's federal structure and could place additional financial burdens on state governments, while asserting that even states governed by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are not yet in a position to implement the new framework. [The New Indian Express]

In response, the BJP has mounted a public counter-campaign to defend the new law, with Union Minister for Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan arguing that the legislation improves upon the MGNREGA. He maintained that the new framework increases the number of guaranteed workdays, introduces unemployment compensation if work is not provided within a set timeframe, and expands provisions intended to reduce misuse of program funds. The party has also prepared a national-level outreach effort aimed at countering the opposition's criticism.

Chouhan rejected claims that the law undermines federal finances, saying cost-sharing between the Union and state governments is already common across centrally sponsored programs. He also criticized the Congress leadership, accusing it of resisting reform and failing to participate in parliamentary debate on the legislation. [The Tribune]

Last month, the parliament has passed the VB-GRAM-G Act, a legislation aimed at reforming employment in India's rural areas. The move repealed the two-decade-old MGNREGA.

The controversial legislation was cleared by the Upper House in a post-midnight session on December 18, following its passage in the Lower House earlier that day amid unprecedented scenes of protest, including opposition MPs tearing copies of the bill in the well of the House and Congress party allies like the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)—two major regional parties—staging a 12-hour overnight

sit-in protest at the Parliament complex (see AiR No. 51, December/2025, 4).

India: Catholic union urges government to act on rising attacks against Christians

(dql) The All India Catholic Union (AICU), a national body representing the Catholic laity, which counts India's roughly 16 million Catholics among its broader community, has urged the government to move beyond symbolic gestures and take concrete action against rising attacks on Christians, particularly during the 2025 Christmas period. [The Wire]

The union highlighted that incidents of violence and harassment have increased in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh, citing monitoring data that recorded more than 700 cases ranging from assaults and disrupted worship to arrests under anti-conversion laws.

The AICU argues that gestures like leaders attending church events are insufficient without accountability, legal reform, and protection of constitutional rights. It links the hostile climate to hate speech and narratives promoted by figures in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and affiliated groups, which portray Christians as outsiders and embolden vigilante actions. The statement also criticizes restrictions on NGOs under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act and calls for a "2026 charter" to safeguard India's secular framework, minority welfare, and civil liberties.

Framing the issue as a threat to India's pluralist social fabric rather than a single-community grievance, the AICU calls for political will, public advocacy, and unity to ensure equal rights and protection for religious minorities. [Persecution.org]

India: Major electronics projects approved to boost domestic manufacturing

(dql) The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has approved 22 projects under the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), totaling INR 418.63 billion (USD 4.64 billion), to boost domestic production and reduce reliance on imports.

Beneficiaries include major global and domestic companies such as Samsung, Tata Electronics, and Foxconn, covering components for mobile, telecom, consumer electronics, automotive, strategic

electronics, and IT hardware. The projects are expected to generate USD 8.62 billion in output and create 34,000 jobs.

A central focus is the domestic semiconductor sector. Four chip manufacturers, including Kaynes Semicon, CG Semi, Micron, and Tata Electronics, are preparing to begin commercial production in 2026. IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw emphasized that expanding local capabilities across all electronic components is essential to withstand geopolitical risks and build a robust domestic industry comparable to China's. [Total Telecom]

Launched in March 2025, the ECMS is part of India's broader effort to strengthen its electronics ecosystem, integrate domestic firms into global value chains, and accelerate self-reliance amid rising geopolitical tensions and growing global demand for electronics. India produced USD 125 billion in electronics components in 2024–25 but remains heavily dependent on imports from China, a vulnerability the government aims to address with a target of USD 500 billion in production by 2031. [Reuters]

India: Supreme Court denies bail to two key accused in 2020 Delhi riots case

(dql) The Supreme Court has refused bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the case alleging a broader conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi communal violence, while granting bail to five co-accused.

The Court argued that Khalid and Imam occupy a different degree of alleged involvement and that the prosecution has met the preliminary threshold required to justify continued detention under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). They may seek bail again after protected witnesses are examined or after one year.

In its ruling, the Court also underscored that bail decisions must be weighed against constitutional protections under Article 21, highlighting the right to a speedy trial and warning against arbitrary deprivation of liberty. It clarified that although the UAPA establishes stricter bail conditions, courts must still scrutinize whether the evidence shows a real nexus to the alleged offence and assess each accused individually. The trial court was instructed to avoid delays in examining protected witnesses.

The case stems from the February 2020 riots in Delhi, which left 53 people dead and caused widespread damage. The Delhi Police later framed the unrest as part of a coordinated conspiracy linked to anti-

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protest networks, bringing terrorism-related charges under the UAPA against student activists and local organizers. [The Wire] [The Tribune] [NDTV]

This approach has faced sustained domestic and international criticism for criminalizing dissent and prolonging pre-trial detention. [Human Rights Watch] [Amnesty International]

The CAA, a 2019 Indian law that fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, sparked widespread nationwide protests, as critics argued that it undermines India's secular constitutional framework and discriminates on religious grounds.

India: Counter-terror agency indicts two suspects over 2024 hotel shooting tied to terrorist network

(dql) The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has formally charged two Punjab-based suspects for allegedly carrying out the 2024 shooting at a hotel in Neemrana, a case authorities link to networks associated with Khalistani militant Arshdeep Singh (Arsh Dala). The accused — Puneet and Narinder Lalli — are charged for executing the attack and reportedly issuing threats and extortion demands on behalf of the syndicate.

Their inclusion brings the number of individuals named in the case to nine, with investigations continuing. [The Tribune]

Arshdeep Singh is a designated Khalistani militant and crime syndicate leader from Punjab, accused by Indian security agencies of running terror and extortion networks linked to the Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF), a militant organization advocating for an independent Sikh homeland. He has allegedly coordinated funding, recruitment, weapons supply, and targeted attacks through operatives in India while operating from abroad.

Arshdeep Singh (alias Arsh Dala) is a designated Khalistani militant and criminal figure wanted by Indian authorities, associated with extremist and separatist activities linked to the *Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF)*, a militant organization advocating for an independent Sikh homeland. He originally came from Punjab's Moga district and reportedly became involved in organized crime before relocating to Canada, where he has been based for several years.

Security agencies allege he has been involved in terror financing, targeted killings, extortion, and running

terror modules from abroad, and he has been designated an "individual terrorist" under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Dala is also accused of providing logistical support, weapons, and funds to operatives associated with KTF's violent activities in India.

NIA highlights strong 2025 performance

Separately, the NIA reported strong operational results over the past year, recording a conviction rate above 92 percent and registering 55 new cases across terrorism and organized-crime categories. The agency made 276 arrests — including suspects linked to jihadist groups, left-wing extremism, northeastern insurgencies, networks and gang crime tied to the Khalistan movement, a separatist cause that seeks the creation of an independent Sikh state (Khalistan) carved out of India's Punjab region. In addition, nationwide searches led to the detention of an additional 200 accused.

The agency also intensified actions against left-wing extremist networks in support of the government's objective of ending Naxalite insurgency — movements inspired by Maoist ideology that operate mainly in parts of central and eastern India —by 2026, while pursuing transnational human-trafficking and pro-Khalistan criminal nexuses. [The Tribune]

Security forces kill 14 Maoist rebels amid intensified anti-insurgency campaign

In the latest development, on January 2, security forces carried out a major coordinated anti-Maoist operation in the state of Chhattisgarh—one of the main centers of India's Maoist (Naxalite) insurgency—, killing 14 suspected Naxal insurgents in separate encounters in Sukma and Bijapur districts. Weapons were recovered at the sites, and authorities said the action reflected growing operational gains in the Bastar region.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai described the killings as evidence of weakening rebel capacity and credited ongoing intelligence-led operations, rehabilitation measures, and local cooperation.

The operation forms part of the Union Home Ministry's intensified campaign to eliminate left-wing extremism by March 31, following a series of large-scale security actions and surrenders across central India. Official figures cited for 2025 indicate 285 Naxal militants have been killed so far in Chhattisgarh. [Deccan Herald]

In parallel, Telangana state police received the surrender of Badse Sukka, Battalion commander of the

People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA)—the armed wing of the Communist Party of India (Maoist)—, PLGA state committee member Kankanala Raji Reddy, and 18 other underground cadres. This reduces the PLGA's strength in Telangana from over 400 members to just 66, and leaves the state committee with only one member aside from the secretary.

Badse Sukka, a senior tribal leader and former protege of Madavi Hidma—PLGA's top commander—, played a central role in Maoist operations. Raji Reddy had been active since 1997 and helped strengthen guerrilla bases in Telangana.

The surrenders, conducted under state and Union rehabilitation schemes, mark the collapse of the Maoist infrastructure in Telangana. The cadres cited arbitrary leadership decisions and unsafe deployments as reasons for leaving. Authorities described this as effectively signaling the end of organized Maoist activity in the state, with only 17 underground cadres remaining nationally. [The New Indian Express] [The Times of India]

India: Indigenous short-range ballistic missile successfully tested

(dql) India has successfully carried out back-to-back test launches of two Pralay short-range, surface-to-surface missiles during user evaluation trials. The missiles — developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), India's premier government agency responsible for researching, designing, and developing military technologies, weapons systems, and defence equipment for the Indian Armed Forces, — were fired in rapid sequence from the same launcher off India's eastern coast and were confirmed to have met all mission parameters through test-range tracking systems.

Pralay is a domestically produced, solid-fuel, quasi-ballistic missile equipped with modern guidance technology and designed to carry different types of conventional warheads against multiple target categories. [Anadolu Ajansı] [Overt Defense]

India: Coast Guard commissions first indigenous pollution-control vessel

(dql) India has commissioned ICGS Samudra Pratap, its first indigenously designed pollution-control vessel,

marking the latest advancement in domestic shipbuilding and maritime capability development. It is now the largest vessel in the Indian Coast Guard fleet and strengthens India's capacity for oil-spill response, firefighting, maritime safety, surveillance, and coastal security.

Although designed for environmental protection, the multi-role vessel also supports law-enforcement and patrol missions, reinforcing deterrence against threats to India's maritime domain.

India: Air Force announces senior command reshuffle

(dql) Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor has assumed the role of Vice Chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF), succeeding Air Marshal Narmdeshwar Tiwari following his retirement. In a parallel command reshuffle, Air Marshal Tejinder Singh has been appointed head of the South Western Air Command, based in Gandhinagar.

Kapoor, a veteran fighter pilot with extensive experience on MiG-21 and MiG-29 aircraft and prior service as Defence Attaché in Pakistan, previously led both the IAF's Training Command and the South Western Air Command. [The Tribune]

Maldives: Parliament advances proposal to merge presidential and parliamentary elections

(lm) The Maldivian Parliament has moved forward with a government-backed constitutional amendment that would merge presidential and parliamentary elections, marking a significant potential change to the country's electoral cycle and institutional balance.

The amendment, submitted by the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) through its parliamentary group leader, proposes holding presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously starting in 2028 and shifting the inauguration date of the next parliament to December 1 of that year. If ultimately approved, the current 20th Parliament would be dissolved earlier than its normal five-year term to accommodate the change. Parliament accepted the proposal during an extraordinary sitting and referred it to committee review, with lawmakers voting overwhelmingly in favor of further consideration. The

relevant committee has opened a brief window for public submissions and aims to complete its review within ten days.

The government has justified the proposal primarily on fiscal grounds. President Mohamed Muizzu has argued that holding the two elections together would significantly reduce public expenditure, citing the high costs of recent polls. According to the administration, the last presidential elections cost more than MVR 180 million (approximately USD 11.7 million), while the most recent parliamentary elections cost over MVR 120 million (approximately USD 7.8 million). The President has said that combining the two contests could save at least MVR 120 million (about USD 7.8 million), funds that could instead be redirected toward support for low-income households. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2] [The Sun 3]

Political reactions, however, have been mixed. Former president Mohamed Nasheed, who has since returned to the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) after the collapse of The Democrats, has publicly voiced support for merging the elections, aligning with the government's argument that the change could streamline governance and reduce costs.

At the same time, Nasheed's position does not reflect consensus within the MDP. Several senior figures in the party have expressed reservations, warning that simultaneous elections could weaken Parliament's role as an effective check on executive power by removing voters' ability to reassess the government's performance mid-term. Former MDP chairperson Fayyaz Ismail has suggested alternative electoral sequencing rather than full alignment of the two polls, highlighting internal divisions within the opposition. [The Sun 4]

Opposition has also come from outside the MDP. Former president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has strongly criticized the proposal, arguing that merging elections would deprive voters of a "watchdog parliament" and undermine democratic oversight by concentrating electoral mandates at a single political moment. [The Sun 5]

Maldives: Ruling party membership growth coincides with new Elections Commission rules

(lm) The Elections Commission of the Maldives (EC) has introduced new regulations allowing individuals to withdraw from political parties with immediate effect

through its official online portal, effective January 1, 2026, as updated membership figures show significant growth for the ruling People's National Congress (PNC).

Under the revised EC framework, individuals may now resign from party membership instantly upon submitting a request via the commission's portal. Political parties are given up to 30 days to process membership registration requests; if no action is taken within that period, the applicant is automatically registered. Party-led expulsions must be submitted through the EC's Simedha portal. The EC has also clarified that individuals holding senior or registered leadership positions must first resign from those posts before withdrawing from a party or joining another political organization. [The Sun 1]

Against this regulatory backdrop, official EC statistics show that the PNC added more than 5,000 members over the past six months, increasing its membership from 68,665 in late June 2025 to 74,048 by the end of December. This consolidates the PNC's position as the largest political party in the Maldives. Other parties recorded only limited changes over the same period: the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) posted modest gains, while the Jumhoory Party, Adhaalath Party, Maldives National Party, and People's National Front registered net declines.

The figures also indicate continued membership losses in The Democrats, a party that has not been formally dissolved despite former president Mohamed Nasheed and many supporters returning to the MDP. The Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), which previously held the largest membership base, was dissolved in early 2025, after which the PNC intensified recruitment efforts and publicly set a target of reaching 100,000 members.

PNC's recent expansion has occurred alongside public discussion about the integrity of party registration processes. Over the past year, allegations have surfaced that some individuals were registered without consent. The PNC has acknowledged that invalid membership forms were submitted, citing verification challenges at the time. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Parliament moves to approve former minister as president of human rights commission

The Maldivian Parliament was set to convene an extraordinary session to vote on the appointment of

Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) President, following the nomination of Aishath Rameela by President Mohamed Muizzu.

Rameela, who was appointed as a member of the five-person HRCM in late October after receiving unanimous parliamentary approval, was formally nominated by the President on December 3 to assume the role of commission president. Her nomination was announced to Parliament during a special sitting and referred to the Parliament's Human Rights Committee, which unanimously endorsed her appointment without conducting a further interview, citing the vetting already undertaken during her recent confirmation as a commissioner.

Only Rameela's nomination has been placed on the agenda for the extraordinary sitting on January 6, indicating that Parliament's session is focused solely on completing the constitutional approval process required for the leadership of the independent human rights watchdog. Rameela previously served as the first Minister of Agriculture and Animal Welfare in the current administration before resigning in December 2024 to undergo medical treatment. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Parliament advances bill to criminalize gambling amid concerns over online betting

(lm) The Maldivian Parliament has advanced a government-backed amendment to the Penal Code that would formally criminalize gambling and the operation of gambling establishments, introducing prison sentences of up to four years.

The amendment was unanimously accepted during an extraordinary parliamentary sitting and has been referred to the relevant committee for detailed review. Once enacted, gambling-related offenses would be classified as a fourth-degree felony, carrying a minimum prison sentence of one year, seven months, and six days, and a maximum of four years. The proposed changes explicitly include online gambling within the scope of criminal liability.

The bill was submitted by a lawmaker from the ruling People's National Congress, following a policy decision announced by President Mohamed Muizzu in December last year. The government cited growing public concern over the spread of online betting platforms and illegal gambling networks, which authorities say have contributed to financial harm

despite existing administrative efforts such as blocking gambling websites.

The amendment introduces a statutory definition of gambling and specifies exemptions. Participation in tournaments conducted for entertainment or sporting purposes—even where cash or valuable prizes are awarded—would not be treated as gambling under the proposed law.

Although gambling activity has reportedly increased in recent years, the current Penal Code does not explicitly criminalize gambling or the operation of gambling venues. The proposed amendment would close that legal gap and provide a clearer enforcement framework.

The bill now moves to committee stage, where lawmakers are expected to examine its scope, penalties, and implementation before it returns to the full Parliament for final consideration. [The Sun]

Maldives: President establishes Maldives Intellectual Property Office under new law

(lm) As of last week, the Maldives has formally established the Maldives Intellectual Property Office (MIPO), creating the country's first dedicated national authority for the registration, administration, and protection of intellectual property rights. President Mohamed Muizzu established MIPO on January 1, 2026, under Article 4(a) of the Maldives Intellectual Property Office Act. The law was passed by parliament on August 11, 2025, ratified on August 21, 2025, and entered into force with the beginning of 2026. [The Sun]

Maldives: Police warn delayed reporting hampers child sexual abuse investigations and launch early-intervention effort

(lm) Police in Maldives say rising reports of child sexual abuse are becoming harder to investigate because many complaints are filed long after the alleged abuse occurred, limiting evidence collection and prosecutorial options. Speaking at a press briefing on December 30, senior officers from the Maldives Police Service urged the public to report suspected abuse immediately, stressing that delays significantly undermine investigations.

Authorities acknowledge that child sexual abuse remains underreported despite its prevalence. Police said that while the number of reports is increasing, late complaints remain a persistent problem. As part of preventive efforts, police are conducting targeted operations against online and offline child grooming, with ten grooming cases currently under investigation and at least one recent arrest linked to such activity. Police data indicate that 266 sexual offence cases and 298 domestic violence cases have been reported so far this year, with officials noting that domestic violence and blackmail complaints are also frequently delayed or later withdrawn. [The Sun 1]

In parallel, police have identified approximately 300 children who are regularly exposed to criminal environments or associating with individuals with criminal records, particularly in the Greater Malé area, including Hulhumalé Phase 2. Officers have begun direct engagement with parents and coordination with relevant agencies to intervene early, aiming to prevent recruitment into gangs or deeper involvement in criminal activity. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Parliament advances amendment to expand early access to pension funds

(lm) The Maldivian Parliament has moved forward with a revised amendment to the Pension Act that would allow individuals facing serious illnesses, including cancer, to access their pension savings before reaching the statutory retirement age of 65. The government-backed bill was accepted unanimously during an extraordinary parliamentary sitting and has been referred to committee for further review.

The revised amendment was submitted by a ruling-party lawmaker after an earlier, substantively similar proposal introduced by the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party was rejected in October. The new version incorporates additional provisions and reflects a policy shift formally endorsed by President Mohamed Muizzu, who has publicly committed to expanding permissible uses of pension funds in line with his election pledges.

Under the proposed changes, pension holders undergoing treatment for serious illnesses would be permitted to withdraw funds regardless of age, either as a lump sum or in instalments. The amendment would also allow contributors who have already paid twenty percent of the cost of the Hajj pilgrimage to cover the remaining eighty percent using their pension

savings. At present, pension withdrawals are generally restricted, with limited use allowed for Hajj expenses and regular disbursements beginning only at retirement age. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Zakat made legally mandatory as new law enters into force and Zakat House established

(lm) As of last week, Maldives has made the payment of zakat - an obligatory form of almsgiving under Islamic law - legally mandatory following the entry into force of the Zakat Act, with President Mohamed Muizzu formally establishing the Maldives Zakat House under the new legislation. The Act was passed by parliament and ratified on December 6, 2025.

The Zakat House had initially been created by presidential decree on December 18, 2024, shortly after Muizzu assumed office. With the Zakat Act now in force, the earlier Zakat House that operated under the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has been dissolved and replaced by the new statutory body established under law. [The Sun]

Maldives: Government moves to prioritize SMEs in public procurement and expand logistical support

(lm) The Maldivian government has announced a package of regulatory and administrative measures aimed at strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), following concerns raised directly with President Mohamed Muizzu in mid-December 2025. The Ministry of Finance confirmed that regulations governing public procurement will be amended to prioritize registered SMEs in tenders for certain government projects, including reserving publicly announced tenders below a specified value exclusively for SME participation.

The planned changes are intended to address long-standing obstacles faced by SMEs, including difficulties accessing government contracts, meeting tax obligations, and obtaining United States dollars for operations. The ministry said it is coordinating with relevant authorities to amend the necessary laws and regulations, while also reforming procurement procedures to reduce administrative barriers and improve competitiveness among smaller firms.

In parallel, discussions are under way with the Maldives Inland Revenue Authority and state-owned enterprises to settle outstanding government dues owed to SMEs, potentially by offsetting unpaid bills against tax liabilities. The government has also indicated it is exploring fee reductions charged by state-owned enterprises and converting certain fees currently denominated in United States dollars into Maldivian rufiyaa. President Muizzu has designated 2026 and 2027 as a period for special measures to advance the SME sector.

Separately, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade announced plans to establish dedicated SME storage facilities in the Malé area and in Kulhudhuffushi City over the next two years, responding to complaints about the lack of affordable warehousing. The ministry said it will also monitor cargo clearance operations at Maldives Ports Limited and strengthen regional cargo vessel services as part of broader logistical reforms.

Business owners at the December meeting also highlighted unpaid government bills dating back more than a year, in some cases amounting to millions of Maldivian rufiyaa. While the government has not disclosed the total sum owed, it reiterated that payments are expected to be settled before the upcoming Ramadan, following earlier missed deadlines. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Government rejects rumors of foreign takeover of key port assets amid broader debate on infrastructure management

(lm) The Maldivian government has moved to publicly counter rumors alleging plans to hand over operations of the Thilafushi commercial port to Dubai Ports World (DP World), amid a widening political debate over foreign participation in strategically significant infrastructure.

Thilafushi is a reclaimed industrial island located near Male', the densely populated capital, and is being developed as the Maldives' main commercial port to ease congestion at the Male' Commercial Harbor. The first phase of the Thilafushi port project is expected to be completed next year, with an estimated cost of USD 60 million, while the full development is projected to span a decade.

Finance Minister Moosa Zameer stated that claims of the government "selling" the port are false, emphasizing that the receipt of investment proposals does not imply acceptance or implementation. He said that, since President Mohamed Muizzu took office, international interest in investing in Maldivian infrastructure has increased, and that all proposals are reviewed through established government processes. According to Zameer, no decision affecting national interests would be taken without consultation among ministers, and no agreement to transfer port operations has been approved.

The allegations were initially raised by former president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, who claimed that the government was pursuing discussions to hand over port operations to DP World. He argued that foreign management of the port could carry strategic and security implications, drawing comparisons to the former 25-year concession granted to India's GMR for the operation of Velana International Airport during the Nasheed administration. Former president Mohamed Nasheed also commented on the issue, stating that private sector participation in port operations could be considered to address congestion, but only through a transparent and competitive bidding process. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

The debate over Thilafushi has unfolded alongside parallel public discussion on airport management. Nasheed has expressed support for engaging foreign operators in the management of Hanimaadhoo International Airport, an atoll airport recently redeveloped with Indian assistance, citing financial sustainability concerns. The current government has denied reports that it plans to hand over the airport's operations to a foreign company. [The Sun 3]

Maldives: Police intensify operations against gang crime in urban hotspots

(lm) Maldivian police carried out 415 raids over a single weekend in areas identified as gang crime hotspots in Malé and Hulhumalé, as part of intensified enforcement under the Prevention of Gang Crimes Act, according to the Gang Crime Suppression Department.

Authorities said one case has been forwarded to the Prosecutor General's Office seeking the formal designation of a group as a criminal gang under the law, although prosecutors have requested additional clarification before proceeding.

Police officials said that since the legislation came into force, law enforcement has conducted raids at six locations and arrested 11 individuals across seven cases. They noted that organized criminal groups were active prior to the enactment of the law and confirmed that similar operations are continuing in other atolls.

According to police assessments, gang-related activity has declined in recent months compared with earlier in the year, with authorities expressing confidence that the new legal framework provides stronger tools to address organized criminal activity. [The Sun]

Nepal: State of play ahead of March 5 snap elections

(lm) With less than two months remaining before voting day, Nepal is entering the final phase of preparations for snap elections to the House of Representatives scheduled for March 5 following the dissolution of parliament in September 2025.

Unlike previous mid-term elections, which were largely triggered by inter- or intra-party elite disputes, the current snap poll was precipitated by mass protests and public violence. The unrest brought down the government led by K. P. Sharma Oli, a coalition carried primarily by his Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) and the Nepali Congress, both of which remain central actors in the post-dissolution political and legal process. An interim administration headed by former chief justice Sushila Karki is in place with a mandate to restore order and conduct elections originally due in 2027.

The political environment remains fluid. While the Election Commission has advanced technical preparations—including submission of proportional-representation closed lists, issuance of a code of conduct, and expansion of polling infrastructure—legal uncertainty persists over the status of the dissolved House. Both the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML have filed petitions at the Supreme Court seeking possible restoration of parliament; hearings have not yet begun. Party leaders publicly acknowledge a “dual-track” scenario, preparing simultaneously for elections and for a potential institutional reversal. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Voter dynamics are also shifting. The Election Commission has finalized a roll of 18.9 million eligible voters, including 915,119 first-time voters, most of them from Generation Z. Media reporting over the past week indicates that participation among new

voters is driven less by party loyalty than by dissatisfaction with established parties, demands for accountability, and interest in new or independent candidates. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Security remains a standing concern ahead of the vote. In meetings convened by the president and the interim prime minister, major parties have conditioned their participation on adequate security guarantees. The government has approved and begun implementing an integrated election security plan. Authorities report that roughly 70 percent of the more than 1,100 firearms looted during the September unrest have been recovered and that over 10,000 of the 14,555 detainees who escaped from prisons nationwide during the violence have been rearrested. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Despite these efforts, unresolved security risks persist. Officials confirm that 140 inmates remain at large following a mass jailbreak from Bhimphedi Prison on September 9, when 440 prisoners escaped amid the unrest; many of those still unaccounted for face charges related to narcotics offenses or sexual assault, and 26 are Indian nationals. Separately, seven juveniles remain missing after an escape from a juvenile correction center in Hetauda the following day. Security agencies say targeted operations are continuing to locate remaining fugitives and prevent any misuse of unrecovered weapons during the electoral period. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

Nepal: Major parties converge on alliance for upper house elections

(lm) Nepal's main traditional political forces are moving toward a coordinated alliance for the National Assembly (upper house) elections scheduled for January 25, reflecting elite-level consolidation following the dissolution of the House of Representatives in September 2025 amid the youth-led "Gen Z" protest crisis.

Negotiations are under way among the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML), the Nepali Communist Party (a recently formed leftist front that includes the former Maoist Centre), and a bloc of Madhesh-based parties. According to party sources, a tentative seat-sharing formula would divide the 18 seats up for election among the Nepali Congress (seven), the CPN-UML (six), the Nepali Communist Party (four), and the Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal (one), though final confirmation is still pending.

The alliance discussions have involved senior leaders including Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Sharma Oli, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, underscoring a rare moment of coordination among rivals who, until the September unrest, occupied sharply different positions in government and opposition.

Oli was prime minister when the Gen Z protests erupted and resigned on September 9, 2025, following mass demonstrations and violence. His government rested on a coalition led by the CPN-UML and supported by the Nepali Congress, headed by Deuba, which at the time held the largest bloc of seats in the now-dissolved House of Representatives. Dahal, by contrast, was serving as leader of the parliamentary opposition, positioning himself outside the ruling coalition during the crisis. All three figures are former prime ministers and remain central actors in Nepal's post-dissolution political process.

The emerging upper house alliance reflects pragmatic electoral calculations rather than ideological convergence. Leaders from both the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML have publicly acknowledged that, given the indirect electoral college system used for National Assembly elections, contesting independently would significantly reduce their chances of securing seats.

Under Nepal's constitution, the National Assembly is a permanent chamber of Parliament, unlike the House of Representatives, which can be dissolved. One third of the National Assembly's 59 members retire every two years, with members serving six-year terms. The January election will fill seats vacated by members retiring on March 4. Members are elected not by direct popular vote but by an electoral college composed of provincial assembly members and local government heads and deputies, each carrying weighted votes.

The alliance discussions are taking place under an interim administration mandated to restore order and oversee elections following the September unrest. Congress and CPN-UML leaders have also acknowledged parallel—but inconclusive—talks about possible cooperation in the March 5 snap parliamentary elections, suggesting that coordination in the upper house contest may serve as a testing ground for broader electoral arrangements. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Parties face scrutiny over proportional candidate lists as court intervenes on inclusion

(lm) Nepal's political parties have come under mounting scrutiny over the closed lists of candidates they submitted under the proportional representation (PR) system for the March 5 parliamentary elections, prompting pledges of revisions, public protests, and direct intervention by the Supreme Court.

Nepal's PR system, which allocates 40 percent of seats in the House of Representatives, is constitutionally designed to ensure representation of historically marginalized social groups, including women, Dalits, indigenous communities, Madhesh-origin groups, Muslims, and persons with disabilities. The system relies on closed party lists submitted to the Election Commission, rather than direct voter selection.

Following the submission of PR lists at the end of December 2025, civil society groups, activists, and party members criticized both established and newer political parties for allegedly undermining the intent of inclusive representation by nominating relatives, political loyalists, or individuals from economically privileged backgrounds under inclusion quotas. Criticism was particularly sharp toward the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), a reform-oriented party that has positioned itself as aligned with the youth-led "Gen Z" protest movement that emerged in September 2025 demanding political accountability and systemic reform. Party leaders from multiple parties cited time constraints and late political negotiations as contributing factors and pledged to revise their lists within the legally permitted correction period. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Amid the controversy, women's rights organizations and civil society groups organized demonstrations in Kathmandu, arguing that the submitted PR lists weaken constitutional guarantees of inclusive democracy and calling for immediate revisions to ensure meaningful representation, including greater participation of women. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The Supreme Court subsequently issued interim orders directing the Election Commission strictly enforce constitutional and legal requirements on inclusion, with particular emphasis on representation of persons with disabilities. The court cited provisions of the constitution and election law mandating such representation and warned that exclusion could cause irreparable harm. The Election Commission confirmed it would require parties to correct any non-compliant lists during the official revision window in early January before final lists are published in February. [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Nepal: Emerging reformist party consolidates power

(lm) The Rastriya Swatantra Party, a reform-oriented political force that emerged as the fourth-largest party in Nepal's 2022 parliamentary elections, is accelerating organizational consolidation ahead of the March 5 national polls. The party has increasingly associated itself with themes and public sentiment linked to the youth-led protests that emerged in September 2025, while concurrently managing internal integration challenges following recent mergers and navigating ongoing legal proceedings involving its leadership.

Following a series of unification agreements concluded in late December 2025, the party has expanded its senior leadership to accommodate newly joined groups and prominent figures. Two additional vice-chair positions have been created, raising the total to four, and seven former members of Bibeksheel Sajha have been inducted into the central committee. The leadership has also established subcommittees to manage organizational integration and to recommend candidates for first-past-the-post constituencies. Party officials say the restructuring is intended to stabilize the organization after rapid growth and to honor commitments made during the merger process. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

On December 28, the party formally unified with Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor Balendra Shah, followed shortly by the merger of the Ujyalo Nepal Party, whose patron is former Nepal Electricity Authority chief Kulman Ghising. Ghising—widely credited with resolving Nepal's prolonged electricity shortages—has been appointed a vice-chair, while the party has indicated that Shah may be projected as a future prime-ministerial candidate. Party leaders and supporters describe these alliances as aligned with the political opening created by the September 2025 youth-led protests. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The rapid expansion has also exposed internal strains, particularly with the faction originating from the Ujyalo Nepal Party, over the composition and ranking of candidates on the proportional representation lists. Several nominees from different merger partners have withdrawn after public criticism that individuals from affluent or well-connected backgrounds were placed under quotas intended for historically underrepresented communities. Party leaders have acknowledged shortcomings, citing severe time pressure caused by last-minute unification deals, and have pledged to revise the lists within the Election Commission's correction window. Disagreements over

the allocation and ordering of proportional seats remain under discussion. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

The party's strategy places increased emphasis on Madhesh Province, Nepal's southern plains region bordering India that accounts for roughly one-fifth of the population and a substantial share of parliamentary seats. The party performed weakly in Madhesh in the 2022 elections but hopes to improve its prospects by leveraging Shah's national profile and family roots in the region, as well as broader anti-establishment sentiment. Analysts caution, however, that Madhesh politics is shaped by long-standing debates over federalism and inclusion, and that success will depend on whether the party articulates credible positions on region-specific concerns rather than relying primarily on personalities. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Meanwhile, party chair Rabi Lamichhane continues to face judicial proceedings related to alleged financial irregularities at cooperative institutions predating his entry into politics. On January 1, the Patan High Court upheld a lower court decision granting Lamichhane release on bail in the Swarnalaxmi Savings and Credit Cooperative case, rejecting a government request for his remand to custody. This followed a similar December ruling in another cooperative-related case. The decisions allow Lamichhane to remain active during the campaign period, though the cases continue to form part of the party's public profile. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

Nepal: Nepali Congress still divided over timing and legality of party convention

(lm) The Nepali Congress, previously the single largest party in the now-dissolved House of Representatives and a central participant in the last governing coalition, continues to face an internal dispute over whether to convene a special party convention ahead of national elections or proceed with a regular general convention later in the year, highlighting divisions within the party leadership at a sensitive political moment.

The party's Central Work Execution Committee has decided to hold the 15th general convention from May 11 to 14 in Kathmandu, citing time constraints and organizational challenges that prevented the convention from being held by mid-January, as previously planned. The revised schedule was endorsed by a majority of committee members.

However, the party's two general secretaries—Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma—have rejected the decision and insist that a special general convention on January 11–12 is required under the party's charter. They argue that the failure to hold the regular convention within the earlier timeframe activates provisions mandating a special convention.

Their position is based on a memorandum submitted in October 2025 by a majority of elected general convention representatives, calling for a special convention in the changed political context following the September protests. Under the party charter, a special convention must be convened if at least 40 percent of elected representatives submit a written request, or if the central committee deems it necessary.

Party president Sher Bahadur Deuba, who continues to exercise authority over the party's central decision-making bodies, and his supporters oppose holding any convention before the March 5 parliamentary elections, warning that an early convention could deepen internal divisions. Deuba has stated publicly that procedural ambiguities and verification requirements make a special convention impractical at this stage and has argued that internal restructuring should be addressed through the regular convention process.

Following the committee's decision to schedule the general convention in May, Thapa and Sharma formally recorded their dissent and sought legal advice. According to party officials, consultations with legal experts concluded that the general secretaries have the authority under the party charter to organize a special convention if the required level of representative support is met.

The dispute has prompted multiple rounds of consultations among senior party figures, including leaders associated with Shekhar Koirala, a former party president and influential internal power broker whose support is often decisive in leadership contests. Some of these figures have urged caution and emphasized the importance of maintaining party unity. While several leaders support the principle of a special convention, they have expressed reservations about holding it ahead of national elections.

As of now, the party has not resolved whether the special convention will proceed as announced by the general secretaries, and both camps continue internal consultations amid concerns that the disagreement could affect party cohesion in the run-up to the elections. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu

Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Nepal: Madhesh-based parties announce unity but key elements remain unresolved ahead of elections

(lm) Several Madhesh-based political parties in Nepal announced an agreement to reunify in late December, but more than a week later have yet to finalize core elements of the merger, including the new party's name, leadership structure, statute, and election symbol, leaving the arrangement operationally incomplete ahead of national elections.

Madhesh refers to Nepal's southern lowland region along the border with India, home to a large population of Madheshi communities who have historically mobilized around demands for political representation, federalism, and inclusion within the Nepali state. The reunification initiative centers on the Janata Samajbadi Party, Nepal (JSP-N), led by Upendra Yadav, and the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party, Nepal (LSP-N), led by Mahantha Thakur—traditionally the two most influential parties representing Madhesh-based political interests. Several smaller Madhesh-oriented parties have also agreed in principle to join the unified formation.

The agreement was announced shortly before the legal deadline for submitting proportional representation candidate lists for the March 5 parliamentary elections. As the statutory deadline for registering party mergers has already passed, the parties cannot formally merge before the election and have instead agreed to contest under a common election symbol and submit a joint proportional representation list.

Party leaders have stated that legal and technical issues remain under discussion. Madhesh-based parties have undergone repeated mergers and splits over the past decade, including a split between the current JSP-N and LSP-N leadership in 2021, contributing to ongoing uncertainty over the long-term stability of the latest unity arrangement. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Inquiry commission advances accountability process over September 2025 Gen Z protests

(lm/ec) Nepal's independent inquiry commission investigating the use of force and violence during the September 8–9, 2025, youth-led "Gen Z" protests has intensified its work by formally obtaining statements from senior political figures – including the ousted prime minister - and lifting movement restrictions as procedural milestones are met.

The three-member commission was established by the interim government to examine allegations of excessive force, human rights violations, and political and administrative failures during the unrest, which resulted in 77 deaths, including 19 on the first day. The protests emerged from widespread frustration over corruption, impunity, and entrenched patronage networks and led to the resignation of the government then led by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on September 9. An interim administration under Prime Minister Sushila Karki assumed office on September 12 with a mandate to organize elections.

Former prime minister and current chair of the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), KP Sharma Oli, was formally notified by the commission and submitted a written statement immediately upon receipt of the summons. Although Oli had earlier questioned the neutrality of the panel, he provided responses to the commission and separately appeared before the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). In his statements, Oli denied personally ordering security forces to open fire on protesters, emphasizing that operational police decisions do not rest with the prime minister. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Following the submission of his statement, the inquiry commission lifted the movement restrictions previously imposed on Oli, consistent with its practice of easing travel and movement bans once testimony is recorded. Similar restrictions had earlier been lifted for former home minister Ramesh Lekhak and other senior officials after they provided statements. Lekhak had been questioned over two days, after which the commission allowed him to travel freely, including abroad. [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

The inquiry process has also expanded to include other senior political leaders. The commission has sent questionnaires and requests for statements to Sher Bahadur Deuba, president of the Nepali Congress, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, coordinator of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist Centre). At the time of the September unrest, the Nepali Congress was a key coalition partner in the Oli-led government that had continued in office following the dissolution of the

lower house, while Dahal served as leader of the parliamentary opposition. Both leaders were directly affected during the unrest: protesters attacked Deuba's residence, and Dahal's home was set on fire while he was absent. The commission has indicated that written responses are acceptable where in-person appearances are not feasible. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

In parallel, the National Human Rights Commission has conducted its own investigation, questioning Oli and dozens of other officials and security leaders involved at the time. In a preliminary report issued in late September, the NHRC found that the early phase of the protests was largely peaceful and that subsequent police shootings contributed to widespread arson and violence on the second day, pointing to failures in anticipation, command, and morale within the security sector.

Alongside the investigative process, the interim government has sought to defuse residual protest pressure through political concessions. In early January, it signed a six-point agreement with representatives of the protest movement that ended an 11-day hunger strike. The agreement commits the government to initiate action against those responsible for deaths, injuries, and abuses during the Gen Z protests within 15 days of receiving the inquiry commission's final report; to review and withdraw, within one month, cases against protest participants not implicated in serious crimes; and to provide long-term support to families of those killed or injured. It also pledges the creation of high-level mechanisms to address political and policy-level corruption, curb partisan appointments in public institutions, recommend action against illicit wealth, advance administrative reform and e-governance, expand voting rights for Nepalis abroad and out-of-constituency voters, and study possible constitutional amendments, including proposals for a directly elected executive prime minister and a review of provincial governance. [The Kathmandu Post 6]

The inquiry commission's mandate—initially set for three months and later extended by one month—is scheduled to expire on January 24. Commission members have indicated that a comprehensive final report is expected within weeks. Together with the commitments embedded in the six-point agreement, the findings are likely to shape debates on accountability, institutional reform, and public trust as Nepal moves toward national elections scheduled for March 5.

Nepal: Supreme Court extends limitation freeze after September 2025 protests

(lm) Nepal's Supreme Court has extended the suspension of statutes of limitation, procedural deadlines, and hearing dates by an additional 60 days, citing continued disruption to judicial processes following nationwide protests in September 2025.

The court stated that many litigants remained unable to meet procedural requirements within the previously granted relief period due to court closures, damage to court facilities, and the destruction of case records during the unrest. Courts across Nepal were closed from September 9 to November 15 after violent protests involving arson and vandalism damaged judicial buildings and records. The Supreme Court had earlier declared this period void for limitation purposes and initially suspended deadlines until December 15.

Under the new order, limitation periods, filing deadlines, and hearing dates will remain suspended or may be revived for an additional 60 days starting January 15. The ruling applies to all levels of the judiciary, including high courts, district courts, and tribunals.

The court classified the period from September 9 until the resumption of services—on dates determined by individual courts—as an "extraordinary situation" under Nepal's 2025 directive governing the recovery and authentication of case records destroyed under special circumstances. The relief applies to all cases, regardless of whether records were destroyed.

According to Supreme Court figures, the protests resulted in the destruction of approximately 933,000 case files nationwide, including more than 30,000 files from ongoing cases and over 900,000 archived files. At the Supreme Court alone, files related to more than 20,000 pending cases were lost. As of early January, around 8,000 active case files had been recovered. The court has established 28 dedicated desks to facilitate record recovery. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Former minister remanded in judicial custody in land bribery case

(lm) A special court in Nepal has ordered former minister Rajkumar Gupta to be remanded in judicial custody in connection with a corruption case involving alleged bribery linked to land administration and political appointments.

The case relates to land in Batulechaur, an area on the outskirts of Pokhara, and centers on allegations that Gupta sought to influence appointments to local land administration bodies in Kaski District. Investigators are examining a leaked audio recording in which Gupta is allegedly heard negotiating a bribe of NPR 7.8 million (USD 56,940) in exchange for facilitating a political appointment and the transfer of a government official.

The recording, which surfaced earlier in 2025, triggered public and political backlash. Following the leak, Gupta resigned from his ministerial post on July 15, stating publicly that he was a victim of what he described as misuse of technology while calling for a fair investigation. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Complaint filed against police over disappearance of youth in remote district

(lm) A formal complaint has been filed against five Nepal Police personnel over the disappearance of a 34-year-old man in Dolpa, a remote district in Karnali Province in northwestern Nepal.

According to police, the man went missing earlier this month during a routine police check near a local bridge, after officers attempted to search him on suspicion of drug trafficking. Police state that he panicked and jumped into a river. Family members and local residents dispute this account, alleging that the disappearance resulted from police action.

The incident triggered local protests, including a transport strike that disrupted movement in the area. The strike was lifted after an agreement was reached to pursue legal action against the officers involved. Search operations for the missing individual are continuing. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Communal tensions reported in southern districts after social media dispute

(lm) Localized tensions were reported in Dhanusha District, in Nepal's southern Madhesh Province bordering India, following a dispute between two groups triggered by religiously offensive comments circulated on the social media platform TikTok.

According to police, the situation escalated after a mosque was vandalized in Kamala Municipality,

prompting protests in Birgunj, a major commercial and transit hub near the Indian border. Demonstrators blocked roads and staged rallies, during which police used tear gas to disperse crowds after clashes broke out at a central intersection. Police reported minor injuries among security personnel and said several individuals were detained in connection with the online posts and the vandalism. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Central bank sees early signs of economic recovery, but private sector remains cautious

(ec) Nepal Rastra Bank, the country's central bank, has signaled early signs of economic recovery following months of disruption linked to the September 2025 youth-led "Gen Z" protests, according to its latest economic outlook. The bank said measures taken by the interim government—particularly efforts to restore law and order, strengthen governance, and support reconstruction—are beginning to have a positive impact on overall economic conditions. Policy support, easing inflationary pressures, and expected election-related spending ahead of the March 5, 2026 national elections were cited as factors likely to provide short-term momentum.

According to Nepal Rastra Bank, the external sector remains stable and well-buffered, while key areas of the economy—including agriculture, industry, and services—are expected to perform better in the current fiscal year than in the previous one. The bank pointed to supportive conditions such as ample liquidity in the banking system, declining interest rates, stable international commodity prices, and government measures including uninterrupted electricity supply and targeted export incentives. Progress in tourism and rising demand for Nepali goods were also identified as contributing to the recovery. In addition, reconstruction of infrastructure damaged during the protests and increased economic activity linked to the election period—such as campaign logistics and transportation—are expected to provide further stimulus.

Despite this cautiously optimistic assessment, private sector sentiment remains subdued. The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the country's largest umbrella organization for businesses, reported historically low levels of business confidence. Business leaders cited continued political uncertainty, weak investor confidence, and insufficient assurances of property and contractual security as major constraints on new investment. They warned that

employment growth cannot be sustained without a stronger private sector, which accounts for a substantial share of national employment and economic output.

The central bank also acknowledged ongoing challenges in agriculture, noting that delayed monsoon rains negatively affected crop yields in several areas. However, it said investments in modern farming techniques, improved irrigation systems, and wider access to agricultural technology could support productivity gains over the medium to long term. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Fatal shooting by security forces in border district triggers protests and official probe

(lm) A 45-year-old man was killed in Sunsari District, in eastern Nepal's Koshi Province near the Indian border, during an incident involving the Armed Police Force (APF), prompting protests and an official investigation.

Initial reports described the death as the result of gunfire by unidentified individuals. Subsequent statements by the Armed Police Force said the man was fatally shot during a confrontation between security personnel and individuals allegedly involved in cross-border smuggling. According to the APF, officers opened fire after being attacked while attempting to seize goods being transported illegally from India. Local residents and family members disputed aspects of the official account. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Following the killing, protests erupted in the local market area, with demonstrators blocking a section of the East–West Highway, Nepal's main transport artery, and demanding an impartial investigation, accountability, and compensation. An Armed Police Force post was damaged during the unrest. Authorities later restored order after negotiations with community representatives. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The Armed Police Force headquarters has since established a three-member internal investigation committee to examine the circumstances of the shooting. Several local APF and border security officers were relieved of their duties pending the outcome of the inquiry. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Pakistan: Ousted ex-prime minister's party sets conditions for talks with government

(lm) Pakistan's main opposition party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has stated that it would only consider the government's offer of political talks credible if it is accompanied by specific confidence-building measures, including regular and unhindered access to its jailed founding leader, former prime minister Imran Khan.

Khan has been in custody since August 2023 and is serving prison sentences in multiple cases, including convictions related to corruption and charges connected to unrest that followed his arrest in May 2023. He is held in a high-security prison in Rawalpindi. PTI has previously stated that members of Khan's family, legal team, and party representatives have faced restrictions in meeting him, while authorities have allowed limited visits on specific occasions.

In December 2025, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif publicly stated that the government was prepared to hold dialogue with the opposition to address ongoing political polarization. Government representatives have since reiterated that talks would only proceed if Khan himself supports the initiative and that negotiations would not be conducted under conditions they describe as unlawful or coercive.

PTI officials have responded by stating that any dialogue process requires direct access to Khan so that designated party representatives can accurately convey his views and the party's collective position. The party has indicated that it has nominated senior figures to engage in talks but maintains that access to Khan is a prerequisite.

Separately, a newly formed National Dialogue Committee, comprising former PTI members and other political figures, has announced plans to convene a meeting in Islamabad on January 7, bringing together representatives of major political parties, lawyers, journalists, and civil society. According to its organizers, the initiative includes written appeals to the government for interim measures, such as parole for certain detained PTI leaders, ahead of any formal negotiations. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Anti-terrorism court sentences journalists and online commentators in absentia over May 2023 cases

(lm) An anti-terrorism court in Islamabad has sentenced seven individuals, including journalists and online commentators, to two life sentences each in absentia in cases described by prosecutors as involving "digital terrorism." The verdict was announced on January 2 by an Islamabad Anti-Terrorism Court and is subject to confirmation by the Islamabad High Court, as required under Pakistani law.

The convictions were issued under provisions of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act and the Pakistan Penal Code. The court also imposed financial penalties. The trial was conducted in absentia, a procedure permitted under Pakistan's anti-terrorism legislation when accused persons are outside the country. A court-appointed defense counsel represented the defendants during the proceedings.

The cases are linked to events of May 9, 2023, when protests erupted across multiple cities following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan in Islamabad on corruption-related charges. During the unrest, government buildings and military installations were attacked. Prosecutors alleged that the convicted individuals were involved in online activities connected to the unrest.

Following the May 2023 events, thousands of supporters of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the political party led by Imran Khan, were detained, and hundreds were charged under anti-terrorism laws. Some related cases were transferred to military courts. The government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has accused PTI of organizing violent protests, an allegation denied by the party. Imran Khan has remained in custody since August 2023 in connection with multiple legal cases. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Removal of opinion article sparks political and social media backlash

(lm) The removal of an opinion article titled *"It Is Over"* from the website of Express News, a privately owned national media outlet with a large digital readership, has generated significant public attention in Pakistan, with the author's name trending on social media shortly afterward. The article, written by Zorain Nizamani, a Pakistani doctoral student based in the United States, argued that Pakistan's older political leadership is increasingly disconnected from younger generations and that official narratives aimed at promoting patriotism are failing to resonate with youth.

Published on January 1 and taken down the following day without a public explanation from the outlet, the article continued to circulate widely through screenshots shared on platforms such as X and WhatsApp. The episode gained additional visibility as supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Pakistan's former ruling party and now the largest opposition force with a strong youth and online support base, shared the article extensively on social media, framing its removal as indicative of shrinking space for dissenting opinion. [Pakistan Today] [Journalism Pakistan]

Pakistan: State-run companies report new oil and gas discoveries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

(lm) Pakistan's state-owned energy companies have reported new oil and gas discoveries in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to regulatory filings submitted in early January 2026 to the Pakistan Stock Exchange.

Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) announced a gas discovery at the Bilitang-1 exploratory well in the TAL block in Kohat district. Initial testing indicated gas flows of approximately 1.58 million standard cubic feet per day. In Pakistan's onshore exploration context, such flow rates are typically associated with early-stage exploratory finds and are below the levels generally required for standalone commercial development.

Separately, Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) reported oil and gas flows from another exploratory well in Kohat district targeting the Datta Formation, a geological layer that has previously yielded hydrocarbons in northern Pakistan. According to the filing, testing recorded production rates of approximately 4,100 barrels of oil per day and 10.5 million standard cubic feet of gas per day, volumes that fall within the range typically associated with potentially commercially viable onshore discoveries, subject to further appraisal.

The announcements follow other oil and gas discoveries reported in recent months, including findings in Attock district in Punjab province and in North Waziristan. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Government advances multi-track restructuring of state-owned assets

under IMF-linked reforms

(lm) Pakistan's government has taken a series of steps across the shipping, energy, and overseas real-estate sectors as part of a broader effort to restructure state-owned enterprises under reform commitments linked to international lending programs.

In the maritime sector, the government has decided to transfer management control of the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) to the National Logistics Corporation (NLC), a commercial logistics company operated by the Pakistan Army. Under the arrangement outlined by officials, the government would sell around 30 percent of its PNSC shareholding to NLC, which would assume operational control. As of June 30, the state held 87.56 percent of PNSC's shares, which are listed on the Pakistan Stock Exchange. Officials said NLC would be tasked with expanding PNSC's fleet from 10 vessels to 54 over five years and replacing aging ships expected to become commercially unviable beyond 2030. According to official estimates, PNSC currently carries about 11 percent of Pakistan's commercial cargo, with the remainder handled by foreign operators, resulting in annual freight payments of approximately USD 6 billion abroad. [Arab News 1]

Separately, the government plans to redevelop the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, a century-old Manhattan property owned by the Pakistani state through Pakistan International Airlines. The hotel has been closed since 2020 and is among Pakistan's most valuable overseas assets. Officials said the property would be redeveloped under a joint-venture model involving up to USD 5 billion in combined equity and debt financing. Under the proposed structure, the government would contribute the land while a private partner would inject equity, with remaining financing raised through debt. Pakistan's ownership share would fall to about 50 percent, while officials said the economic value of its stake would increase. Ownership of the asset has recently been transferred to PIA Holding Company Limited, a state holding entity, following the privatization of the airline itself. [Arab News 2]

In the energy sector, Pakistan has launched the privatization process for five electricity distribution companies—Islamabad, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Hyderabad, and Sukkur—by appointing financial advisers and initiating sell-side due diligence. The move forms part of reforms agreed with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Official data cited in government documents show that Pakistan's power sector had accumulated more than

PKR 2.6 trillion (USD 9.3 billion) in circular debt by mid-2025, driven largely by distribution losses, electricity theft, and weak bill recovery. Two other distribution companies were excluded from the current phase due to security and structural constraints. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan: Agreements with ABD exceeding USD 300 million on climate resilience initiatives signed

(lm) Pakistan has signed agreements with the Asian Development Bank exceeding PKR 85.2 billion (USD 304.5 million) to implement two major climate resilience initiatives. The projects target coastal protection and climate-resilient agriculture in Sindh and Punjab, respectively. The agreements come against the backdrop of Pakistan's high climate vulnerability, underscored by the 2022 floods that caused losses exceeding USD 30 billion and mass displacement, reinforcing the centrality of climate resilience in Pakistan's development and fiscal planning. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government outlines plans for three to four new deep-sea ports

(lm) The government of Pakistan plans to develop three to four new deep-sea ports as part of its long-term maritime infrastructure planning. The plans are aimed at expanding port capacity and reducing pressure on existing facilities as trade volumes increase. The ministry also indicated that work is underway on a commercial framework to manage future port capacity, noting that alternative facilities must be in place before existing ports reach full utilization. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Security operations, militant incidents, and 2025 violence trends

(lm) Pakistani authorities reported several security-related developments over the past days, including the disruption of an alleged attack plot in Karachi, fatal militant incidents in northwestern and southwestern Pakistan, and new data on nationwide violence trends.

In Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and main commercial hub, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Sindh province stated on January 5 that it had disrupted a

planned attack linked to the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a proscribed separatist organization. According to CTD officials, intelligence-led operations led to raids on a rented location on the city's outskirts, where more than 2,000 kilograms of explosive material were recovered. Three suspects were arrested in subsequent operations, while other individuals reportedly escaped. Officials said the suspects were linked to a BLA network, including its Majeed Brigade, which Pakistani authorities identify as a unit involved in high-impact attacks. Authorities stated that the alleged planning involved coordination from outside Pakistan, without specifying locations. [Arab News 1]

Separately, on January 5, at least two people were killed and more than two dozen injured in two improvised explosive device (IED) blasts. One blast occurred near a vehicle transporting cement factory workers in Lakki Marwat, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bordering Afghanistan that has experienced repeated militant violence in recent years. The blast killed one person and injured nine others. Another IED detonated in a busy market area in Panjgur, a remote district in Balochistan, killing one person and injuring at least 16. No group claimed responsibility for either attack. [Arab News 2]

In a separate incident on January 4, unidentified gunmen shot dead three traffic police officers in Lakki Marwat district. Police said a search operation was launched in surrounding rural areas. No claim of responsibility was reported. [Arab News 3]

These incidents occurred alongside the release of an annual security report by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), which reviewed violence trends for calendar year 2025. According to the report, Pakistan recorded a decline of up to 17 percent in cross-border militant attacks in the final months of 2025 following the closure of major official border crossings with Afghanistan on October 11. CRSS reported that attacks fell by around nine percent in November and nearly 17 percent in December, with a corresponding decline in fatalities among civilians and security personnel.

Despite the late-year decrease, CRSS described 2025 as Pakistan's deadliest year in a decade, with 3,417 fatalities nationwide, compared with 2,555 in 2024. Violence remained heavily concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, which together accounted for more than 96 percent of all fatalities. Security forces, including the army, Frontier Corps, and police, were identified as the primary targets of attacks. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and the

Balochistan Liberation Army were cited as responsible for a significant share of incidents.

Pakistani authorities continue to accuse militant groups of operating from across the border in Afghanistan, allegations denied by the Afghan Taliban administration. [Arab News 4]

Pakistan: Air force tests new air-launched cruise missile

(lm) Pakistan's air force has conducted a flight test of the indigenously developed Taimoor air-launched cruise missile. The missile reportedly has a range of approximately 600 kilometers, carries a conventional warhead, and is designed to fly at low altitudes, a profile intended to reduce detection by air and missile defense systems.

The missile test occurred several months after a brief but intense military confrontation between Pakistan and India, during which both sides exchanged missile and artillery fire and deployed drones and combat aircraft. It also follows other recent military activities, including a naval surface-to-air missile test in December and large-scale field exercises involving armor, drones, and forward-deployed units near the eastern border. [Arab News]

Seychelles: President withdraws intelligence chief appointment pending parliamentary consultation

(ms) The Seychelles government has temporarily withdrawn the appointment of Sabry Khan as Director-General of the Seychelles Intelligence Service, citing the need to fully observe parliamentary consultation procedures set out in law.

In a statement issued on December 30, the Office of the President said Patrick Herminie took the decision to reaffirm the administration's commitment to constitutional governance and due process. Khan had been sworn in earlier the same day following the end of the previous director-general's tenure.

According to the statement, the appointment process began on December 5 under the Seychelles Intelligence Service Act, 2018, after the former director-general's term expired. At that time, the Defense and Security Committee of the National

Assembly had not yet been constituted, making formal consultation impossible. The committee was later established on December 11, after its members were sworn in.

The presidency said the urgency of maintaining leadership continuity at the intelligence service led to the initial appointment but acknowledged that consultation with the parliamentary committee is required under the law. As a result, the appointment has been withdrawn temporarily, and the nomination formally resubmitted to the National Assembly for advisory review.

The Office of the President stressed that the committee's role is consultative rather than binding, and that the final authority to appoint the director-general rests with the president. It added that the move should not be interpreted as a rejection of Khan's candidacy.

The government said it remains focused on ensuring stability and effective leadership within the intelligence service, which it described as critical to safeguarding national security and the constitutional order of Seychelles. [Seychelles Nation] [State House of Seychelles]

Seychelles: National Unity Committee expanded as government pushes reconciliation agenda

(ms) President Patrick Herminie has announced the appointment of three new members to the National Unity Committee, strengthening a key institution tasked with promoting national reconciliation and social cohesion.

Effective January 1, the new members are Bishop Danny Elizabeth, representing the Seychelles Interfaith Council; Dr. Odile Decomarmond, chairperson of the Citizens Engagement Platform Seychelles; and Ambassador Marie-Pierre Lloyd, a member of the COMESA Committee of Elders. The committee is chaired by former president Danny Faure.

The committee plays a central role in shaping dialogue on national unity and reconciliation following Seychelles' 2025 presidential election, which brought a change in national leadership. In a small and politically active society, such transitions can heighten divisions and mistrust among communities. The National Unity Committee is intended to provide a platform for inclusive dialogue, helping to bridge political, social,

and institutional differences while reinforcing stability and public confidence during the early period of a new administration. [State House of Seychelles]

Sri Lanka: Post-cyclone recovery framework advances as donor talks loom

(lm) Sri Lanka's government is moving to formalize its post-disaster recovery response following Cyclone Ditwah, while facing mounting opposition criticism over governance and accountability.

A Presidential Task Force for Rebuilding Sri Lanka, established by extraordinary gazette on December 31, will act as the central coordinating body for rehabilitation and reconstruction in affected areas, with the prime minister appointed to chair a high-level, cross-government team. [Daily Mirror 1]

In parallel, authorities said preparations are underway to convene an international donor conference under the auspices of the High-Level Committee for Foreign Relief Aid (Supplies) Coordination (HL-FRAC), following a World Bank report estimating USD 4.1 billion in direct physical damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and buildings. No date has been set for the donor meeting, and the government is also continuing risk assessments and relocation planning for vulnerable areas identified by the National Building Research Organisation. [Daily Mirror 2]

Meanwhile, political opposition to the ruling National People's Power government continues. Namal Rajapaksa, a member of parliament and national organizer of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) —a right-wing, Sinhalese nationalist party that was Sri Lanka's dominant governing party from 2019 until its decline following economic collapse and youth protests in 2022—accused the government of slow disaster response and failure to fulfil compensation promises to affected families. Rajapaksa, son of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and a once-prominent presidential candidate for the SLPP in 2024, also criticized delays in appointing an Auditor General, warning that prolonged vacancy of the post could undermine transparency and risk external funding linked to audited oversight. [Daily Mirror 3] [Daily Mirror 4]

Sri Lanka: Parliament moves on electoral framework as opposition presses for

provincial council polls

(lm) Sri Lanka's Parliament is set to appoint a Select Committee to determine the electoral system required to hold long-delayed Provincial Council elections, following approval by the Parliamentary Business Committee to table the resolution in an extraordinary sitting. The committee will be mandated to examine legal and technical options for conducting the polls and to submit recommendations to Parliament, a step the government has framed as necessary to break the prolonged institutional deadlock. [Daily Mirror 1]

Provincial Councils are constitutionally established sub-national bodies responsible for key policy areas such as education, health services, and local infrastructure. Elections to all nine councils have not been held since 2018, largely due to unresolved disputes over the applicable electoral system and constituency delimitation, leaving the councils under prolonged central government administration.

The parliamentary move comes amid sustained pressure from the main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), which has publicly called for Provincial Council elections to be held as early as possible in 2026, arguing that continued delays undermine representative governance and democratic accountability at the regional level. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Bill gazetted to abolish parliamentary pension scheme

(lm) A bill to abolish long-standing pension entitlements for Members of Parliament has been formally gazetted, clearing the way for legislative approval to repeal the parliamentary pension scheme. The proposed Parliamentary Pensions (Repeal) Act of 2025 would revoke the Parliamentary Pensions Law of 1977, which currently grants lifetime pensions to Members of Parliament and, in certain cases, their surviving spouses after a minimum five-year term.

The move implements a core pledge under the government's policy program and follows a series of approvals during 2025, including cabinet endorsement and legal clearance. The government has clarified that the repeal will not apply retrospectively: pensions already paid will not be recovered, but no new entitlements will accrue once the law takes effect.

As of late January 2024, pension payments were being made to 330 former Members of Parliament, alongside 182 spouses of deceased legislators, bringing the total

number of beneficiaries to more than 500. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Colombo Municipal Council budget passes on second attempt

(lm) The Colombo Municipal Council (CMC)—Sri Lanka's largest and most politically significant local authority—approved its 2026 budget on December 31 by a narrow margin of 58–56, with two abstentions, reversing an earlier defeat and highlighting continuing instability in local governance under the ruling National People's Power (NPP) coalition, a left-wing alliance that came to power nationally in 2024. [Daily Mirror 1]

The vote followed the council's initial rejection of the budget on December 22, when the NPP-led administration—despite being headed by Mayor Vraie Cally Balthazaar—lost by 60 votes to 57. Under Sri Lanka's local government framework, the mayor was entitled to present a revised budget within 14 days, which ultimately secured approval. Similar budget defeats suffered by the NPP in other local authorities in late December point to a broader pattern of narrow and contested control at the municipal level. [AiR No. 51, December/2025, 4]

Political fallout followed immediately. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, a longstanding Muslim minority party that often plays a swing role in coalition politics, suspended CMC councillor Zohara Buhary after she voted in favor of the revised budget despite a party directive to oppose it, citing a serious breach of party discipline. [Daily Mirror 2]

The budget's passage coincided with heightened scrutiny of the CMC, as the government established a Presidential Commission—a high-level investigative mechanism with powers to summon witnesses and documents—to probe alleged corruption and irregularities within the council. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Party appointment and parallel statements on opposition coordination

(lm) A senior Sri Lankan politician, Navin Dissanayake, has been appointed vice chairman for 2026 of the United National Party (UNP), a long-established center-right political party that dominated Sri Lankan politics for decades and produced multiple prime ministers and presidents, but which currently holds a limited

parliamentary presence. The appointment was confirmed by Ranil Wickremesinghe, former president of Sri Lanka and current leader of the party, who also named Dissanayake to the party's Working Committee in line with its constitution. [Daily Mirror 1]

Separately, representatives of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, Sri Lanka's largest opposition party, made public statements on the status of discussions concerning a possible electoral arrangement with the UNP. Harshana Rajakaruna, an SJB Member of Parliament, stated that any future alliance would need to be led by the SJB, with the UNP participating under its leadership. He said the SJB's management committee has tasked Sajith Premadasa—the Leader of the Opposition and head of the SJB—with conducting discussions with UNP leaders.

In contrast, Ajith Mannapperuma, a former Member of Parliament affiliated with the UNP, expressed skepticism that an alliance would materialize, citing differing views on leadership style and cooperation. Rajakaruna also said that Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has indicated reluctance to return to active frontline electoral politics, could potentially play a patron or advisory role should cooperation emerge. No formal agreement or joint framework has been announced by either party. [Daily Mirror 2]

In a separate statement, Namal Rajapaksa, a Member of Parliament from the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and the son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, said that a joint opposition alliance was necessary to change the country's political direction. Rajapaksa stated that he was not involved in discussions between the UNP and SJB and spoke in general terms about opposition unity. The SLPP, which led the government until 2022 and once held a dominant parliamentary majority, has since experienced a notable decline in electoral support and parliamentary strength following Sri Lanka's economic crisis and subsequent political upheaval. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Former ministers detained and questioned in separate financial probes

(lm) Sri Lankan law-enforcement and anti-corruption authorities have taken procedural action against two former cabinet ministers in connection with separate financial investigations.

Johnston Fernando, a former cabinet minister affiliated with the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (the party that

dominated government until 2022), and his youngest son were arrested by the Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID), a specialized police unit handling major financial offenses. The arrests followed Fernando's appearance before the FCID after he had been formally summoned. Investigators allege that he caused financial losses to the state through the misuse of a vehicle belonging to Lanka Sathosa, the state-owned retail enterprise. Both Fernando and his son were produced before the Wattala Magistrate's Court and remanded in custody until January 9 while investigations continue. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2] [Daily Mirror 3]

In a separate case, Rishad Bathiudeen, a former cabinet minister and current Member of Parliament associated with minority-based political parties and previously a coalition partner in past governments, appeared before the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC), Sri Lanka's independent anti-corruption body. The commission is examining the procurement of a privately owned building on a rental basis for use by the Ministry of Agriculture during an earlier administration. [Daily Mirror 4]

Sri Lanka: Main maritime gateway posts record container throughput in 2025, eyes further expansion

(lm) Sri Lanka's main maritime gateway, the Port of Colombo, recorded its highest-ever container throughput in 2025, handling approximately 8.29 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), marking growth of about 6 percent compared with 2024.

Port authorities attributed the record results to the combined performance of state-owned and privately operated terminals. These include terminals run by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) (the state body managing national ports), as well as facilities operated by international partners such as South Asia Gateway Terminals (with Chinese investment), Colombo International Container Terminal (a China-backed deep-water terminal), and the Colombo West International Terminal, developed by India's Adani Group together with Sri Lanka's John Keells Holdings (one of the country's largest conglomerates). The addition of new deep-water capacity has strengthened Colombo's ability to handle ultra-large container vessels.

Looking ahead, port authorities expect further momentum in 2026 as additional capacity comes on

stream, including full operations at the Eastern Container Terminal and the SLPA-owned Western Container Terminal. Officials have indicated that Colombo is targeting throughput of over 10 million TEUs in the near term, framing the port's expansion as a key pillar of Sri Lanka's broader economic recovery and ambitions to position itself as a central logistics hub for South Asia. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Flagship China-backed refinery project remains stalled one year after MoU

(lm) Nearly one year after the signing of a memorandum of understanding, Sri Lanka's largest proposed foreign direct investment to date—a USD 3.7 billion oil refinery project by China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), a Chinese state-owned energy company—has yet to move into the implementation phase.

The agreement was concluded in January 2025 during a state visit to China by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and aims to fast-track the construction of a modern refinery in the investment zone near Hambantota International Port, a deep-sea port in southern Sri Lanka developed with Chinese financing. The refinery, first approved in 2023, is designed to process 200,000 barrels of crude oil per day and would represent the single largest investment project ever undertaken in the country.

Progress has slowed after Sinopec requested amendments to the original agreement, including provisions for expanded access to Sri Lanka's domestic fuel market. Negotiations on these revisions are still ongoing. Government officials indicate that a final decision is expected from the Cabinet, but no firm timeline has been set.

The delay comes as Sri Lanka continues to open its energy sector to foreign participation. Alongside Sinopec, the market currently includes Lanka IOC (a subsidiary of India's Indian Oil Corporation) and RM Parks, a United States–based energy firm. At the same time, Sri Lanka is pursuing closer cooperation with India to develop Trincomalee, a strategic eastern port city, as a regional energy hub. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Air force to modernize helicopter and transport fleet after

disaster-response constraints

(lm) Sri Lanka has accelerated plans to modernize the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) following operational constraints exposed during nationwide disaster-response operations after Cyclone Ditwah in late November 2025. Severe flooding highlighted long-standing gaps in airlift capacity, with the SLAF operating only a limited number of serviceable helicopters at the peak of rescue operations, forcing the temporary use of non-dedicated and VIP aircraft.

According to the air force, a series of fleet upgrades and acquisitions is scheduled for 2026. The United States is set to transfer 10 TH-57 Sea Ranger (Bell 206) helicopters, with the first batch expected by mid-February 2026. In addition, two C-130 transport aircraft are to be provided by the United States and Australia, with deliveries planned for 2026 and 2027 respectively.

In parallel, the SLAF will proceed with the overhaul of four Mi-17 helicopters, with the first aircraft scheduled to be sent for refurbishment by the end of January 2026. Cabinet has approved an urgent overhaul and service-life extension program at an estimated total cost of USD 18 million (approximately LKR 5.9 billion), including transport and insurance. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Narcotics seizures rise as internal integrity concerns emerge within drug-control agencies

(lm) Sri Lanka's anti-narcotics efforts in 2025 combined high-value interdictions with growing concerns over internal integrity within enforcement agencies.

The Sri Lanka Coast Guard, operating jointly with the navy, police, and intelligence services, reported seizures of illegal narcotics valued at LKR 370 million (approximately USD 1.15 million) during the year and the arrest of 71 suspects. Confiscated items included crystal methamphetamine, Kerala cannabis, locally grown cannabis, hashish, prescription drugs, illicit cigarettes, agricultural chemicals smuggled by sea, and 19 vessels used in trafficking. [Daily Mirror 1]

Parallel to these operations, a survey conducted for the Police Narcotics Bureau identified drug use among a segment of police and security-force personnel, linked in part to prolonged exposure in narcotics-related duties. Police authorities confirmed that intelligence-led investigations are under way into

alleged misconduct, unexplained assets, and data-security breaches within the bureau. [Daily Mirror 2]

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

Brunei: Central bank sees brighter 2026 outlook as oil output stabilizes, investments advance

(dql) Brunei's central bank has signaled a cautiously improving outlook for 2026, expecting steadier growth as oil and gas output levels off and large investment projects advance, despite the economy shrinking over the first three quarters of the year. [Brunei Darussalam Central Bank]

Growth in hydrocarbons helped offset a decline in non-energy sectors, but authorities anticipate a rebound supported by foreign-led projects and initiatives under the 12th National Development Plan—the country's current five-year national strategy (2024–2029), outlining the country's major public investment and development agenda.

Inflation remains negative — -0.3% year-on-year between January to November 2025 — and tightly managed through subsidies, price controls and the currency link to Singapore, with prices projected to stay broadly stable next year.

The financial system is described as sound, with expanding assets, a dominant Islamic finance sector and strong bank capital buffers, even as profitability softens. Recent policy moves — including a Sustainable Finance Roadmap and work on a national digital

payments framework — point to a dual strategy of greening the economy and modernizing financial infrastructure. [The Star]

Cambodia: Government to continue decentralization reforms

(dql) The government will extend its decentralization reforms through a new five-year national program for 2026–2030, following the completion of the first plan under the second phase of reforms.

While previous programs strengthened local administration and citizen access to public services, officials acknowledge that further review and improvement are needed to fully achieve reform objectives. Preparations for the 2026–2030 program are underway, building on lessons from prior phases.

Decentralization was initiated at the commune level in 2001 and later expanded to provinces, cities, and districts. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Minimum wage for garment workers raised

(dql) Cambodia's minimum monthly wage for workers in the garment, footwear, and travel goods sectors increased to USD 210, effective January 1. Including benefits, monthly earnings now range from USD 227 to USD 238.

Workers noted the change reflects annual adjustments to wages and overtime pay. Trade unionist Kim Chansamnang called on landlords not to raise rents in response to the wage increase. The adjustment affects hundreds of thousands of workers in the sector. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Authorities suppress over 2,100 natural resource crimes in 2025

(dql) The Ministry of Environment reported the suppression of 2,152 natural resource crimes in 2025, including forestry, wildlife, land encroachment, illegal fishing, and mineral violations, through 16,261 patrols in protected areas.

While detected offences fell compared with 2024, patrol activity increased, seen by the ministry as signaling improved deterrence. Authorities referred 95 suspects to courts and compiled 133 case files.

The ministry credited the results to strengthened inter-agency cooperation, technological monitoring using satellites and drones, and community engagement. Efforts also support the ministry's "Environmental Sector Circular Strategy," emphasizing conservation, reforestation, and sustainable livelihoods. [Khmer Times 1]

Meanwhile, the Anti-Drug Department reported a decline in narcotics confiscations in 2025, with 5.88 tons seized compared to 14.7 tons in 2024. Authorities arrested 26,421 drug-related suspects, a 1.5 percent increase from the previous year, including 1,118 foreigners from 18 nationalities. [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia: Police arrest 32 South Koreans over online fraud

(dql) Cambodian authorities arrested 32 South Koreans in Phnom Penh's Chbar Ampov District for running an online fraud scheme. The suspects reportedly impersonated South Korean police and prosecutors to extort money from victims.

The suspects are now in police custody pending further investigation. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Ruling coalition weighs ending direct local elections

Parties backing President Prabowo Subianto are coalescing around a proposal that would end Indonesia's direct elections for governors, regents, and mayors and replace them with an indirect system in which regional legislatures (DPRD) select local executives. Supporters argue the change would cut costs and curb vote-buying, but critics say it would concentrate political power inside party leaderships and weaken one of the few remaining electoral arenas where challengers can still break through.

Prabowo has repeatedly questioned the expense of nationwide, single-day local elections, citing costs running into tens of trillions of Indonesian rupiah (IDR), , and has urged a return to DPRD selection. In practical terms, that shift would move the decisive contest from the ballot box to post-election bargaining inside

legislatures, making executive office contingent on party caucuses and coalition negotiations rather than a direct popular mandate. Analysts note that while money politics would not disappear, incentives would likely migrate toward behind-the-scenes dealmaking at the DPRD level.

The debate is unfolding as lawmakers prepare broader revisions to election laws following rulings by Indonesia's Constitutional Court, including an order that national and regional elections be separated starting in 2029. That legal reset has opened space for coalition leaders to float structural changes that would reshape how local power is won and exercised. [The Jakarta Post]

Opposition to the proposal is sharpened by historical memory. Indirect selection of local leaders was a hallmark of the New Order era under Suharto, when centralized control and limited competition helped entrench regime-aligned forces. Although today's DPRD elections are competitive, critics argue that moving executive selection into legislatures would again narrow the channel between voters and regional heads, reducing accountability and reinforcing central party control.

Concerns are particularly acute for smaller parties and non-establishment figures. Direct local elections have offered a separate mandate from DPRD arithmetic, allowing candidates to win executive office even without dominant party backing. They have also been one of the few venues where nomination rules have been loosened—most recently by court decisions lowering thresholds—to widen access and prevent major coalitions from locking up races. Indonesia's allowance for independent candidates in local executive contests, however demanding the requirements, further underscored that openness. An indirect model would effectively close those pathways, because only parties with legislative seats would control selection, tilting the field toward incumbents and large coalitions.

Indonesia: New criminal code takes effect, prompting debate over reform and civil liberties

(ms) Indonesia has formally enacted its new National Criminal Code (KUHP) and Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP), ending more than a century of reliance on colonial-era laws and marking one of the most significant legal reforms since the country's democratic transition.

The new codes replace legislation inherited from Dutch rule and the New Order period, which officials long criticized as outdated, punitive, and misaligned with Indonesia's constitutional and cultural values.

Substantively, the KUHP introduces a move away from a purely retributive justice model—centered on imprisonment—toward a more restorative approach. Judges are now encouraged to prioritize penalties such as mediation between offenders and victims, community service, fines adjusted to economic capacity, and rehabilitation programs. This shift is particularly significant for minor offenses and narcotics users, who under previous laws were routinely sentenced to prison. Officials argue that rehabilitation and social reintegration are more effective than incarceration, especially as Indonesia continues to face chronic prison overcrowding.

Another major change concerns how the state regulates morally and politically sensitive conduct. Acts such as sex outside marriage and cohabitation are now classified as complaint-based offenses, meaning law enforcement cannot act unless a report is filed by a close family member, such as a spouse, parent, or child. The government says this mechanism is designed to limit state intrusion into private life and prevent arbitrary enforcement. Similarly, offenses related to insulting the president or state institutions require a formal complaint, rather than proactive prosecution by authorities.

At the same time, these provisions remain controversial. Legal experts note that while the complaint requirement narrows enforcement, the underlying offenses still exist in law, creating the possibility of selective or politically motivated complaints.

Procedural reforms under the KUHAP are intended to balance these expanded powers. The new code strengthens protections for suspects, including clearer limits on detention, enhanced access to legal counsel, and stricter rules on evidence gathering. Victims' and witnesses' rights are also expanded, with improved restitution mechanisms and stronger witness protection. Authorities say digital case management and clearer investigative oversight will increase transparency and accountability.

The government says the reforms are intended to assert legal sovereignty and address long-standing problems such as prison overcrowding and unequal treatment before the law. Law Minister Supratman Andi Agtas has acknowledged, however, that the breadth of the new provisions carries risks of misuse,

stressing that public oversight and civil society scrutiny are essential to prevent abuse. [Antara] [Reuters] [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Planned history book on 1945–1949 independence struggle draws scrutiny

(ms) Indonesia's Ministry of Culture has announced plans to publish a new history book documenting the country's struggle to defend its independence between 1945 and 1949, a period the government describes as the "war to defend independence" but which the Netherlands historically refers to as the revolutionary era.

Culture Minister Fadli Zon said the book will cover key political, diplomatic, and military developments, including the proclamation of independence, Dutch recognition of sovereignty, the brief establishment of the United States of Indonesia, and the transition to a unitary state. He emphasized the importance of presenting the period comprehensively for future generations and said the work is expected to encourage public debate.

The announcement comes amid ongoing controversy over state-facilitated history writing in Indonesia. Just weeks earlier, the ministry conducted a soft launch of a 10-volume national history series that has drawn criticism from historians and civil society groups over concerns of selective interpretation and limited transparency in its preparation. [see AiR No. 50, December/2025, 3]

Critics argue that government-backed historical narratives risk prioritizing certain perspectives while marginalizing others, particularly in politically sensitive periods involving violence, diplomacy, and competing claims of legitimacy. While the 1945–1949 struggle is widely regarded as a foundational moment in Indonesian history, scholars note that it also involves contested interpretations, including internal conflicts, civilian experiences, and differing accounts of military actions.

Concerns have also been raised about the broader political context. The new history series extends into the early presidency of Prabowo Subianto, prompting debate about how state-sponsored histories handle episodes linked to figures currently in power. Observers say similar sensitivities could emerge in the treatment of the independence period if alternative narratives or unresolved questions are minimized.

The Ministry of Culture has stated that the planned book will remain open to critique and discussion. However, historians stress that broad peer review, transparency, and public engagement will be key to ensuring credibility, particularly if the book is later used in schools or official institutions. [Antara]

Indonesia: Corruption trial opens against former education minister

(ms) The corruption trial of former education minister Nadiem Makarim formally opened in Jakarta on January 6, following weeks of delays linked to his recovery from surgery. Prosecutors accuse Makarim of abusing his authority during the procurement of Chromebook laptops for schools between 2019 and 2022, alleging the scheme caused state losses of about IDR 2.18 trillion (approximately USD 130.4 million).

According to the indictment presented at the Central Jakarta Corruption Court, Makarim is accused of manipulating tender specifications to favor Google's Chromebook ecosystem, despite internal studies warning that the devices were poorly suited for use in many parts of Indonesia because of limited internet access. Prosecutors argue that large numbers of laptops proved unusable in remote and underdeveloped regions, undermining the stated objective of supporting nationwide digital learning.

The case centers on a flagship education digitalization program rolled out during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools shifted rapidly to remote instruction. Investigators allege the procurement lacked adequate feasibility assessments and effectively positioned Google as a gatekeeper within parts of Indonesia's education system. Google itself has not been charged with wrongdoing.

Prosecutors also allege that Makarim failed to disclose conflicts of interest linked to Google's investments in companies he founded before entering government, including ride-hailing firm Gojek. They claim he personally benefited by up to IDR 809.6 billion (around USD 48.3 million) through these investment ties, although the companies involved were not direct suppliers in the laptop procurement.

Makarim has denied all allegations. His legal team has filed a formal objection, arguing that the charges are based on assumptions rather than concrete evidence and that procurement decisions were handled by technical units within the ministry. They also contend that the Attorney General's Office had been consulted

before the program was launched.[Bloomberg] [Reuters] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Country's largest Islamic organization signals de-escalation in leadership dispute

(ms) Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has moved to de-escalate an internal leadership dispute following reconciliation talks among senior figures, though key issues remain unresolved.

NU chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf said after a meeting of senior leaders at the Miftachussunnah Islamic boarding school in Surabaya that both camps had agreed to halt open confrontation and channel disagreements through formal organizational forums. He stressed that no changes had been made to NU's leadership structure and that the organization would continue operating as before.

The meeting followed earlier talks on December 25, which brought together Yahya and Miftachul Akhyar, head of NU's supreme religious council. Miftachul leads a faction that had questioned Yahya's leadership, citing concerns over governance and authority within NU's dual structure, which separates religious and executive power.

Both sides have agreed that NU's next national congress, or Muktamar, scheduled for 2026, will serve as the formal venue to address leadership and structural questions. Senior clerics have urged restraint to avoid further polarization within the organization. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Government expands teacher scholarships and school revitalization efforts in 2026

(ms) Indonesia's government has announced expanded education programs for 2026 aimed at addressing long-standing shortcomings in teacher qualifications and school infrastructure.

Under Indonesia's education regulations, teachers are required to hold at least a bachelor's degree (S1) to be considered professionally qualified and to access certification and related allowances. However, a large number of teachers, particularly in early childhood, elementary, and junior high schools, still do not meet

this requirement, reflecting historic shortages of access to higher education and uneven professional development.

To narrow this gap, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education will provide S1 scholarships to 150,000 teachers in 2026, up from 12,500 in 2025. Education Minister Abdul Mu'ti said the scholarships will use a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme, allowing teachers' work experience to count as academic credit and reducing study time to about one year. Each scholarship is valued at IDR 3 million (around USD 190) per semester, paid directly to participating universities.

Alongside teacher upgrading, the government is targeting the revitalization of 71,000 schools nationwide. Many schools operate in deteriorating buildings, with inadequate classrooms, sanitation, and learning facilities, particularly outside major cities. Officials estimate that more than 100,000 schools still require construction or major repairs after years of limited infrastructure investment.

The 2026 state budget allocates more than IDR 14 trillion (approximately USD 838 million) for school revitalization, an increase from previous years. President Prabowo Subianto has identified education as a priority for strengthening human resources. [Antara 1] [Antara 2]

Indonesia: Concerns grow over freedom of expression amid intimidation of flood critics

(ms) Questions over the state of freedom of expression in Indonesia have resurfaced following a series of intimidation incidents targeting activists, academics, and social media figures who criticized the government's handling of deadly floods and landslides in northern Sumatra late last year. Civil society groups say the cases risk creating a chilling effect on public debate at a time when scrutiny of disaster response and accountability is high.

Reports of threats began emerging in late December. Environmental activist Iqbal Damanik of Greenpeace Indonesia said a chicken carcass was left outside his home along with a handwritten note warning him to "watch your words." In Aceh, social media influencer Sherly Annavita reported receiving online threats and finding her car vandalized after posting about the scale of flooding in the province, which officials had described as under control.

A similar incident was reported by music producer Ramon Dony Adam, also known as DJ Donny, who said he received a threatening package on December 29, followed days later by an alleged Molotov cocktail attack at his residence. Meanwhile, constitutional law scholar Zainal Arifin Mochtar of Gadjah Mada University said he was threatened by an anonymous caller claiming to represent the police and warning him of arrest.

Human Rights Minister Natalius Pigai has urged law enforcement to investigate the incidents and identify those responsible. In a statement issued January 3, Pigai described the intimidation as unacceptable and said perpetrators should face firm legal action if proven guilty. He rejected allegations of state involvement and argued that Indonesia is experiencing what he termed a “democracy surplus,” with citizens free to criticize government policies.

Pigai also called on the public to express criticism responsibly and cautioned against misinformation or assigning blame for natural disasters before official investigations establish responsibility. Police have yet to announce any arrests linked to the reported threats. [Antara] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Government halts rice, sugar, and corn imports in push for food self-sufficiency

(ms) Indonesia has announced a complete halt to imports of rice, table sugar, and corn for 2026, citing rising domestic production and a broader policy shift toward national food self-sufficiency.

Senior officials said the decision was finalized following a review of the 2026 National Food Commodity Balance, which concluded that domestic output and existing reserves would be sufficient to meet household and industrial demand. The policy also suspends imports of industrial-grade rice, which had previously been used by manufacturers of rice flour and processed foods.

Agriculture Minister Andi Amran Sulaiman said the move follows direct instructions from President Prabowo Subianto to protect farmers’ incomes and reduce reliance on foreign supplies. Businesses are now expected to source raw materials locally; a step the government hopes will improve domestic processing standards and strengthen agricultural value chains.

Production forecasts underpinning the policy project table sugar output of up to 3 million tons in 2026, exceeding estimated annual demand of 2.836 million tons when combined with carryover stocks from 2025. Corn production is expected to reach 18 million tons, above projected national demand of around 17.055 million tons, while rice output is also forecast to remain sufficient without imports.

The import ban reflects a longer-term strategy to enhance food sovereignty, particularly after years of volatility linked to climate events, global price swings, and supply disruptions. Indonesia has historically relied on imports during periods of poor harvests, with state logistics agency Perum Bulog tasked with stabilizing supplies. [Antara] [Tempo]

Indonesia: Youth unemployment remains high despite economic growth

(ms) Indonesia's youth unemployment challenge has become increasingly visible as economic pressures, demographic shifts, and technological change converge. While the economy continues to grow, many young Indonesians report difficulty securing stable and well-paid work, a frustration reflected in the popularity of phrases such as *"in this economy"* and the viral hashtag *#KaburAjaDulu*, which captures the desire among some to seek opportunities abroad.

Official data highlights the scale of the problem. According to Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the unemployment rate for people aged 15–24 stood at around 16 percent in 2025, more than three times the national unemployment rate of roughly 4.8 percent. This translates into millions of young people struggling to enter the labor market. In addition, nearly 10 million youths are classified as NEET (not in education, employment, or training), underscoring structural gaps between education, skills, and available jobs.

The challenge is intensified by rapid digitalization and the rise of artificial intelligence, which is reshaping demand for skills and displacing some entry-level roles. While new jobs are expected to emerge, the transition risks leaving many young workers behind without targeted support.

The government has responded with initiatives such as the National Internship Program, which reached 100,000 participants in 2025 and is set to continue. Economists argue, however, that internships alone are insufficient. Addressing youth unemployment will require broader coordination with the private sector,

stronger vocational training, and policies that translate Indonesia's demographic dividend into sustainable employment opportunities. [Antara]

Indonesia: Government reaffirms drive toward space technology independence

(ms) Indonesia has reaffirmed its ambition to accelerate national space technology independence as part of a broader push to strengthen technological self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on foreign capabilities.

During a visit to space research facilities in Bogor, West Java, the head of the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Arif Satria, said Indonesia is prioritizing the development of domestic satellite technology, launch systems, and supporting infrastructure. The visit included inspections of facilities linked to preparations for the planned A4 satellite launch and the long-term development of a national spaceport.

Officials say Indonesia's space ambitions go beyond physical infrastructure. Arif emphasized the need for clear governance, coordination among institutions, and integrated decision-making to ensure space programs are executed efficiently. Discussions are ongoing with multiple ministries regarding institutional arrangements for space activities, though authorities say operational effectiveness will take precedence over organizational structure.

Concrete plans include advancing satellite design and manufacturing, strengthening rocket and propulsion research, and updating the National Space Master Plan 2017–2040, which outlines Indonesia's long-term space strategy and is reviewed every five years. BRIN engineers have acknowledged that several targets now need to be adjusted to reflect technological realities and budget constraints.

The space push fits within a wider national strategy aimed at increasing self-sufficiency across strategic sectors, including defense, food security, energy, and advanced manufacturing. [Antara]

Indonesia: Government to redirect USD 4.5 billion from state-owned banks to fiscal spending

(ms) Indonesia will withdraw IDR 75 trillion (about USD 4.5 billion) in government funds previously placed in state-owned banks, citing the policy's limited impact on boosting lending and a shift toward more direct fiscal stimulus. Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa said the funds will be reallocated to central government spending and transfers to regional administrations.

The deposits were part of an initiative under which the government parked surplus cash in six state-owned lenders, including Bank Mandiri, Bank Rakyat Indonesia, and Bank Negara Indonesia, to encourage credit expansion and support economic growth. In total, IDR 276 trillion had been placed under the scheme.

Purbaya said the program did not generate the expected lending response, partly due to weak policy coordination with Bank Indonesia. The central bank has argued that subdued loan growth reflects cautious demand from businesses rather than banks' capacity to lend, as firms remain in a wait-and-see mode amid high borrowing costs.

Analysts say redirecting the funds into fiscal spending could provide a stronger economic multiplier than leaving liquidity idle in the banking system. Markets reacted cautiously, with shares of major state banks falling following the announcement, reflecting investor concerns over reduced deposits even as the government prioritizes growth-supportive fiscal measures. [Bloomberg]

Indonesia: Police oversight body pushes for greater independence as reform efforts multiply

(ms) Indonesia's National Police Commission (Kompolnas) is seeking to strengthen its institutional independence in 2026, positioning itself more clearly as an external oversight body amid renewed government-led efforts to reform the national police force (*Polri*). The move comes as public scrutiny of police conduct remains high and President Prabowo Subianto has launched a parallel, high-level initiative to accelerate police reform.

Kompolnas member Mochammad Choirul Anam said the commission's recent relocation from a police-run complex to an independent office in South Jakarta was intended to address long-standing concerns about its proximity to the institution it oversees. He added that Kompolnas is also preparing a revised presidential regulation to replace the 2011 decree that currently

governs its mandate, arguing that the existing framework no longer provides sufficient authority or clarity for effective oversight.

Kompolnas' push unfolds alongside a separate Police Reform Acceleration Commission established by President Prabowo in late 2025. That presidential body, chaired by senior legal and political figures, has been tasked with reviewing structural problems within Polri and proposing reforms directly to the president. While the reform commission operates on a temporary, policy-review basis, Kompolnas is a standing advisory institution whose role is to monitor police performance and recommend appointments to senior police posts.

The coexistence of the two mechanisms reflects a broader debate over how police accountability should be strengthened. Supporters of Kompolnas' initiative argue that lasting reform requires stronger, independent oversight embedded in the system, not only ad hoc reform panels. Critics, however, question whether overlapping mandates could dilute responsibility or delay concrete change.

Kompolnas has set a target of March 2026 to finalize its proposed legal revisions, as Indonesia's government weighs how to translate reform rhetoric into institutional safeguards. [Antara]

Laos heads into elections after ruling party congress sets leadership and policy course

Laos is preparing for a closely sequenced political transition that will unfold in early 2026, beginning with the 12th National Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and followed by nationwide elections for the National Assembly and provincial councils in February. Together, the two processes define how power is renewed in the country's single-party political system.

The LPRP's 12th National Congress, scheduled for January 6–8 in Vientiane, is the most consequential political event in Laos. Held every five years, the congress brings together hundreds of delegates elected from provincial, ministerial and mass-organization party congresses. These delegates review the previous five-year term, debate policy documents, and elect a new Party Central Committee. The Central Committee then selects the party's top leadership, including the secretary general and members of the Politburo. In practice, decisions made at the party

congress determine the country's strategic direction, leadership balance and development priorities for the next half decade. In personnel terms, the congress is widely expected to confirm continuity at the top, with Thongloun Sisoulith likely to remain as secretary general of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, reflecting his central role in guiding policy since the previous congress. Senior figures associated with economic management and party discipline are also expected to retain influence within the Politburo, while a number of provincial leaders and mid-career officials are anticipated to enter the Central Committee. These personnel outcomes traditionally shape the subsequent allocation of state posts, as party leadership decisions at the congress form the basis for appointments to government positions following the National Assembly elections.

Security has been tightened nationwide ahead of the congress, reflecting its political importance. Authorities have stressed the need for stability as the party finalizes key documents, including the draft national socio-economic development plan for 2026–2030. Once the congress concludes, attention shifts to the state side of the system.

On February 22, Laos will hold nationwide elections to choose members of the National Assembly of Laos and Provincial People's Councils. Voters aged 18 and above are eligible to participate, with candidate lists vetted in advance. The vote will elect 175 National Assembly members, up from 164 in the outgoing legislature, reflecting population growth and administrative adjustments. Each deputy represents roughly 50,000 citizens.

While the elections are competitive at the constituency level, they take place within a one-party framework. All candidates are endorsed through party-led and mass-organization processes, and independent opposition parties are not permitted. The National Assembly's role is nonetheless significant: once convened as the 10th Legislature in March, it will formally elect the president, prime minister and other senior state leaders, approve the new cabinet, and adopt the five-year development plan prepared under party guidance.

This sequencing illustrates how Laos' political system functions. The LPRP congress sets the leadership lineup and policy direction; the subsequent national elections institutionalize those choices through the state apparatus. Officials have emphasized continuity, orderly transition and development-focused governance as priorities.

Laos' elections come amid a broader regional election cycle in Southeast Asia, but its model remains distinct. Rather than a contest between parties, the process centers on internal party renewal followed by mass participation in state elections. For Lao authorities, the coming months are about ensuring a smooth handover and aligning political leadership with long-term economic and social planning goals. [Lao News Agency] [Lao News Agency 2] [Lao News Agency 3] [The Laotian Times] [Vientiane Times]

Laos: Vientiane establishes first sub-district in nationwide administrative restructuring drive

(ms) Vientiane has formally established its first sub-district, marking the launch of a broader administrative restructuring campaign across Laos aimed at reshaping local governance and public service delivery.

On December 31, 2025, authorities designated Ta Saeng Xangmixay in Xaythany district as Vientiane Capital's first sub-district, following approval earlier in the year as a pilot project. The new administrative unit groups 24 villages under a single sub-district committee, creating an intermediate layer between district and village governments. Officials say the move is designed to streamline administration in rapidly growing urban areas and bring decision-making closer to local communities.

The creation of Xangmixay is part of a nationwide reform program introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs in January 2025, which reintroduced sub-districts after they were abolished in 1990. Under the new framework, each *ta saeng* oversees between one and 24 villages, depending on population size, geography and administrative needs. Sub-district committees are responsible for governance and administration, economic affairs, social and cultural issues, and public security.

The rollout is being phased. Following pilot schemes in Vientiane, the government has approved the creation of 640 sub-districts nationwide, with provinces such as Savannakhet receiving significant allocations. Most posts are being filled by redeploying existing officials and appointing qualified local personnel, rather than expanding the civil service.

The restructuring coincides with a wider political transition as the Lao People's Revolutionary Party prepares to enter a new five-year policy cycle. While authorities frame the reform as a technical response to

urbanisation and administrative strain, observers note that it also strengthens state coordination and oversight at the grassroots level as Laos moves into its next development phase. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Inflation rises to 5.6 percent in December as currency pressures persist

(ms) Inflation in Laos accelerated to 5.6 percent in December, up from 4.8 percent in November, according to the latest data released by the Lao Statistics Bureau. The increase reflects renewed price pressures toward the end of the year, driven largely by higher clothing costs and goods affected by exchange rate movements.

The statistics bureau said currency fluctuations continued to push up the cost of imported products, contributing to overall consumer price increases. Among major categories, goods and services recorded the sharpest rise, surging 29.2 percent year on year. Housing, water, electricity and gas followed with an 18.1 percent increase, while medical care and medicines rose 14.4 percent. Education costs also climbed, increasing by 11.4 percent.

In response, the government reiterated its commitment to keeping inflation under control, identifying domestic production and exchange rate stability as key priorities. Authorities said measures would focus on expanding local production for both domestic consumption and exports to reduce reliance on imports and limit foreign currency outflows.

The government also plans to build up foreign currency reserves to help stabilize the exchange rate. Meanwhile, the Bank of the Lao PDR is expected to intensify efforts to address financial and economic pressures, with the aim of bringing inflation back to a single-digit level in 2025. [Lao News Agency]

Malaysia: Opposition coalition faces turmoil after leadership exits

(tl/ea) Ahmad Fadhli Shaari, information chief of the Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS), played down concerns over a wave of resignations within the Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition, saying the departures have not disrupted operations at the state or division level. He said many local PN leaders remain

in place and continue their work while awaiting further direction from the coalition's new leadership.

PN is the second largest political coalition in House of Representative with 74 seats after Pakatan Harapan (PH) with 81 seats. The opposition coalition consists of PAS, the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, Bersatu), the Malaysian People's Movement Party (Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia,Gerakan) and Malaysian Indian People's Party (MIPP). PAS is a major component party of the coalition, holding 43 seats in the House of Representatives.

His remarks come amidst political instability in the state of Perlis, following the resignation of PAS leader Mohd Shukri Ramli as Chief Minister—citing health reasons—and the subsequent appointment of Bersatu's Abu Bakar Hamzah. The situation escalated after state assembly members from PN—five Bersatu assemblymen and three PAS representatives—signed statutory declarations withdrawing support for the Chief Minister, prompting PAS to expel three of its Perlis lawmakers, making three state seats vacant, although no by-elections will be held as the state assembly has passed its mid-term point.

Meanwhile, the three expelled Perlis state assemblymen have filed an originating summons against Rus'sele Eizan from PAS, the Speaker of the Perlis State Legislative Assembly. The lawmakers are challenging the declaration that their seats had fallen vacant following the termination of their party memberships, arguing that the Speaker acted beyond his lawful authority and failed to observe due process when announcing the vacancies shortly after their expulsion from PAS.

The originating summons seeks judicial clarification on the scope of the Speaker's constitutional powers, particularly whether the loss of party membership alone can trigger the automatic forfeiture of an elected seat. The assemblymen said the legal challenge was intended to safeguard voters' interests, warning that their constituencies could be left without representation for nearly two years ahead of the next state election if no replacement representatives are elected. The Speaker has defended his decision as a routine exercise of his official duties and has acknowledged the lawmakers' right to pursue legal action. [Malay Mail 1]

The Perlis developments triggered a series of high-profile exits from PN by Bersatu leaders, including former coalition chairman Muhyiddin Yassin and several state-level figures. Their resignations are seen

as a protest against the coalition's partnership with PAS.

In response, PAS secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan has signaled the party's readiness to take a leading role within PN, calling on coalition partners to regroup, restore public trust and prepare for future elections. [Malay Mail 2] [See No.52, December/2025,5]

In the latest development, Bersatu expelled on January 6 Supreme Council member Saifuddin Abdullah and four division chiefs over alleged breaches of the party's constitution. Saifuddin, a former minister and MP for Indera Mahkota, had publicly called for the resignation of party president and PN chairman Muhyiddin Yassin, as well as other senior leaders, citing concerns over leadership quality and controversial family ties. He intends to appeal the decision. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim revives plans for bill to cap PM's term to ten years

(ea) Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has revived key institutional reform pledges, signaling that several long-delayed bills could be introduced in the upcoming parliamentary sitting in late January. Speaking at a New Year's assembly in Putrajaya, Anwar said the government is considering tabling legislation to limit the prime minister's tenure to a maximum of ten years or two terms, alongside a bill to separate the roles of the attorney general (AG) and public prosecutor.

Anwar added that term limits extend beyond premiership to senior public offices, senior top civil service positions, arguing that no individual should occupy such roles indefinitely, and that leadership renewed is necessary. Any amendment to impose term limits on the prime minister would require two-thirds support from the Lower House, which the opposition has indicated they would support.

The proposed term-limit reform was a key electoral promise of Anwar's coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH), but has appeared to be deprioritized, with little indication over the past two years that the bill would be tabled. Anwar's renewed commitment comes amid mounting criticism that his administration has been slow to deliver on promised institutional reforms.

Anwar also confirmed plans to table a Freedom of Information Bill and an Ombudsman Bill this year, reviving accountability reforms first proposed more

than two decades ago under the leadership of former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The Ombudsman institution, he said, would provide the public with a formal avenue to lodge complaints against any public official, including the prime minister, strengthening transparency and oversight across the public sector. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: New Online Safety Act takes effect

(tl/dql) Malaysia has moved to formally bring major global social media and messaging platforms under its regulatory framework by automatically treating services with more than eight million local users as licensed operators from January 1. The change closes a gap in which several major platforms — including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, Telegram and YouTube — had operated without formal approval, and places them under the same legal obligations as registered service providers.

The move is closely tied to the implementation of the Online Safety Act (ONSA) 2025, which came into force on January 1 and grants regulators wider powers to address online scams, harmful content and child safety risks — powers that apply only to licensed platforms. By deeming large companies licensed, authorities eliminate a loophole that had limited enforcement despite rising cybercrime losses. Platforms that fail to comply now face significant fines or criminal penalties, although analysts remain uncertain about how effectively these sanctions can be applied in practice. [SCMP]

ONSA shifts responsibility for preventing online harm from users to digital platforms. The law compels major social media, messaging and online service providers to adopt stronger and more transparent safety systems — including clearer reporting channels, faster responses to harmful content and enhanced protections for children through stricter defaults and privacy controls.

Platforms with large Malaysian user bases must block high-risk material such as child sexual abuse content and financial scam operations, publish safety plans, and provide tools that help users manage unwanted contact. Network and content providers are also required to support investigations and share relevant technical information with authorities.

The Act signals Malaysia's move toward a more interventionist, platform-regulation model of digital

governance, coming in response to rising cybercrime and exploitation, with police data showing Malaysians lost USD 577 million to online fraud between January 2023 and November 2025, alongside hundreds of recorded child exploitation and abuse-material cases over recent years. [Malay Mail] [Open Gov]

Malaysia: Energy Commission restructures to strengthen regulatory oversight

(ea) Malaysia's Energy Commission has implemented a new organisational structure effective 1 January to strengthen regulatory oversight and support the country's energy-transition agenda. The restructuring consolidates technical, economic and enforcement functions under clearer lines of authority and introduces two Deputy CEO positions overseeing core regulatory portfolios, alongside a Senior Director for corporate management.

The move is intended to sharpen market supervision and consumer protection while improving regulatory delivery in a more complex energy landscape. The reform is aligned with ongoing policy initiatives, including the National Energy Transition Roadmap, the National Energy Policy and the implementation of the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act.

The Commission said steps are being taken to limit disruption to licensing and certification services during the transition period. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Inspector-General of Police (IGP) outlines security priorities for 2026

(ea) Malaysia's Inspector-General of Police Mohd Khalid Ismail has set three strategic priorities for the Royal Malaysia Police in 2026, including optimizing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in law enforcement operations, strengthening professionalism and ethical standards to counter corruption and abuse of power, and placing greater emphasis on public safety and welfare.

Reflecting on PDRM's performance in 2025, Mohd Khalid pointed to the force's role in maintaining public order during major international events, including regional security forums and the 47th ASEAN Summit in October, which brought together world leaders such as the President of the United States, Donald Trump.

He also reaffirmed PDRM's commitment to transparent and impartial investigations, underscoring the importance of insulating law enforcement processes from undue influence. [Bernama]

Malaysia: New deep-sea search for missing Malaysia Airlines jet relaunched in Indian Ocean

(dql) Malaysia has restarted an undersea search for the wreckage of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 in the southern Indian Ocean, more than ten years after the aircraft disappeared with 239 people on board. A search vessel equipped with autonomous underwater vehicles has arrived in the designated zone, though authorities have not disclosed the precise location.

The renewed mission is being carried out under a "no-find, no-fee" arrangement and is widely understood to involve the U.S.-based company Ocean Infinity, which previously led a 2018 search and has since upgraded its technology and refined its analysis to focus on a narrower, higher-probability area. [ABC News]

The move reflects continued political and humanitarian pressure to provide answers to families. Despite earlier multinational searches and scattered debris findings along the Indian Ocean and African coastlines, the main wreckage has never been found, and the cause of the plane's deviation from its route remains unknown.

Myanmar: Military-back party claims phase-one election gains

(su) The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has claimed early victory in the first phase of the country's three-stage general election, held on December 28 in 102 townships—nearly a third of Myanmar's 330 townships.

Partial results show the USDP winning the majority of contested seats, including its leader Khin Yi—a former general and close ally of military ruler Min Aung Hlaing—while minor ethnic parties secured only a few seats. The USDP ran unopposed in nearly 30 constituencies.

Voter turnout was reported at about 52 percent of eligible voters. Armed conflict prevents voting in 65 townships, and full results will only be known after the

next phases on January 11 and January 25. [ABC News] [Reuters]

Meanwhile, military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said he intends to transfer sovereign power to the government formed after the completion of Myanmar's ongoing multi-phased general election. In a New Year's Day address on January 1, he stated that the authorities would hand over power to the election winner.

Min Aung Hlaing also said that agreement had been reached on 43 points during peace talks related to amendments to the 2008 constitution, adding that these issues would be raised in the next parliament, though he did not specify which parties were involved in the discussions.

He further claimed that foreign investment increased in 2025 and that the country experienced positive political developments, while observers continue to point to rising living costs, electricity shortages, unemployment, and persistent security challenges. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Release of more than 6,000 prisoners in Independence Day amnesty

(anl) The military regime has announced it would release more than 6,000 prisoners as part of an annual amnesty marking the country's Independence Day on January 4. According to the National Defence and Security Council, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has pardoned 6,134 Myanmar nationals who were imprisoned. The council also stated that 52 foreign prisoners would be released and subsequently deported.

The amnesty coincides with Myanmar's commemoration of 78 years of independence from British colonial rule.

The announcement follows a similar move in November, when hundreds of prisoners were freed in a pre-election amnesty. Among those released at that time was a key aide to detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The junta said then that more than 3,000 prisoners would have their sentences reduced after being convicted under post-coup laws that restrict freedom of expression.

Since the military seized power in February 2021, it is said to have arrested thousands of protesters, activists, and critics. The coup brought an end to

Myanmar's brief democratic period and has since plunged the country into widespread conflict and civil w. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: NUG warns of ongoing war crimes

(anl) The National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Human Rights released updated data on December 31, warning that Myanmar's military junta continues to commit widespread war crimes and human rights violations against civilians nationwide. The figures are drawn from the ministry's monthly Human Rights Data Dashboard.

According to the latest data, the junta has carried out 4,498 aerial attack incidents, resulting in 4,683 deaths. Among those killed were 637 children under the age of 18. The data also documents the continued use of what the ministry as massacres used as a tactic of terror, with 494 massacre incidents recorded and 5,116 fatalities. Of those killed in massacres, 574 were children and 926 were women. The aerial attacks are said to have caused extensive damage to civilian infrastructure, including the destruction of 432 schools, 144 hospitals and clinics, and 650 religious buildings.

The ministry also highlighted the junta's ongoing campaign of forced military recruitment, citing 1,763 incidents of forced conscription, involving a total of 31,729 individuals. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Central Bank removes 29 companies from export-earnings blacklist

(su) The Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) announced on January 2 that it has removed 29 companies from its blacklist after they fully repatriated export earnings. The companies had previously been blacklisted for failing to return foreign currency proceeds from exports conducted between 2016 and 2021, involving amounts of USD 500,000 or more.

According to the CBM, the blacklisting had been carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Immigration and Population, which imposed entry and exit bans on the companies and their directors. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Military reasserts control over strategically important route

(su) Myanmar's military has reestablished control over the Mandalay–Madaya–Singu–Thabeikkyin communication route, which had previously been disrupted by People's Defense Force (PDF) groups, according to official sources.

The route had reportedly been affected by insurgent activity, including road blockages, arrests of travelers, and the collection of money at checkpoints, prompting the Armed Forcess to launch what it described as a counter-terrorism operation across parts of Mandalay Region.

Military statements say government forces gradually retook control of key areas over several months, including Thabeikkyin Township and surrounding areas on July 23, the Phayongtaung mining area in Madaya Township on August 24, the Alpha Cement Factory area on August 28, Si Dawgyi Village and reservoir on November 7, and Singu Township on December 19.

Additional clearing operations were conducted from both the Thabeikkyin and Singu directions in October, December, and late December, with columns converging at Laik Kya Village by December 31. Authorities state that the route has now been reopened to local residents and travelers, citing the restoration of security and socio-economic activity. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Cyber scam ringleaders reportedly relocate to Border Guard Force-controlled village

(su) Ringleaders of cyber scam operations sought by Chinese and United States authorities are reportedly operating from Thit Ka Tay Village, an area under the control of the Border Guard Force (BGF), now rebranded as the Karen National Army (KNA), according to local residents and media reports. The village lies on the eastern foothills of the Dawna Mountains, around 20–30 miles north of Myawaddy in Kayin State. The reported relocation followed Myanmar military raids on scam centers and casinos in KK Park near Myawaddy beginning in December, which dismantled several online fraud hubs.

Residents say scam syndicates began moving into Thit Ka Tay as early as December, shifting activity away from Myawaddy town. A local media figure, Kyaw Myo

Min of NP News, claimed on social media that senior Chinese cyber scam figures wanted by Beijing, as well as a former Malaysian female government official linked to online fraud, are present in the village. He alleged that more than 40 senior Chinese nationals involved in cyber scams are being held there, though it remains unclear whether they are detained or protected by local armed actors.

Locals also report rapid construction in Thit Ka Tay, including single-storey steel-and-concrete buildings, alongside the establishment of hospitals and schools offering free services, though some facilities have reportedly closed recently. Security in the area is described as tight, with residents noting the presence of Chinese, Myanmar, and other foreign nationals.

The developments come amid heightened international pressure to dismantle cyber scam networks in southern Kayin State. The BGF announced it would officially rebrand as the Karen National Army on January 1, a move its spokesperson said was linked to organizational restructuring. The force is led by Colonel Saw Chit Thu, who was sanctioned by the United States in May 2025 for involvement in online scam operations and human trafficking. The U.S. has also sanctioned senior leaders of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and announced the creation of a "Scam Centre Strike Force"—an U.S. government task force set up to combat online fraud and cyber scam, involving multiple federal agencies, which likely means coordination between bodies such as the FBI, Department of Justice, Treasury, and Homeland Security.

China, meanwhile, has issued arrest warrants and rewards for more than 100 fugitive cyber scam suspects, including members of major crime families operating from Myanmar, and has urged suspects to surrender voluntarily while calling on the public to assist law enforcement. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Resistance forces report near full control of Katha, dozens of junta soldiers captured

(su/anl) Resistance forces said they were close to gaining full control of Katha town in Sagaing Region—located on the Irrawaddy River at the junction of Kachin State, Shan State, and Mandalay Region—as of the morning of December 31, after seizing a key Myanmar military position at the town's entrance. A member of the revolutionary forces stated that one of the main access gates to Katha had been captured and

that most other areas of the town were already under their control, with further details to be released by Military Region No. 1.

The assault on Katha reportedly began on the night of December 28. By the following evening, soldiers and police were said to have withdrawn from the Township General Administration Office and the Township Police Station. On December 30, junta forces responded with heavy airstrikes after resistance fighters entered the town and attacked the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 309 camp. As of the morning of December 31, resistance sources reported no aircraft activity.

According to Burmese news outlet Khit Thit Media, more than 50 junta soldiers were captured alive during the fighting. Katha is among the townships included in the first phase of the junta's general election, which took place on December 28, the same day resistance forces launched their operation to seize the town. [Mizzima]

In the latest development, frontline sources reported on January 6 they are now targeting Infantry Battalion 309 under the junta's Northwestern Command. The advance is being carried out through coordinated operations by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), units under the National Unity Government (NUG), Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA) forces, and the Katha People's Defense Forces (K-PDF).

In response, junta forces have carried out airstrikes and heavy artillery shelling on Katha and surrounding areas.

Katha's strategic location makes it a significant military objective. Control of the town would provide leverage over ongoing fighting in Bhamo, Kachin State, and northern Shan State. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: New impeachment bid against Vice-President Sara Duterte gains traction ahead of February window

(ms) Efforts to impeach Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte are set to intensify as lawmakers and civil society complainants weigh filing a fresh complaint after a constitutional one-year bar expires on February 6, potentially adding new allegations from a detainee who says he acted as a campaign "bagman" for Duterte.

The renewed push comes after the Supreme Court in July 2025 voided the previous articles of impeachment against Duterte, ruling the complaint violated the constitution's one-year ban on initiating multiple impeachment proceedings against the same official. The court decision, which Duterte's critics have asked the justices to reconsider, halted momentum for a Senate trial after more than one-third of House members backed the complaint.

ACT Teachers party-list Representative Antonio Tinio, part of the Makabayan bloc — a small leftist coalition in the House of Representatives made up of progressive party-list groups that typically campaign on labour rights, public services and anti-corruption platforms — said complainants behind the consolidated impeachment cases were preparing to "refile and augment" their complaint once the ban lapses, depending on whether the Supreme Court acts on the pending motion for reconsideration before then.

"If the Supreme Court reverses itself, the Senate trial can proceed and there will be no need to refile," Tinio said in a television interview. "But if there is no decision by February, the complainants will talk and will likely decide to refile."

A key focus of any renewed complaint would remain allegations that Duterte misused confidential and intelligence funds during her time leading the Office of the Vice President and previously as education secretary, an issue that has fueled public criticism and legislative scrutiny. Duterte has denied wrongdoing and has previously described impeachment talk as politically motivated, including as leverage tied to budget negotiations.

What is new is the potential inclusion of claims made by Ramil Madriaga, a detainee at Camp Bagong Diwa who has executed a sworn affidavit alleging he served as Duterte's "bagman" and that campaign funds used in the May 2022 election were sourced from drug traffickers and from operators of Philippine offshore gaming operators, or POGOs, many of which catered to Chinese clients before the government began tightening restrictions on the sector.

Lawmakers said they were assessing whether Madriaga's claims could be corroborated and whether they intersect with allegations involving confidential funds. Tinio said the affidavit could be considered as additional material but stressed the core accountability question remained the handling of secret funds.

Separately, Duterte and other officials have faced plunder complaints before the Office of the Ombudsman linked to alleged misuse of hundreds of millions of pesos in confidential funds, though those proceedings are distinct from impeachment and could take years.

Analysts say the February timeline is critical because Philippine politics typically shifts into campaign mode well ahead of the 2028 presidential race, potentially complicating coalition-building in Congress. Tinio argued the window remains open, saying the House could still muster the threshold support needed to transmit a new complaint to the Senate if public pressure and new evidence sustain momentum. [GMA Network] [Manila Standard] [PhilStar 1]

Despite the renewed impeachment threat, Duterte continues to enjoy comparatively strong public support. A fourth-quarter survey by Pulse Asia released in late December showed her approval rating at 56 percent and trust rating at 54 percent, both largely unchanged from the previous quarter and notably higher than those of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who recorded an approval rating of 34 percent and a trust rating of 32 percent. Duterte's support remains particularly solid in Mindanao, her political base, where approval and trust both stood at 95 percent. Pollsters said the stability of her numbers suggests that congressional probes and budget controversies have so far failed to significantly erode public confidence, though analysts cautioned that sentiment could shift if impeachment proceedings advance and evidence is tested publicly. [PhilStar 2]

Philippines: Senate ethics panel to review complaints against lawmakers in February

(ms) The Senate of the Philippines is set to begin deliberations in February on ethics complaints filed against several senators, following delays caused by extended budget hearings, according to committee chair JV Ejercito.

Ejercito said the Senate committee on ethics was unable to convene in recent months as the chamber focused on passing the 2026 national budget, which concluded in December. With sessions resuming on January 26, he said the committee expects to formally organize and start reviewing pending cases in February.

Among the unresolved complaints are those filed last year against Senators Francis Escudero and Risa Hontiveros. Hontiveros faces allegations stemming from claims by a Senate witness who said he was offered money to provide false testimony related to investigations involving Kingdom of Jesus Christ leader Apollo Quiboloy. She has denied the accusation and said she is ready to present documentary evidence. Escudero, meanwhile, has dismissed a complaint linked to an alleged PHP 30 million (USD approximately 540,000) campaign contribution as politically motivated.

Ejercito stressed that complaints will be handled on a first-in, first-out basis and evaluated strictly on their merits. Only cases found to have sufficient grounds will proceed, with outcomes ranging from dismissal to reprimand or censure, but not criminal penalties. [PhilStar]

Philippines: 24 million Filipinos functionally illiterate as millions of disabled children remain unsupported

(ms) The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2) has flagged deep and persistent gaps in the country's education and social services, warning that 24 million Filipinos are functionally illiterate and millions of children with disabilities remain excluded from basic support.

In its top findings for 2025, EDCOM 2 cited data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showing that more than 24 million of around 75 million Filipinos aged 10 to 64 struggle with reading, writing and comprehension needed for daily life, while 5.8 million are basically illiterate. The figures were drawn from the 2024 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey released in April 2025.

A separate EDCOM 2 policy brief, produced with research group IDinsight, highlighted weaknesses in inclusive education. Although the Inclusive Education Act is aligned with international standards, the commission said limited funding, staff shortages and uneven local capacity have slowed implementation. Only 391,089 learners with disabilities are enrolled in public schools, just eight percent of an estimated 5.1 million children nationwide.

EDCOM 2 also found that government nutrition and welfare programs fall short. Only 43 percent of malnourished children aged two to four are covered by the Department of Social Welfare and Development's

supplementary feeding program, largely because of structural constraints and reliance on facility-based delivery.

The commission further warned that funding confusion has left the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao under-served, with some agencies mistakenly treating its block grant as a substitute for national programs. [PhilStar]

Philippines: Senators Deny Involvement as DOJ Probes Alleged Bulacan Flood Control Irregularities

Philippine authorities have opened a preliminary investigation into alleged irregularities in flood control projects in Bulacan province, with Senator Joel Villanueva and former senator Ramon Revilla Jr. among those facing complaints. Both lawmakers filed counter-affidavits at the Department of Justice on January 5, rejecting accusations of graft, bribery, corruption, and malversation linked to allegedly deficient or non-existent flood control projects.

According to prosecutors, the cases involve projects reported as fully completed despite findings that some were either substandard or never built. The complaints cite possible violations of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, the Government Procurement Reform Act, and laws on falsification and misuse of public funds.

Revilla's legal counsel described the allegations as baseless and reliant on hearsay, arguing that the evidence does not meet the threshold required for a full trial. Villanueva similarly dismissed the accusations, saying his counter-affidavit provides documentary proof and sworn statements refuting claims that he received illicit payments.

The probe stems largely from testimony by former public works officials who alleged that lawmakers received commissions amounting to 25 percent of project costs, claims both politicians have denied. The DOJ said it will assess whether sufficient grounds exist to elevate the cases, underscoring the investigation's significance amid continued public scrutiny of infrastructure spending and corruption risks in disaster-prone areas. [PhilStar 1] [PhilStar 2]

Philippines: President Marcos signs 2026 budget after corruption-hit review

(ms) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on January 5 signed the 2026 General Appropriations Act, approving a PHP 6.793 trillion (USD approximately 122 billion) national budget after weeks of controversy linked to what has been described as the biggest corruption scandal of his administration.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Marcos acknowledged systemic weaknesses exposed by alleged infrastructure corruption schemes, particularly involving flood control projects under the Department of Public Works and Highways. He said the revelations underscored the need for reforms to strengthen accountability and restore public trust in government spending.

The 2026 budget prioritizes social services, with education receiving PHP 1.34 trillion (USD approximately 24.1 billion) and health allocated PHP 448.1 billion (USD approximately 8.1 billion) to support universal healthcare programs. State insurer PhilHealth was allotted PHP 129 billion (USD approximately 2.3 billion), including PHP 60 billion (USD approximately 1.1 billion) in excess funds ordered returned by the Supreme Court.

The budget process was overshadowed by investigations into alleged kickbacks and “ghost” projects, prompting Congress to livestream bicameral deliberations for the first time. Deadlocks over DPWH funding delayed ratification, forcing the government to operate on a reenacted 2025 budget until January 4. [PhilStar]

Philippines: President Marcos moves to ban Politicians from aid distribution

(ms) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has announced a nationwide ban on politicians’ involvement in the distribution of government financial assistance, marking one of the most explicit attempts by his administration to address long-standing concerns over patronage politics tied to social welfare programs. The provision is embedded in the 2026 national budget, which Marcos signed into law this week, and is intended to ensure that aid reaches beneficiaries without political mediation.

Under the new rule, elected officials are barred from attending aid distribution events or associating

themselves with cash and in-kind assistance programs funded through the General Appropriations Act. The move follows public outrage over corruption scandals in infrastructure and persistent criticism that welfare schemes, commonly known as *ayuda*, have been used to reward political loyalty rather than address need.

However, questions remain over implementation. As of now, detailed guidelines have yet to be published, and officials acknowledge that enforcement mechanisms and penalties for violations are still being finalized. Analysts also note that political influence has not always depended on physical presence. Programs such as medical assistance schemes have historically relied on "guarantee letters" issued by lawmakers, effectively allowing politicians to control access to benefits behind the scenes. [PhilStar] [Rappler]

Philippines: No new flood-control builds in 2026 budget

(ms) The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) has confirmed that the 2026 national budget, now approved by Congress and signed into law, contains no funding for new locally funded flood control projects, countering earlier reports that suggested fresh construction spending.

DPWH said the PHP 2.49 billion (about USD 43 million) allocated for flood control in 2026 is strictly for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) of existing systems and facilities. The funds will support routine but critical work such as declogging, desilting, dredging, repairs and clearing of waterways and drainage networks under programs including Oplan Kontra Baha.

The clarification comes amid heightened scrutiny of the agency following investigations into alleged ghost and substandard flood control projects. In response, the administration moved to rein in capital outlays and tighten oversight. As a result, the DPWH's 2026 budget was reduced to PHP 529 billion (about USD 9.1 billion) from PHP 880 billion (about USD 15.2 billion) during bicameral deliberations, reflecting a shift away from large new builds toward maintenance and accountability.

While the budget includes flood control-related line items spread across regions and specific river basins, DPWH stressed these are not new projects but allocations to keep existing infrastructure functional and reduce flood risks during the rainy season. [GMA Network] [Philstar 1] [PhilStar 2]

Legal cases tied to flood-control spending are also progressing. Prosecutors have filed charges over a PHP 289 million (about USD 5.0 million) substandard road dike project in Oriental Mindoro and a PHP 96.5 million (about USD 1.7 million) alleged ghost flood-control project in Davao Occidental. Authorities say further cases could follow as investigators pursue documentary and digital evidence to establish responsibility and recover public funds.

DPWH said it is prioritizing maintenance while cooperating with investigators, arguing that restoring public trust is essential before any future expansion of flood-control construction is considered. [PhilStar 3]

Philippines: VAT cut to 10 percent to ease household burden proposed

(ms) Senator Erwin Tulfo has filed a bill seeking to lower the Philippines' value-added tax rate from 12 percent to 10 percent, citing inflationary pressures on households and the relatively high tax burden compared with neighboring countries.

Under Senate Bill 1552, the proposed reduction is intended to provide short-term relief to consumers, particularly low- and middle-income families, who spend a larger share of their income on basic goods subject to VAT. Tulfo said the Philippines currently shares the highest VAT rate in Southeast Asia with Indonesia, while most other ASEAN economies impose lower consumption taxes.

The bill's explanatory note compares the Philippines' rate with those of regional peers, including Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos at 10 percent, Singapore at nine percent and Thailand at seven percent. Malaysia levies a six percent sales tax, while Myanmar and Timor-Leste impose even lower rates.

To address concerns about fiscal sustainability, the proposal includes a safeguard allowing the VAT rate to be temporarily restored to 12 percent if revenue conditions deteriorate, subject to presidential approval and recommendation from the finance secretary. [PhilStar]

Philippines: Former General arrested for involvement in alleged coup plans against President Marcos

(ms) Retired Philippine Air Force major general Romeo Poquiz was arrested on January 5 at Ninoy Aquino International Airport after a Quezon City court issued a warrant charging him with inciting to sedition, a case that has revived concerns over political destabilization amid mass protests over corruption. Police said Poquiz was taken into custody upon his return from Thailand and brought to Camp Crame for booking, after the court set bail at PHP 48,000 (about USD 860), which was paid. Authorities said the warrant stemmed from speeches he delivered during rallies in November 2025, where he urged members of the armed forces to withdraw support from President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. following revelations of large-scale corruption, particularly linked to public works and flood control projects.

Poquiz has been a prominent critic of the Marcos administration and serves as a convenor and spokesperson of the United People's Initiative, a loose grouping of retired military officers that has publicly demanded the president's resignation. The group has framed its calls as a response to what it describes as systemic corruption and governance failure, arguing that ordinary political remedies are no longer sufficient. Government officials, however, have characterized these appeals—especially those directed at the military—as crossing a legal and constitutional line.

The arrest is closely tied to earlier warnings by Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Romeo Brawner Jr., who disclosed in October 2025 that he and his senior command had met with a group of retired officers led by Poquiz. Brawner said the group aired grievances and floated ideas of a political "reset," including attempts to persuade younger, active-duty officers to withdraw support from the government. While the AFP publicly rejected these overtures and stressed its loyalty to the Constitution, the disclosure fueled speculation about possible coup or junta-style scenarios. To date, however, authorities have not presented public evidence of an operational coup plot involving active-duty units, and reporting has largely pointed to political pressure efforts rather than concrete plans to seize power.

Poquiz's legal team, led by lawyer Ferdinand Topacio, denounced the arrest as politically motivated and accused the administration of weaponizing the justice system to silence critics. Police and Interior Department officials rejected this claim, insisting the arrest was purely the enforcement of a valid court order and not a broader crackdown on dissent. As the case proceeds, the central legal question will be whether Poquiz's speeches constitute protected

political expression or unlawful incitement to collective action against the state. Beyond the courtroom, the episode underscores the heightened sensitivity surrounding military loyalty in the Philippines, particularly at a time when public anger over corruption remains high and political tensions continue to simmer. [ABS-CBN] [Inquirer] [PhilStar]

Singapore: Workers' Party to convene special conference after disciplinary panel set up over Pritam Singh conviction

(st) The Workers' Party (WP) will form a disciplinary panel to determine whether party chief and Leader of the Opposition Pritam Singh breached the party constitution following his conviction for lying to a parliamentary committee. The decision was taken by WP's Central Executive Committee (CEC) at a meeting on January 2, after the High Court dismissed Singh's appeal in December. The CEC said the panel's work should be completed within three months to ensure due process, after which a Special Cadre Members' Conference will be convened.

The move follows a request by more than 20 WP cadres, meeting the threshold under the party constitution, for a special conference to discuss the implications of the conviction, including Singh's leadership. Party chair Sylvia Lim acknowledged receipt of the request, and the CEC said it would be addressed in accordance with party rules, with formal notice of the conference to be issued within two weeks after the disciplinary process concludes.

Singh's case is also set to be debated in Parliament on January 12, with ministers previously stressing that lying to Parliament is a serious matter that warrants an appropriate response. The outcome of WP's internal process will therefore shape both the party's leadership decisions and the broader political response to the conviction. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore: Eight new Nominated Members of Parliament to be appointed

(st) Singapore will appoint eight new Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs), with business leader Mark Lee Kean Phi returning for a second term, bringing the total number of NMPs to nine. The appointments were announced by the Office of the Clerk of Parliament and will take effect on January 8,

when President Tharman Shanmugaratnam formally appoints the group and they are sworn in at the next parliamentary sitting. The NMP scheme allows up to nine individuals to serve non-partisan roles in Parliament for two-and-a-half years, contributing alternative perspectives to legislative debates.

The new appointees come from diverse backgrounds including business, labor unions, healthcare, law, education, clean energy, aerospace, sports administration, and public service. Speaker of Parliament Seah Kian Peng, who chaired the Special Select Committee that reviewed 57 nominations from the public and functional groups, said the selected candidates had demonstrated distinguished contributions in their respective fields and would add value through their varied expertise and perspectives. Leader of the House Indranee Rajah also welcomed the cohort, noting that the selection process was highly competitive. Several nominees said they hoped to focus on issues such as economic competitiveness, workforce skills, inclusive development, sustainability, healthcare, and social support. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore: GDP expands 4.8 percent in 2025 after strong fourth quarter, lifted by AI-driven manufacturing

(st) Singapore's economy grew 4.8 percent in 2025, its fastest pace since 2021, after output expanded a stronger-than-expected 5.7 percent year on year in the fourth quarter, preliminary government data showed. The Ministry of Trade and Industry said growth was driven mainly by manufacturing, particularly the biomedical and electronics clusters, supported by sustained global demand for artificial intelligence-related semiconductors, servers, and related products. Quarter on quarter, GDP rose 1.9 percent on a seasonally adjusted basis.

The full-year outcome exceeded the government's November forecast of around 4.0 percent and earlier projections of 1.5 to 2.5 percent. Economists described 2025 as a standout year, pointing to resilient global demand, strong export performance, and front-loading of activity ahead of potential trade frictions. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said growth benefited from lower-than-expected United States tariffs and the AI-driven electronics boom, but cautioned that such momentum would be difficult to sustain.

Looking ahead, the trade ministry has projected GDP growth of 1.0 to 3.0 percent for 2026, reflecting uncertainties from global trade tensions and sector-

specific tariffs. The Monetary Authority of Singapore has kept monetary policy unchanged, noting resilient growth, with its next policy review due later this month. [Reuters]

Thailand: General election and charter referendum set for February 8 amid tight timelines

(lm) Thailand will hold a nationwide general election and a constitutional referendum on the same day, February 8, 2026, following a cabinet decision formally published in the Royal Gazette. Voters will be asked both to elect a new House of Representatives and to indicate whether they support drafting a new constitution to replace the current charter.

The referendum date was set by the caretaker government led by Anutin Charnvirakul, and implementation is being overseen by the Election Commission of Thailand. Under existing law, the referendum must be conducted nationwide on a single day and does not permit advance voting.

Registration for out-of-constituency and overseas referendum voting was open from January 3 to 5. The Election Commission has confirmed that this registration window is final and cannot be extended, citing legal deadlines and logistical requirements, including the preparation of voter lists for approximately 101,000 polling stations nationwide. The commission also rejected calls for postal voting in the referendum, arguing that it could compromise ballot secrecy and voter identity verification.

Advance voting applies only to the general election and will take place on February 1, both domestically and overseas. Voters who registered for advance voting but later decide not to vote on that date may cancel their registration and vote in person on February 8, allowing them to participate in both the election and the referendum.

As of early January, more than one million voters had registered for advance voting in the general election, with the majority opting for out-of-constituency voting. The Election Commission expects registration figures to rise toward the close of the registration period following the New Year holidays.

Candidate registration for the February 8 general election has also concluded. More than 5,000 constituency and party-list candidates from 60 political parties are contesting the election, alongside 94 prime

ministerial nominees put forward by 43 parties. The new House of Representatives will comprise 400 constituency members and 100 party-list members. Official confirmation of candidate eligibility is expected by January 7 after verification by relevant state agencies.

Observers and civil society groups have raised concerns about the compressed preparation period for the referendum, noting that the Royal Gazette announcement came only in early January, leaving fewer than six weeks before polling day. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: National polls point to coalition government

(lm) Thailand is approaching its February 8 general election amid high voter indecision and growing expectations that no single party will secure a parliamentary majority, making coalition negotiations decisive for government formation.

At the national level, opinion polling and expert commentary indicate a tight contest between the People's Party (PP) – the single-largest party in the now-dissolved Parliament - and the Bhumjaithai Party (BJT) of caretaker Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, with neither projected to win enough seats to govern alone. Most projections place Pheu Thai, a long-established populist party closely associated with the Shinawatra political family, in third position nationally. Although expected to win fewer seats than in past elections, Pheu Thai is widely described in the reporting as likely to play a pivotal role in post-election coalition bargaining, as neither of the two leading parties is expected to reach a majority without partners.

Several analysts argue that the post-election outcome may resemble earlier coalition arrangements, potentially involving Bhumjaithai, Pheu Thai, and the Klatham Party - a newer political party that has attracted defectors from multiple parties and is positioning itself as a potential coalition broker. A large bloc of undecided voters—estimated at over 40 percent nationally—adds uncertainty to seat projections and coalition scenarios. [Bangkok Post 1]

Against this national backdrop, a provincial poll from Songkhla, a major province in southern Thailand bordering Malaysia, illustrates how regional dynamics may diverge from national trends. A National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) poll conducted

in Songkhla between December 20 and 25 shows the Democrat Party—Thailand's oldest political party and one that traditionally draws strong support from southern provinces—leading voter preferences for prime minister, constituency seats, and the party-list vote.

The party is again led by Abhisit Vejjajiva, a former prime minister who recently returned to the party leadership after several years outside frontline politics. According to the poll, Abhisit is the preferred prime ministerial candidate among respondents in Songkhla, although a significant share of voters remain undecided. Bhumjaithai leader Anutin Charnvirakul ranked behind Abhisit, followed closely by People's Party leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut. The Democrats also led both the party-list and constituency voting intentions in the province. [Bangkok Post 2]

Prime Minister Anutin has dismissed the Songkhla poll results as non-determinative, noting that Bhumjaithai's support has grown steadily over time and stating that polling does not shape how the party conducts its campaign. Senior Bhumjaithai officials acknowledged concern about the southern results but said the party would continue focusing on local engagement and practical policy proposals. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Main opposition party sets out reform platform

(acs/lm) The People's Party (PP), the single largest party and main opposition force in Thailand's now-dissolved Parliament, has intensified campaigning ahead of the February 8 general election, setting out its policy positions, coalition red lines, and electoral strategy as it seeks to form the next government.

Responding to criticism that it undermines the armed forces, PP leaders have publicly rejected an anti-military stance. Party spokesperson Parit Wacharasindhu stated that the PP supports soldiers tasked with defending national sovereignty and public safety, while advocating reforms aimed at improving effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. The party has said it does not oppose weapons procurement in principle but argues purchases should focus on equipment relevant to evolving security threats and be accompanied by technology and knowledge transfer. It has also emphasized welfare protections for service members, safeguards for conscripts, and civilian-court jurisdiction for military personnel accused of corruption or criminal offenses. Former PP lawmaker Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn, who

chaired the House committee on military affairs, reiterated that the party's criticism targets systems and misconduct, not the institution itself. [Bangkok Post 1]

At the electoral level, PP leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut has repeatedly called on voters to deliver a landslide victory that would allow the party to form a single-party government. He has ruled out coalition participation with the Bhumjaithai Party, a conservative, regionally rooted party that currently leads the caretaker government under Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul following parliamentary realignment in late 2025, as well as with the Kla Tham Party, a newer political grouping positioning itself as a potential kingmaker and attracting defectors from established parties. Natthaphong has argued that coalition politics involving such parties have historically entrenched patronage networks and weakened political accountability.

Natthaphong has also stressed that, unlike in the 2023 election, the appointed Senate will no longer play a role in selecting the prime minister, removing a key institutional barrier that previously prevented the Move Forward Party—the PP's predecessor—from forming a government despite winning the most seats.

Campaigning in the northeastern provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima and Khon Kaen, both major electoral battlegrounds, Natthaphong has highlighted the party's aim to retain and expand seats previously won by the Move Forward Party in 2023. He has framed the election as a choice between entrenched patronage-based politics and a rules-based political order emphasizing transparency, equality before the law, and parliamentary accountability. Party messaging has focused on opposing party defections, rejecting advance coalition bargaining, and urging voters to use both constituency and party-list ballots to determine the country's political direction. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Early polling shows weak Pheu Thai position as party reorients after loss of premiership

(lm/msz) Early opinion polling ahead of Thailand's February 8 general election indicates that the Pheu Thai Party is currently performing below its historical baseline in key regions. In Nakhon Ratchasima province, a long-standing electoral stronghold for the party, approximately 31 percent of respondents reported being undecided on constituency candidates, while about 35 percent remained undecided on party-

list voting. Among voters who had made a choice, Pheu Thai registered roughly 20 percent support, trailing the undecided group but ahead of the People's Party and the Bhumjaithai Party. Around 40 percent of respondents had not yet selected a preferred prime ministerial candidate. [Bangkok Post 1]

These figures reflect a broader period of adjustment for Pheu Thai following its loss of the premiership in September 2025. That transition followed a ruling by Thailand's Constitutional Court against Paetongtarn Shinawatra, then prime minister and a member of the influential Shinawatra political family. After the ruling, parliamentary realignment led to Anutin Charnvirakul, leader of the Bhumjaithai Party, assuming the premiership. Since that change, Pheu Thai has operated from the opposition and has sought to reposition itself ahead of the 2026 elections.

Against this backdrop, Pheu Thai has nominated Yodchanan Wongsawat as its principal prime ministerial candidate. He is the son of former prime minister Somchai Wongsawat and a nephew of Paetongtarn's father, Thaksin Shinawatra, whose political legacy continues to shape the party's identity. Professionally, Yodchanan Wongsawat is an academic administrator and research executive, and the party has presented him as a technocratic figure with policy experience alongside institutional continuity. [Bangkok Post 2]

In parallel with these repositioning efforts, the governing Bhumjaithai Party has announced plans to pursue legal action against a Pheu Thai candidate over campaign statements related to the discontinued 10,000-baht digital wallet policy. A senior Bhumjaithai figure said complaints would be filed with Thailand's Election Commission, arguing that remarks made at a December campaign rally falsely linked the suspension of the digital wallet scheme to budget reallocation under the current administration.

Bhumjaithai maintains that the digital wallet proposal was halted during the previous Pheu Thai–led government, following objections from oversight bodies including the National Economic and Social Development Council, the National Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Council of State, which cited potential legal and procedural issues. On this basis, the party rejects claims that the current government redirected funds from the digital wallet program to finance the Khon La Khrueng Plus co-payment scheme. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Investigators move closer to charges into bribery case involving former deputy police chief

(lm) Thai authorities say they have assembled substantial evidence in a high-profile bribery investigation involving Surachate Hakparn, a former deputy national police chief, as the case moves toward formal consideration by the country's anti-corruption body.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) stated that evidence gathered to date is sufficient to support legal action, although additional witness statements and clarifications are still being pursued. Investigators say the case is linked to earlier probes into online gambling networks and has widened to include possible money-laundering, abuse of influence, and unusual wealth accumulation among associates. The inquiry has also expanded to examine the alleged role of a university academic accused of advising on public-image management and efforts to discredit critics.

According to investigators, the core allegation is that gold bars valued at about THB 15.7 million (around USD 460,000) were offered to a commissioner of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) in an attempt to interfere with ongoing investigations. A former aide has claimed he was instructed to deliver the gold at a Bangkok location in September 2024. Police say their case file includes CCTV footage, audio recordings, photographs, financial documents, and testimony from officials and business figures. Several witnesses reportedly came forward after alleging intimidation and threats, with medical records included as supporting evidence. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The NACC has confirmed it will formally take up the case once evidence collection is complete. A member of the commission named in media reports has publicly denied any involvement, told the commission he had committed no wrongdoing, and indicated willingness to step aside from oversight of police-related cases pending internal decisions. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Appeal revives scrutiny over handling of 2012 fatal hit-and-run case

(lm) A long-running legal saga surrounding the 2012 fatal hit-and-run involving Vorayuth Yoovidhya, heir to the Red Bull fortune, has re-entered national focus as

an appeal challenges earlier court findings on alleged evidence manipulation by state officials.

The case stems from a September 2012 incident in which Vorayuth's Ferrari struck and killed a police officer riding a motorcycle in central Bangkok. While Vorayuth remains a fugitive, the current proceedings concern a separate corruption case against officials accused of manipulating forensic evidence to shield him from prosecution between 2016 and 2020.

At the center of the controversy is the calculation of the Ferrari's speed at the time of the crash. An initial forensic assessment placed the speed at 177 kilometers per hour, suggesting severe negligence. Years later, alternative expert testimony reduced the estimate to below 80 kilometers per hour, just under the legal threshold for reckless driving. This revised figure was later used by Nate Naksuk, then a deputy attorney general, to drop the key charge against Vorayuth, triggering public backlash and a probe by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).

In an April 2025 judgment, a court ruled that the original 177 km/h calculation was scientifically unreliable and insufficiently validated, concluding that the credible speed range lay between 76 and 80 km/h. On that basis, six of eight defendants—including former police chief Somyot Poompanmoung—were acquitted of conspiracy charges. Two former prosecutors were convicted: Nate Naksuk received a three-year prison sentence, while a senior colleague was sentenced to two years for altering evidence.

The ruling has divided legal and forensic opinion. Some lawyers argue the court correctly weighed conflicting expert evidence, while a former forensic police officer involved in the original investigation has publicly disputed the findings, insisting the vehicle's speed was far higher and warning that flawed scientific reasoning risks undermining justice.

In August 2025, the Office of the Attorney General appealed the acquittals to the Appeal Court for Corruption and Misconduct Cases. The appeal, which relies solely on the existing evidentiary record, is expected to be decided within eight to twelve months.

Meanwhile, Vorayuth himself remains at large. Most charges related to the fatal crash have expired under statutes of limitation, leaving only the charge of reckless driving causing death, which expires in September 2027. An Interpol Red Notice remains in effect, but proceedings in that case cannot move forward unless he is taken into custody. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Co-payment scheme concludes with significant portion of unspent allocations returned to state

(bk) Thailand's Khon La Khrueng Plus co-payment scheme, a nationwide consumer support and stimulus program, has formally concluded, injecting THB 84.18 billion (approximately USD 2.44 billion) into the economy while returning a significant portion of unspent allocations to the state.

According to preliminary figures released by the Ministry of Finance, the scheme attracted 19.76 million participants. Of these, 9.21 million users fully utilized their allotted benefits, while more than 10.5 million participants did not exhaust their entitlements. As a result, around THB 2 billion (approximately USD 58 million) in unused funds has reverted to the state budget.

The Ministry of Finance estimates that the program contributed approximately 0.2 percent to Thailand's economic growth in 2025, through increased household purchasing power, improved cash flow for small businesses, and secondary effects across production, trade, employment, and transport. Total spending under the scheme was split almost evenly between consumer outlays and government support. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Enrolment opens for household debt relief scheme

(lm) Thailand's central bank has opened enrolment for a new nationwide household debt relief program, "Clear Debt, Move Forward," aimed at easing the country's high level of household non-performing loans (NPLs) and allowing small borrowers to re-enter the formal financial system.

Eligibility is limited to individual borrowers with total outstanding NPLs of no more than THB 100,000 (approximately USD 2,900) across all loan types and lenders, calculated as of September 30, 2025. The authorities estimate the scheme will cover about 1.6 million NPL accounts belonging to 1.2 million borrowers, with a combined NPL value of THB 43 billion (approximately USD 1.25 billion). According to the central bank, loans below this threshold account for around 60 percent of retail NPL accounts nationwide.

The initiative is designed to address Thailand's elevated household debt burden, which stands at 86.8 percent of gross domestic product. In its initial phase, the scheme applies to borrowers from commercial banks and non-bank lenders within commercial banking groups.

Under the program, SAM purchases eligible unsecured NPLs from participating lenders and restructures them under more lenient conditions. Borrowers may opt for a lump-sum settlement to close accounts immediately or repay in installments over up to three years, with no interest charged during the repayment period. Depending on compliance with repayment terms, restructuring may include partial reductions of principal or full waivers of accumulated interest and fees. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Bangkok–Northeast high-speed rail faces one-year delay amid land and project overlap issues

(msz) Thailand's first high-speed rail project, the Bangkok–Nakhon Ratchasima line, has been delayed by at least one year, with operations now expected to begin in 2030 instead of 2029, according to officials from the State Railway of Thailand.

The Bangkok–Nong Khai high-speed rail project was initiated under Thai–Chinese government cooperation following agreements reached in 2014. Phase 1 of the project spans 250.77 kilometers and has an approved investment value of THB 179.4 billion (approximately USD 5.2 billion). As of November 2025, overall construction progress stood at about 50 percent. The project is divided into 14 construction contracts, several of which have been completed or are nearing completion. However, two major contracts remain at zero progress.

One stalled section is the Bang Sue–Don Mueang segment, which overlaps structurally with the three-airport rail link connecting Don Mueang, Suvarnabhumi, and U-Tapao airports. Under the original arrangement, this section was to be built by Asia Era One Co., the concessionaire led by CP Group, but contract renegotiations with the SRT have remained unresolved since 2018. A decision is pending on whether the SRT will proceed with construction itself.

Another delayed section is near Ayutthaya station, where design changes are required due to proximity to the Ayutthaya Historical Park, a UNESCO World

Heritage Site. Compliance with heritage protection guidelines has slowed progress on this segment.

Phase 2 of the project, extending 357 kilometers from Nakhon Ratchasima to Nong Khai, was approved by the cabinet in February 2025. It carries an estimated cost of THB 341.3 billion (approximately USD 9.9 billion), with construction planned to start around mid-2026 and operations projected for 2032. [Bangkok Post]

Vietnam: Government reviews digital citizen scoring system

(ms) Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security has concluded public consultations on a draft proposal to introduce a digital citizen scoring system through VNeID, the country's national digital identity application. The consultation period ended on December 31, 2025, and authorities are now reviewing feedback as part of Vietnam's broader push to expand digital government services.

The proposed system would assign scores to citizens based on their engagement with digital public services and activities on the VNeID platform. Government officials have consistently framed the initiative as an incentive-based tool designed to encourage participation in e-government services, rather than a mechanism to penalize or restrict citizens.

Under the draft, citizens would be classified into three categories according to their scores. Users would begin with an initial score after completing their VNeID profile and could earn additional points by updating personal information, using online administrative services, and taking part in surveys or policy consultations conducted through the platform. To retain their status, citizens would be required to maintain a minimum level of digital activity over time. The proposal also outlines technical measures intended to prevent manipulation of the system, including limits on repetitive actions and the suspension of point accumulation in cases involving legal violations.

Authorities have stated that higher scores would be linked to tangible benefits. Citizens in the highest tier would qualify for full exemptions from fees for a wide range of basic administrative procedures, along with partial reductions for more complex services. Additional incentives under consideration include tax reductions in selected categories, such as personal income tax. At the same time, the government has

emphasized that citizens with lower scores would continue to receive all legally guaranteed public services without restriction or delay.

The proposal has prompted comparisons with China's social credit system, which was rolled out nationwide in 2014 and evaluates individuals but especially focusses on the industry and organizations based on legal, financial, and social behavior. Unlike China's model, which can impose penalties such as travel restrictions or public blacklisting, Vietnamese officials have reiterated that the digital citizen score would not be used to punish individuals or limit their rights.

Despite these assurances, the initiative has generated debate among legal experts and the public. Critics have raised concerns that even a non-punitive scoring system could deepen social stratification or create indirect pressure for citizens to conform to state-defined standards of digital participation. Some have also questioned the long-term implications for data governance, privacy, and the expanding role of state authorities in managing digital identities.

Legal commentators have underscored the need for clear boundaries in implementation arguing that the score should be understood strictly as a measure of digital engagement and skills, not as an evaluation of a person's character, ethics, or compliance with the law.

With the consultation phase completed, the proposal is now under internal review. If adopted, it would significantly expand the scope of Ministry of Public Security in overseeing digital governance and further position VNeID as a central pillar of Vietnam's digital transformation strategy. [Vietcetera] [Vietnam] [Vietnam Law Magazine]

Vietnam: New regulation introduces fund types and tightens investment fund management rules

(hn) The Ministry of Finance has issued Circular 136/2025/TT-BTC, updating rules on the operation and management of investment funds to diversify products while strengthening investor protection and risk management. The circular introduces two new fund types: a monetary market investment fund, which must invest at least 80 percent of its Net Asset Value (NAV) in low-risk assets, and an infrastructure bond fund, required to allocate at least 65 percent of its NAV to infrastructure project bonds.

It also adds a liquidity reserve mechanism to help open-ended funds cope with unexpected market shocks, with related fees credited to the fund rather than management companies. Governance and transparency are tightened through stricter conflict-of-interest rules, mandatory next-day NAV disclosures, and clearer approval requirements for negotiated transactions. Investor meetings are modernized with online participation and e-voting.

In addition, the circular imposes stricter controls on fund advertising, requiring risk warnings and banning misleading promotional practices. Overall, the regulation aims to create a safer, more transparent and professional investment fund market. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: 17-year prison terms in absentia to exiled critics

(ms) A Hanoi court has sentenced two Vietnam-based critics living in Germany, Nguyễn Văn Đài and Lê Trung Khoa, to 17 years in prison each after trying both men in absentia under Article 117 of Vietnam's Penal Code, a provision the state uses for cases it frames as "making, storing, distributing, and spreading information" against the government.

Vietnam net, a state-affiliated outlet, said the court proceeded without the defendants present because they did not return to Vietnam despite being called to appear, and noted that both men were subject to wanted notices issued in early December 2025. Vietnam net reported that Đài's sentence was combined with remaining time from an earlier case, resulting in a much longer total term, alongside post-prison probation requirements.

Prosecutors alleged that Đài used multiple social media accounts in mid-2025 to circulate content described by authorities as distorted, defamatory, or fabricated, while Khoa was accused of operating online pages over a longer period and directing or organizing related publishing activity with assistance from co-defendants inside Vietnam, who received additional prison terms.

Both men are well known among Vietnam's dissident and exile communities. Đài is a lawyer and longtime democracy activist who has previously been imprisoned on national security-related charges and later left Vietnam for Germany. Khoa is a Berlin-based journalist and editor of the Vietnamese-language site Thoibao.de; The Vietnamese Magazine has reported

that he holds German citizenship and has said he will continue his work despite the verdict.

The convictions come amid heightened political sensitivity ahead of Vietnam's next Communist Party congress, as independent outlets and rights groups have warned that prosecutions under Article 117 and related provisions can have a chilling effect on speech, particularly online. [TAZ in German] [The Vietnamese] [Vietnam Net]

Vietnam: FDI inflows top USD 38 billion in 2025 as disbursements hit five-year high

(ms) Vietnam's foreign direct investment inflows held steady in 2025, with newly registered capital reaching USD 38.42 billion, up 0.5 percent from 2024, according to the National Statistics Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Finance. The figures were released at a January 5 press conference on Vietnam's fourth-quarter and full-year socio-economic performance.

A key indicator for investors, disbursed FDI climbed to an estimated USD 27.62 billion, a 9 percent year-on-year increase and the highest level recorded in the past five years, the NSO said. Vietnam licensed 4,054 new FDI projects during the year, up 20.1 percent, though their registered capital fell 12.2 percent to USD 17.32 billion.

Manufacturing and processing attracted the largest share of new commitments at USD 9.8 billion (56.5 percent), followed by real estate at USD 3.67 billion (21.2 percent). Separately, 1,404 existing projects were approved to expand capital, adding USD 14.07 billion.

FDI-related capital contributions and share purchases rose 54.8 percent to USD 7.03 billion. Singapore led new registrations with USD 4.84 billion (27.9 percent), followed by China at USD 3.64 billion (21 percent), and Hong Kong at USD 1.73 billion (10 percent). [Trading View] [Vietnam Net]

Vietnam: Unified national housing and real estate database to improve transparency

(hn) Vietnam has issued Decree No. 357 to establish a unified national database on housing and the real estate market. The Ministry of Construction will manage the central system, while provincial

governments must collect, update, and standardize local data and link it to the national database.

The system will cover housing development, real estate projects, transactions, prices, inventories, and legal status, with regular updates and historical records. The decree requires accurate reporting from organizations and individuals, integration with other state databases, compliance with data protection and cybersecurity laws, and nationwide standardization by July 1, 2026, to improve transparency and data sharing. [Tuoitre] [Vietnam]

Vietnam: Economy grows strongly by 8 percent in 2025 despite trade tensions

(ms) Vietnam's economy expanded by about 8 percent in 2025, marking a clear acceleration from the previous year and underscoring the country's continued resilience as a manufacturing and export hub despite external pressures. Preliminary government data released on January 5 showed growth rising from roughly 7 percent in 2024, supported by strong exports, steady domestic demand and higher public investment.

The expansion came even as Vietnamese goods faced 20 percent tariffs imposed by the United States from August, a move aimed at narrowing Washington's widening trade deficit. Vietnam nonetheless recorded its largest-ever trade surplus with the US, reflecting the country's deepening role in global supply chains and the limited short-term impact of the duties on export volumes.

Total exports climbed 17 percent to about USD 475 billion in 2025, with shipments to the US alone reaching USD 153 billion, far surpassing the previous year's record. The resulting trade surplus with Washington rose to nearly USD 134 billion, according to Vietnamese figures. Electronics, footwear, textiles and consumer goods remained key drivers, with multinational manufacturers continuing to use Vietnam as a primary assembly base for global markets.

Imports also rose sharply, particularly from China, which supplied a record USD 186 billion worth of goods. Much of this increase reflected Vietnam's role in assembling finished products from imported components. The surge has drawn scrutiny from US officials, who have accused Hanoi of facilitating illegal transshipment of Chinese goods. While Vietnam has

denied wrongdoing, the issue remains a point of negotiation in ongoing trade talks with Washington.

Domestically, growth was supported by strong consumption and higher government spending, particularly on infrastructure. Industrial production and retail sales both rose 9.2 percent last year, while inflation remained relatively contained at 3.31 percent for the year, providing space for policy support. Consumer prices in December rose 3.48 percent year on year, broadly in line with government targets.

Foreign direct investment inflows increased 9 percent to USD 27.6 billion, reflecting continued investor confidence, although pledged investments were flat, suggesting some caution amid global uncertainty. Manufacturing, electronics and renewable energy remained among the most attractive sectors for foreign capital.

Despite the strong headline performance, Vietnam did not fully meet its longer-term growth ambitions. Average annual growth for the 2021–2025 period stood at 6.25 percent, below the Communist Party's earlier target, largely due to pandemic-related disruptions in 2021.

Looking ahead, the government has set an ambitious goal of at least 10 percent annual growth for the 2026–2030 period, a target expected to be endorsed at the upcoming party congress. Achieving it will require sustained export competitiveness, deeper domestic value creation, and more efficient deployment of public and private investment as Vietnam seeks to rebalance its growth model beyond trade-led expansion. [Reuters] [Vietnam Law 1] [Vietnam Law 2]

Vietnamese policymakers have cautioned that sustaining such momentum will be increasingly difficult. Officials at the State Bank of Vietnam have warned that global factors, including United States tariff policy and shifting interest rate decisions by major central banks such as the Federal Reserve, could complicate efforts to reach the government's target of more than 10 percent growth in 2026. Speaking in late December, central bank officials said volatile global markets and exchange rate pressures would require careful coordination between monetary and fiscal policy to preserve macroeconomic stability. Credit growth, which rose more than 19 percent year on year by late December, has been a key driver of expansion, but authorities acknowledged that heavy reliance on credit also increases vulnerability if external conditions deteriorate. The central bank said its priority next year would be to manage policy flexibly to contain inflation while still supporting growth, underscoring the

challenges Vietnam faces as it shifts from recovery-led expansion to sustaining double-digit growth in a more uncertain global environment. [Reuters 2]

Vietnam: EV taxi IPO plans seen as milestone in national champions strategy

(ms) Vietnam's push to build globally competitive "national champions" reached a potential milestone as Green and Smart Mobility JSC (GSM), an electric-vehicle taxi operator linked to Vingroup, prepares for a possible international initial public offering. Advisors have floated a valuation of up to USD 20 billion, with sources indicating GSM is targeting a Hong Kong listing by 2027, which would make it the first Vietnamese company to debut on that exchange.

Founded in 2023 by billionaire Pham Nhat Vuong, GSM operates Vietnam's largest all-electric taxi fleet under the Xanh SM brand, using vehicles supplied exclusively by VinFast. The model supports VinFast's domestic sales while positioning GSM as a regional mobility platform, with operations already expanded into Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Officials and analysts view the IPO ambition as aligning with Vietnam's broader strategy of nurturing large private firms capable of competing regionally and globally, particularly in priority sectors such as electric vehicles, green transport and advanced manufacturing. A successful listing could improve access to foreign capital, deepen international investor confidence in Vietnamese corporates, and signal the growing maturity of the country's private-sector champions. [Reuters]

Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City establish framework to reduce methane emissions

(ln) Submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) authorities have suggested policies and solutions to reinforce Vietnam's current methane-reduction plan until 2030. The major sources of methane emissions in HCMC are waste collection and treatment, crop cultivation, and livestock farming, with waste collection and treatment being the largest sources of methane emissions. HCMC has taken measures in each industry to actively reduce methane emissions.

Ho Chi Minh City is establishing awareness programs among authorities, enterprises, farmers and communities about the benefits of methane emission reduction and is promoting the responsible consumption of products. The city is planning to shift its low-yield rice cultivation areas to higher-value perennial crops and its livestock farming management has adopted better systems of adaptive management frameworks for ducks, the inclusion of probiotics for the livestock and better feed management for dairy cattle. HCMC is also supporting household solid-waste treatment projects by utilizing modern, energy-recovery technology and advancing technological upgrades at household waste treatment plants. Currently, five investors are signed for waste-to-energy technologies, with two projects already under construction.

While progress for methane emission reduction is underway, the city faces many challenges in implementing new policies and frameworks. A current lack of data regarding emissions is restricting some industrial facilities from effectively planning and monitoring its activities. In addition, methane capture from waste sludge is technologically challenging to implement. To hopefully address these issues for future growth, the city is advising local ministries to issue established guidelines on methane reduction in crop cultivation, livestock farming and waste collection and treatment. HCMC is also advising industries to provide incentives for new technological advancement. (Vietnamnews)

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

China to lead BRICS joint naval exercise in South Africa

(ms) China will lead a joint naval exercise with fellow BRICS and BRICS Plus countries in South African waters from January 9 to 16, marking the first defense cooperation formally framed under the expanded BRICS grouping and underscoring Beijing's widening military engagement beyond Asia.

The exercise, titled *Will for Peace 2026*, will be hosted by South Africa and led by China, according to the South African National Defense Force. It will focus on maritime safety operations, interoperability drills and the protection of shipping routes. Media reports say Russia and Iran will take part, with Indonesia and Ethiopia potentially participating or observing.

The drills build on earlier *Exercise Mosi* iterations held in 2019 and 2023 between China, Russia and South Africa, but the inclusion of Iran reflects the expansion of BRICS since 2023. BRICS now includes Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates, alongside its original members Brazil, China, Russia, India and South Africa.

Chinese naval vessels have already transited through East Africa en route to South Africa, while Russia and Iran have confirmed deployments. Iranian officials have said the exercise aims to enhance coordination in international waters and protect maritime trade, while South Africa's defense ministry has framed the drills as non-combat operations focused on shipping security.

The exercise has drawn criticism within South Africa, particularly over the participation of Russia and Iran, both subject to Western sanctions and involved in ongoing conflicts. Opposition politicians and defense analysts argue that hosting sanctioned states complicates South Africa's stated policy of non-alignment and risks straining relations with key Western trading partners.

Analysts also note that while labelled a BRICS exercise, the grouping lacks a formal defense framework, with major members such as India and Brazil not expected to participate. Even so, the drills are widely seen as part of a broader trend in which China is using multilateral formats to normalize security cooperation with partners across Africa, the Middle East and the Global South. [Daily Maverick] [Defence Web] [South China Morning Post]

China: Introduction of curbs on beef imports with new quotas and tariffs

(mis) China has introduced new safeguard measures on beef imports, imposing a steep additional tariff on shipments that exceed newly set quota levels, in a bid to protect its domestic cattle industry from rising foreign competition. The measures, announced by the Ministry of Commerce and reported by Reuters, are set to take effect on January 1 and will remain in place for three years.

Under this aery of policies policy, China will levy an extra 55 percent tariff on beef imports that surpass country-specific quotas from major suppliers including Brazil, Australia and the United States. For 2026, the overall quota for countries covered by the safeguard mechanism has been set at about 2.7 million metric tons, broadly in line with China's total beef imports in 2024 but below shipment levels seen in the first 11 months of 2025 for some leading exporters.

"The increase in the amount of imported beef has seriously damaged China's domestic industry," according to Chinese authorities, which prompted the introduction of the curbs following an investigation launched in late 2024. The quotas are scheduled to rise gradually over the three-year period but imports above the limits will face the punitive tariff, effectively discouraging excess volumes.

Analysts expect the measures to reduce China's beef imports in 2026. Hongzhi Xu, a senior analyst at Beijing Orient Agribusiness Consultants, told Reuters that China's beef-cattle farming remains structurally uncompetitive compared with major exporters such as Brazil and Argentina, and that the new policy is unlikely to change that reality in the short term. [Reuters]

China to host Interpol general assembly in Hong Kong as police target deeper ASEAN cooperation

(ms) Hong Kong police plan to use the city's hosting of Interpol's top annual meeting in November to deepen operational ties with Southeast Asian law enforcement agencies, amid growing regional concerns over transnational crime.

Police Commissioner Joe Chow Yat-ming said cooperation with ASEAN members would be a priority as Hong Kong prepares to host the 94th General Assembly of Interpol, which will bring together

representatives from all 196 member jurisdictions. The meeting, to be held in Hong Kong for the first time, is Interpol's highest decision-making forum.

Chow said Hong Kong's long-standing role in international policing, including intelligence sharing and financial crime investigations, positioned it well to act as a coordination point between China and regional partners. Southeast Asian countries, he noted, face overlapping threats with Hong Kong, particularly in areas such as telecom fraud, online scams, money laundering, drug trafficking and cybercrime.

The hosting rights were secured in 2024 when Chow, then deputy commissioner (operations), attended Interpol's general assembly in Glasgow. Preparations for the November meeting are expected to include bilateral and multilateral discussions alongside the formal assembly agenda. [South China Morning Post]

Japan backs South American states with new program to curb illegal Chinese fishing

(dql) Japan has launched a security assistance initiative to help South American states counter large-scale illegal fishing linked to Chinese fleets operating with disabled tracking systems. Tokyo will provide surveillance drones, analytical technology and patrol equipment to Argentina, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay through the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, backed by a budget of 300 million yen (JPY 300 million / approx. USD 1.9 million).

The program aims to bolster weak maritime enforcement capacities in areas where Chinese vessels have been accused of undeclared fishing, seabed prospecting and extended operations near ecologically sensitive zones such as the Galapagos.

The move follows intensifying foreign fishing activity off Argentina's "Mile 201" zone and recurring incidents involving Chinese vessels across regional waters. Beyond environmental and economic risks, the initiative also addresses concerns over labor abuses aboard illegal fishing ships. [Noticias Ambientales] [Environmental Justice Foundation]

Mile 201 refers to a marine area just outside Argentina's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) — beginning about 201 nautical miles from the Argentine coast — where national jurisdiction ends and international waters begin.

European Parliament delegation visits Taiwan

(acl/dql) Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te praised the deepening relationship between Taiwan and Europe during a meeting with a visiting European Parliament delegation, stressing that stability in the Taiwan Strait is vital not only for the Indo-Pacific but also for Europe's security and the global economy. [Office of the President, Taiwan]

Lai framed Taiwan as a capable and dependable partner for Europe and said shared democratic values underpin closer cooperation. Delegation head Michael Gahler, chair of the European Taiwan Friendship Group — an informal grouping of Members of the European Parliament —, reaffirmed European support for peace and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, warning against China's attempts to alter it.

He condemned recent Chinese military drills around Taiwan and described the strait as an international waterway. The delegation highlighted ongoing cooperation on issues such as submarine cable security, as well as opportunities to expand collaboration in trade, science, and public health. [Taiwan News]

The meeting was part of the delegation's visit to Taiwan this week. During the visit, the 10-member delegation is scheduled to also meet Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung, and representatives from the parliament, the National Security Council, the Mainland Affairs Council, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Digital Affairs, and the National Science and Technology Council.

The delegation will also hold discussions with local academics, industry representatives, and NGOs to exchange views on countering disinformation and cyberattacks, whole-of-society resilience, Taiwan-EU economic cooperation, as well as Indo-Pacific and cross-strait issues. [Focus Taiwan][Ministry of Foreign Affairs Taiwan, in Chinese]

India surpasses Japan to become world's fourth-largest economy

(dql) India's latest economic review unveils that the country has overtaken Japan to become the world's

fourth-largest economy and is on track to surpass Germany within the next three years, positioning it behind only the United States and China. [Government, India]

The report estimates India's GDP at about USD 4.18 trillion and projects expansion to USD 7.3 trillion by 2030, citing strong domestic demand, robust private consumption and improving export performance. Growth reached a six-quarter high in mid-2025, prompting the central bank to lift its annual forecast to 7.3 percent.

The rise in nominal GDP is driven in part by scale. With more than 1.4 billion people compared with Japan's much smaller population, total output has expanded rapidly even though living standards remain lower. India's per-capita income is about USD 2,900 — far below Japan's roughly USD 33,000 — demonstrating the gap between headline growth and household prosperity.

While officials describe the current environment as a "Goldilocks" phase of high growth and moderate inflation, the review also highlights structural challenges — including low per-capita income and the need to generate quality jobs for a large young population. [DW] [Eurasia Review]

India slaps anti-dumping levy on metallurgical coke

(dql) India has imposed a provisional anti-dumping duty on imports of low-ash metallurgical coke from six countries — Australia, China, Colombia, Indonesia, Japan and Russia — for an initial six-month period, following a trade investigation that concluded the imports were underpriced and harming domestic producers.

The decision, based on preliminary findings from the Directorate General of Trade Remedies, introduces duties ranging roughly between USD 60 and USD 130 per ton to prevent further losses to Indian manufacturers while the probe continues.

The measure covers shipments routed directly or via third countries and targets a material essential to blast-furnace steelmaking, a major segment of India's steel sector. [Reuters 1] [Trade World News]

In addition, India has introduced a three-year safeguard duty of 11–12 percent on selected steel imports in an effort to limit low-priced foreign

shipments, particularly from China. The tariff will start at 12 percent in the first year and gradually decline to 11 percent by the third year, and will apply to imports from China, Vietnam and Nepal, while certain developing countries and specialty steel grades — including stainless steel — are exempt.

The move follows a prior 200-day temporary duty and stems from a trade investigation that found a sharp rise in imports was damaging domestic producers.

Industry groups had previously warned about market disruption from cheap imports, prompting calls for trade protection measures. India's decision comes amid wider global pushback against Chinese steel exports, with several countries tightening trade defenses after U.S. tariffs redirected excess supply into other markets. [Reuters 2] [India Today]

Pakistan engages Saudi Arabia and UAE amid Saudi–UAE tensions over Yemen

(lm) Pakistan has conducted a series of senior-level diplomatic engagements with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against the backdrop of heightened regional tensions linked to developments in Yemen.

The contacts followed a set of developments that included a limited airstrike announced on December 30, 2025, by the Saudi Arabia–led Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen targeting alleged weapons shipments at Yemen's southern port of Mukalla; the declaration of a 90-day state of emergency by Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council; and the UAE's announcement that it would withdraw its remaining counter-terrorism units from Yemen. Saudi officials said the targeted shipments had originated from the UAE port of Fujairah and were intended for forces linked to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a UAE-backed southern Yemeni separatist movement.

On December 30, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan, exchanging views on the evolving regional situation following the airstrike. On January 3, the two foreign ministers held a second telephone conversation, during which Dar reiterated Pakistan's position that restraint, dialogue, and diplomacy should guide efforts to address Yemen-related tensions. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

On January 1, Pakistan's Prime Minister held a separate telephone conversation with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, reaffirming Pakistan's solidarity with the Kingdom. Official statements said the leaders discussed regional developments, with the Pakistani side emphasizing unity among Muslim states and the peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue.

During the same period, Pakistan also engaged the United Arab Emirates at the highest political level. Pakistan's Prime Minister met the UAE President in Rahim Yar Khan following the Emirati leader's official visit to Islamabad. Official accounts said the discussions covered bilateral relations and regional issues, including developments related to Yemen. [Arab News 3]

Separately from the Yemen-related diplomatic exchanges, Pakistan confirmed that it will participate in the Future Minerals Forum, scheduled to be held in Riyadh from January 13 to 15. Pakistan plans to send a delegation of around 13 state-owned and private companies, led by the federal petroleum minister, and to establish a national pavilion highlighting investment opportunities in its mineral sector, including large-scale copper and gold deposits. [Arab News 4]

Malaysia backs more inclusive second Gaza flotilla mission

(ea) Malaysia has signaled strong political and logistical backing for the proposed Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) 2.0 mission, which aims to challenge Israel's naval blockade of Gaza and deliver humanitarian assistance. According to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Religious Affairs Dr Zulkifli Hasan, the upcoming mission is intended to be more inclusive than previous efforts, involving volunteers from diverse religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds, as well as public figures. Planning for the initiative is ongoing, with Malaysian authorities emphasizing the need for a coordinated and carefully structured approach.

The Malaysian government has framed its involvement as both a humanitarian effort and a symbolic gesture. Beyond delivering aid and deploying medical and technical personnel, officials stress that the mission seeks to draw international attention to the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has reportedly given full political support, with Malaysia exploring various forms of cooperation to facilitate the mission's objectives.

The announcement follows the interception of an earlier flotilla attempt in late 2025, when dozens of vessels were intercepted and activists detained in Israel before being deported to their respective countries. [Bernama]

Vietnam poised to become Southeast Asia's third-largest economy in 2026, overtaking Thailand

(bk) Vietnam is on track to overtake Thailand in nominal GDP this year, fueled by a major government-led infrastructure push, while Thailand's economy struggles with slow growth, high household debt, and geopolitical tensions along the Cambodia border. Vietnam's real GDP is projected to grow around 8 percent in 2025, and Hanoi has set ambitious targets exceeding 10 percent growth for 2026 and subsequent years, with Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh asserting that double-digit growth is achievable. If these targets are met, Vietnam's nominal GDP could reach the mid-USD 500 billion range by 2026 or 2027, positioning it as Southeast Asia's third-largest economy after Indonesia, with GDP per capita exceeding USD 5,000 and approaching Indonesia's level.

The growth surge in Vietnam is largely driven by public investment and nationwide infrastructure development. Public investment plans for 2026 are expected to increase by around 26 percent, which could add roughly 1.6 percentage points to GDP growth. Significant projects include a new airport near Ho Chi Minh City, scheduled to open in 2026, and a China-backed northern rail project already under construction. However, challenges remain, including legal reforms and cutting bureaucratic red tape, as over 2,000 investment projects are stalled due to unresolved regulatory issues, which could affect the sustainability of growth.

In contrast, Thailand's economy is underperforming. The OECD projects real GDP growth of only 1.5 percent in 2026, a slowdown of 0.5 percentage points from the previous year. Weak domestic consumption is exacerbated by high household debt, while tourism has been slow to recover. Manufacturing faces headwinds from US import tariffs, prompting companies such as Suzuki Motor to exit four-wheel vehicle production and Honda Motor to scale back output. Moreover, escalating Thailand–Cambodia border tensions, which erupted into heavy fighting in December, have disrupted bilateral trade, tourism, and overall investor confidence. Analysts warn that continued geopolitical instability could deter foreign

investment and risk entangling Southeast Asia further in broader US–China strategic competition, highlighting the critical role of regional stability for sustained economic growth in the area. [The Nation]

Vietnam reaffirms ties with Saudi Arabia and the Philippines

(hn) Vietnamese leaders met outgoing ambassadors of Saudi Arabia and the Philippines, reaffirming commitments to strengthen bilateral ties and regional cooperation. Foreign Minister Lê Hoài Trung highlighted Việt Nam's appreciation of Saudi Arabia's regional and global role and agreed with Ambassador Mohammed Ismaeil A. Dahlwy to deepen cooperation through enhanced exchanges, improved legal frameworks, stronger investment ties, and support for Vietnam–GCC cooperation, including a future free trade agreement. President Lương Cường emphasized Saudi Arabia's importance as a key Middle East partner and noted steady growth in bilateral trade toward a USD 10 billion target by 2030, while both sides agreed to consider a higher-level cooperation framework.

President Cường and Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính also praised outgoing Philippine Ambassador Meynardo Los Baños Montealegre for advancing Vietnam–Philippines relations, particularly through effective implementation of the 2019–2024 Strategic Partnership Action Plan and expanded high-level exchanges. Việt Nam expressed condolences over recent natural disasters in the Philippines and pledged support, including a 2,000-tonne rice donation. Vietnamese leaders called for deeper cooperation in trade, defense, maritime affairs, climate change, and ASEAN coordination, and reaffirmed strong support for the Philippines' ASEAN Chairmanship in 2026, underscoring the importance of regional peace, unity, and stability. [Vietnamnews1] [Vietnamnews2] [Vietnamnews3]

Cambodia, Indonesia seal scholarship pact to strengthen human capital ties

(dql) Cambodia and Indonesia agreed to launch a new Indonesian Aid Scholarship program for 2026–2030, giving Cambodian government-nominated officials and students opportunities to study diploma, undergraduate and graduate programs at Indonesian universities and polytechnics.

The initiative aims to deepen bilateral educational cooperation and strengthen people-to-people links, with funding support covering students' academic and living needs. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia, South Korea strengthen tax cooperation to combat offshore evasion and illicit fund transfers

(dql) South Korea's National Tax Service (NTS) and Cambodia's tax authorities signed an agreement to enhance information-sharing on cross-border crimes, including illegal fund transfers and offshore tax evasion. The agreement builds on regular working-level meetings, aiming to address challenges posed by Cambodia not joining the multilateral automatic exchange of financial account information.

The move comes amid Seoul's intensified scrutiny of money laundering linked to online scams operated by criminal networks in Cambodia. [Yonhap News Agency]

Serbia provides humanitarian assistance to Cambodia

(mi) The Republic of Serbia has provided Cambodia with USD 500,000 in humanitarian financial assistance, to aid refugees following the border conflict with Thailand.

This donation comes after a bilateral meeting was held between the Cambodian and Serbian governments in 2025, promising the strengthen the ties between the two nations. [Kiripost]

China, Pakistan reaffirm strategic partnership as US engagement with Islamabad grows

(mis/ms) China and Pakistan moved to reinforce their long-standing strategic partnership on January 5, pledging deeper economic and security cooperation at a time when Islamabad's ties with Washington have shown signs of warming. During meetings in Beijing between Chinese President Xi Jinping and its Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari, both sides described their relationship as an "all-weather strategic partnership" and agreed to expand collaboration across trade, finance and infrastructure.

A joint statement said the two countries would work toward an upgraded version of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with a renewed focus on industry, agriculture and mining. Beijing also praised Pakistan's recent measures to protect Chinese nationals and projects, an issue that has strained ties after repeated militant attacks targeting Chinese workers.

Security issues featured prominently in the discussions. Beijing praised Pakistan's recent steps to protect Chinese nationals and projects after a series of militant attacks targeting Chinese engineers and workers, which have become a major source of friction. Both sides also called for stronger action against militant groups operating from Afghanistan, reflecting shared concerns about cross-border instability following the Taliban's return to power.

The reaffirmation comes as U.S.–Pakistan relations have improved since the return of Donald Trump to the White House, including renewed counter-terrorism cooperation and the release of U.S. funds linked to oversight of Pakistan's F-16 fleet. Analysts see this warming as introducing new diplomatic complexity for Beijing, which views Pakistan as a key partner in its regional strategy. [Radio Pakistan] [Reuters] [Xinhua]

India imposes new steel tariffs targeting cheap imports, hitting Chinese exporters

(mis) India has imposed new safeguard tariffs on selected steel products for a period of three years, a move aimed at shielding its domestic steel industry from a surge in low-priced imports, particularly from China, and adding fresh friction to already strained regional trade relations. The duties, announced in a government order published on December 30, reflect New Delhi's growing willingness to use trade defense tools to protect strategic industries.

Under the measure, India will levy an import duty of 12 percent in the first year, easing to 11.5 percent in the second and 11 percent in the third. While imports from some developing countries are exempt, shipments from China, Vietnam and Nepal will be subject to the tariffs. Specialty products such as stainless steel are excluded. The government said the step follows findings of a "recent, sudden, sharp and significant increase" in imports that has caused, or threatens to cause, serious injury to domestic producers.

China is seen as at the center of India's concerns. As the world's largest steel producer, China has been

exporting large volumes at low prices amid domestic overcapacity, prompting complaints from manufacturers across Asia. Indian industry groups have argued that subsidized Chinese steel distorts competition and erodes margins for local firms.

The Indian move also fits into a broader global pattern. U.S. steel tariffs under President Donald Trump have redirected Chinese exports toward other markets, intensifying competition in Asia. In response, countries such as South Korea and Vietnam have already imposed anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel this year. India's decision adds to that wave of defensive trade actions aimed at managing spillovers from global overcapacity. [Reuters] [India Today]

US President Trump blocks chip deal citing China links

(mis/ms) US President Donald Trump has blocked a small semiconductor-related acquisition, underscoring Washington's continued sensitivity around advanced technologies and Chinese links in strategic supply chains, even as US firms navigate growing Chinese demand for AI chips.

In an executive order issued on January 2, Trump prohibited US-based photonics firm HieFo Corp. from acquiring assets of New Jersey aerospace and defense specialist Emcore, citing national security concerns tied to China. The decision targets a 2024 deal under which HieFo agreed to buy Emcore's digital chips business and indium-phosphide wafer fabrication operations for about USD 3 million.

The order said there was "credible evidence" that HieFo, though incorporated in Delaware, is controlled by a citizen of the People's Republic of China and could take actions that threaten US national security. The administration did not publicly identify the individual or detail the specific risks. Enforcement will be overseen by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which flagged concerns during its review, according to the Treasury Department.

The move comes as Washington pursues a more selective approach to China-linked technology flows rather than blanket bans. While blocking sensitive acquisitions, the Trump administration has recently allowed limited exports of advanced AI chips to China under licensing and fee arrangements.

That balancing act is evident in the semiconductor market. Nvidia has approached Taiwan Semiconductor

Manufacturing Co to ramp up production of its H200 artificial intelligence chips after Chinese technology companies placed orders for more than two million units for 2026, according to Reuters. The administration only recently approved H200 exports to China, reversing a previous ban, though Beijing has yet to formally greenlight imports.

US officials argue that targeted controls are necessary to prevent strategic technologies from strengthening China's military and surveillance capabilities, while allowing US firms to compete commercially. Critics warn that policy uncertainty risks disrupting global supply chains and accelerating China's push for domestic alternatives.[Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3] [South China Morning Post] [The Hill]

US House China panel sees leadership change as Democrats recalibrate Beijing policy

(mis) Illinois Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi is stepping down as the top Democrat on the US House select committee focused on China, as he shifts attention to a Senate run for the seat currently vacated by Dick Durbin. The move reshuffles Democratic leadership on one of Congress's most prominent bipartisan forums dealing with China, without altering the panel's mandate or its cross-party composition.

Krishnamoorthi has served as the senior Democrat on the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party since its launch in 2023, helping steer investigations into economic, technological and security issues tied to China. During his tenure, he backed measures such as targeting Chinese firms, including restrictions on federal contracts with several biotech companies and legislation forcing TikTok's Chinese owner to divest or face a US ban. He has also been a vocal supporter of tighter export controls on advanced semiconductors.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said California Representative Ro Khanna will take over as the panel's ranking Democrat through the end of the current congressional term in January 2027. While Khanna supports reducing US dependence on Chinese supply chains and strengthening domestic industry, he has argued for what he calls "economic patriotism" paired with dialogue. On this matter, Khanna backed the Chips and Science Act but diverged from colleagues by opposing a stand-alone TikTok divestment bill and advocating engagement with

Beijing on issues such as AI safety and fentanyl trafficking.

Krishnamoorthi said the committee had shown that a firm but measured approach to China was possible, stressing competitiveness without “fear or prejudice”. With Khanna at the helm, Democrats are expected to maintain a tough stance on China while debating how far strategic competition should go. [POLITICO] [South China Morning Post]

China sustains imports of sanctioned Russian LNG through shadow shipping network

(ms) China is increasingly relying on a discreet shipping network and a single import hub to keep liquefied natural gas (LNG) flowing from Russian projects sanctioned by the United States and the European Union, according to ship-tracking data and industry accounts.

A Bloomberg investigation describes a “shadow” LNG fleet built around older tankers, opaque ownership changes, and tactics such as disabling or manipulating vessel tracking, enabling cargoes to move despite restrictions imposed after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. One example cited is an LNG carrier renamed CCH Gas, which allegedly used high-seas maneuvers, including ship-to-ship transfers in waters off Malaysia, to receive cargo linked to sanctioned supply chains before heading toward China.

The scale of sanctioned inflows is clearer in shipping datasets cited by Reuters. China received 22 LNG shipments in 2025 from two sanctioned Russian export projects — 21 from Arctic LNG 2 and one from Portovaya — with all cargoes delivered to the Beihai LNG Terminal in Guangxi, southern China. Reuters noted that Chinese state-owned firms CNPC and CNOOC each own 10 percent of Arctic LNG 2, underlining Beijing’s direct exposure to a project targeted by Western sanctions.

The flows are unfolding alongside a broader, rapid rise in Russia’s LNG position in China’s import mix. In November 2025, Russian LNG deliveries to China rose to about 1.6 million tons, lifting Moscow to China’s second-largest LNG supplier behind Qatar and overtaking Australia. Russian LNG accounted for 23.5 percent of China’s total LNG imports that month, up from roughly 11 percent a year earlier. Analysts described the increase largely as supply-driven, reflecting the resumption of output at Arctic LNG 2 and

the redirection of cargoes toward China after earlier disruptions.

For Moscow, sustaining LNG exports helps protect a key revenue stream as Europe tightens its energy exit. The European Parliament has backed plans to phase out Russian gas and LNG imports by late 2027, while the United Kingdom and the United States have expanded sanctions targeting Russia's energy sector. For China, discounted cargoes and diversified supply offer energy-security benefits, though maritime-risk observers warn that "dark fleet" practices raise safety, environmental, and crew-welfare risks in a sector where LNG handling requires specialized training and strict operational controls.[Bloomberg] [Discovery Alert] [Reuters]

China seeks closer ties with Ireland as channel to counter and ease tense EU relations

(ms) China signaled a renewed push to strengthen bilateral relations with Ireland during talks in Beijing on January 5, framing deeper cooperation with Dublin as part of a broader effort to stabilize its strained relationship with the European Union and engage with European members with a more friendly China position. Chinese President Xi Jinping told Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin that mutual respect and "win-win" cooperation had underpinned the long-term development of China–Ireland ties.

The meeting comes at a sensitive moment for China–EU relations, which have been under pressure from disputes over trade, technology and market access. Beijing has increasingly engaged EU member states individually, while its dialogue with Brussels has remained difficult. Xi urged Ireland to play a "constructive role" in supporting stable China–EU relations as Dublin prepares to assume the rotating presidency of the European Union Council later this year.

Economic considerations loomed large in the talks. China expressed interest in expanding cooperation with Ireland in areas such as artificial intelligence, the digital economy, pharmaceuticals and tourism. For Ireland, the visit carries particular weight following Beijing's recent decision to impose provisional tariffs of up to 42.7 percent on EU dairy products, a move widely viewed as retaliation for EU tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles. Ireland is one of Europe's largest dairy exporters, with the majority of its output shipped abroad.

Martin said Ireland recognized China's "indispensable role" globally and reiterated Dublin's commitment to open trade, while also emphasizing the interdependence of the global economy. His visit, the first by an Irish prime minister in 14 years, highlights Ireland's effort to balance its export-driven economic interests with EU trade policy unity. [Modern Diplomacy] [Reuters]

India moves to rebuild channels with Bangladesh's main opposition party ahead of February vote

(ms) India is signaling a shift in its Bangladesh engagement ahead of Dhaka's February 12 parliamentary election, reaching out to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the country's biggest opposition party after years of strained relations and after the political upheaval that removed the Awami League from the electoral field.

The change in tone was most visible on December 31, when Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met BNP acting chief Tarique Rahman – long the BNP's de facto leader from London and expected to formally assume the party chairmanship in the first half of January, consolidating his role ahead of the vote – in Dhaka during funeral events for former prime minister Khaleda Zia. Jaishankar delivered a condolence letter from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and later posted publicly that he had conveyed condolences and expressed confidence that Khaleda Zia's "vision and values" would guide future India–Bangladesh partnership — language analysts described as a clear departure from New Delhi's historically wary posture toward the BNP.

For much of the past decade, India's closest ties were with former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League. With Hasina now in exile in India and her party barred from contesting the February election, Indian officials appear to be widening political contacts in Dhaka, particularly with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which opinion polls and political analysts expect to emerge as the largest party in the next parliament.

The outreach comes amid concern in New Delhi about maintaining influence in its eastern neighbor as Pakistan and China seek to expand their political and economic presence in Bangladesh. Relations remain sensitive over India's decision to host Hasina, a move criticized by BNP leaders as campaigning intensifies. [Al Jazeera] [The Daily Star 1]

Separately but similar in nature, Bangladesh and India have launched coordinated water-flow measurements on the Padma and Ganges rivers as the 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty enters its final year ahead of expiry in December 2026. Joint monitoring began on January 1 at designated points, including upstream of the Hardinge Bridge in Bangladesh and at the Farakka Barrage in India, and will continue until May 31, with readings taken every ten days in line with treaty provisions.

The treaty regulates dry-season water allocation at Farakka through fixed thresholds, including equal sharing at lower flow levels and guaranteed minimum volumes for both sides as flows increase. While the framework has remained in force for three decades, Bangladesh has repeatedly reported shortages during the peak dry months of March and April. Officials said early-January 2026 flows are higher than in recent years, though seasonal variability remains a structural concern.

The measurements are conducted under the bilateral Joint Rivers Commission, which oversees implementation of shared river arrangements. Officials in Dhaka and New Delhi have confirmed that discussions on renewing the treaty have already begun, making the current monitoring cycle particularly relevant in the run-up to the agreement's expiry. [The Daily Star 2]

India deepens security engagement with Sri Lanka and outlines post-disaster financial support

(lm) India is advancing both its security cooperation and economic assistance to Sri Lanka through parallel diplomatic and military initiatives in early January.

India's Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of the Army Staff, is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka from January 7 to 8 as part of a regional tour that also includes the United Arab Emirates. The visit will include meetings with senior Sri Lankan military and civilian defense officials, discussions on training cooperation, capacity building, and regional security, and engagements at key military education institutions. He is also set to pay tribute at the Indian Peace Keeping Force memorial. [Daily Mirror 1]

Separately, India's post-disaster assistance following Cyclone Ditwah is taking shape through a revised financing package. Of the USD 450 million support announced earlier, USD 100 million will be provided as

a grant, while the remaining USD 350 million will be disbursed as Indian-rupee-denominated loans at concessional rates. Indian and Sri Lankan authorities are currently finalizing project modalities, with funding expected to support reconstruction of transport infrastructure, housing, health and education facilities, agriculture, and disaster-preparedness systems. Indian contractors are likely to participate in implementation alongside local partners.

In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, India also delivered large-scale humanitarian assistance under Operation Sagar Bandhu, including relief supplies, medical equipment, and emergency support, complementing the longer-term reconstruction financing now being prepared. [Daily Mirror 2]

Limited India–Pakistan contact in Bangladesh and parallel official developments

(lm) On December 31, 2025, a brief and publicly documented interaction took place between India and Pakistan in Dhaka on the sidelines of the state funeral of former Bangladeshi prime minister Khaleda Zia. Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq and India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar briefly exchanged greetings in the form of a handshake. According to Pakistan's National Assembly, the Indian minister initiated the exchange; India has not issued a public statement on the encounter. The interaction was the first publicly reported high-level contact between representatives of the two countries since their four-day military confrontation in May 2025. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

The funeral in Dhaka also provided the setting for separate meetings between Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and senior representatives from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Following these meetings, Yunus publicly reiterated calls for reviving the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC has remained inactive since 2016, when a planned summit was postponed after India withdrew following a militant attack it blamed on Pakistan; Pakistan denied involvement. Yunus also stated that he had previously attempted to convene informal SAARC-related discussions on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. [Arab News 3]

The Dhaka meetings took place after political changes in Bangladesh. Since the removal of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 and the

establishment of an interim administration, Bangladeshi officials have publicly signaled a reassessment of external relations.

Separately, on January 1, 2026, India and Pakistan carried out their regular exchange of lists of nuclear installations and prisoners under existing bilateral agreements. Under a 1988 agreement, both sides annually notify each other of nuclear facilities. Under the Consular Access Agreement, they exchange prisoner lists twice a year. Pakistan said it provided India with a list of 257 Indian prisoners (58 civilians and 199 fishermen). India said it shared with Pakistan a list of 391 civilian prisoners and 33 fishermen described as Pakistani or believed to be Pakistani. These exchanges took place despite the continued suspension of most high-level bilateral engagement. [Arab News 4]

During the same period, public statements added to bilateral tensions. Jaishankar referred to “bad neighbors” in remarks made in a separate setting and defended India’s decision to place the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance following an April 2025 militant attack in Indian-administered Kashmir. Islamabad rejected the remarks, described them as irresponsible, and stated that any unilateral violation of the treaty would undermine regional stability. Pakistan said it would take measures to safeguard its rights under the agreement, which governs river flows critical to its agriculture. [Arab News 5]

Also on December 31, Pakistan’s Chief of Defense Forces addressed participants at a National Workshop on Balochistan at military headquarters in Rawalpindi. He stated that militant groups allegedly backed by India were fueling violence and disrupting development in Balochistan. Pakistan has long made such allegations, which India denies. The remarks were delivered alongside reports citing increased militant violence during 2025 in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to figures from a Pakistani conflict monitoring organization. [Arab News 6]

US claims tariff pressure curbed India’s Russian oil imports, warns of further tariff increase

(dql) The US government has claimed that India reduced its imports of Russian crude oil in response to tariff pressure from Washington, with President Donald Trump stating that New Delhi acted to preserve favorable trade relations with the United States.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump suggested Prime Minister Narendra Modi scaled back purchases to avoid higher tariffs and to "keep him happy," arguing that such measures were part of wider efforts to weaken Russia's economy during the Ukraine war. He also warned that Washington could swiftly impose higher tariffs if New Delhi does not scale back these imports. [The Tribune] [The Economic Times]

Trump's remarks come as India has significantly reduced—but not abandoned—its dependence on Russian crude, with Moscow's share of Indian oil imports falling from a peak of about 44 peaks in mid-2025 to roughly one-quarter by December. Despite the decline, Russia remains India's top supplier, underscoring New Delhi's continued balancing act between energy security needs and Western pressure linked to the war in Ukraine.

The US has linked its tariff escalation on Indian exports to New Delhi's continued reliance on Russian crude, doubling duties to 50 percent after India emerged as the largest buyer of discounted Russian seaborne oil during the Ukraine war.

To mitigate both supply risk and tariff fallout, India has broadened its import mix. Shipments from Kuwait and Brazil have surged, while flows from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have remained stable; imports of U.S. crude also increased sharply after tariffs were raised. Brazil, another BRICS member, has itself been targeted with similar U.S. tariff actions, reflecting broader geopolitical frictions around the bloc's growing influence.

Domestically, Reliance Industries—one of India's largest private conglomerates and a major player in global fuel and petrochemicals trade—says it has halted Russian crude purchases for its Jamnagar refinery— among the world's largest—in response to sanctions exposure, denying reports of renewed shipments. [Nikkei Asia] [Reuters] [The New Indian Express]

Germany's Chancellor Merz to visit India

(dql) Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz will make his first official visit to India on 12–13 January, with talks centered on strengthening the India-Germany strategic partnership in trade, investment, technology, defence, and clean energy. [Ministry of External Affairs, India]

Merz and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet in Ahmedabad and Bengaluru, review 25 years of

bilateral strategic cooperation, and engage business leaders to spur industry-level collaboration. Discussions are expected to prioritize supply-chain investment, innovation, education and mobility links, defence and security cooperation, and joint work on green and sustainable development — including follow-up on the Indo-German green hydrogen roadmap launched in 2024. [The Tribune]

The trip comes as New Delhi seeks deeper economic ties with Europe amid heightened U.S. tariff pressure on Indian exports (see article in this edition) and ahead of major EU engagements in Delhi, including progress toward an India-EU free trade agreement. [India's World] [European Interest]

Major Japanese business delegation postpones China visit amid fallout from Takaichi's Taiwan remarks

(dql) A planned visit to China by a 200-member delegation from Japan's three leading business federations has been postponed after the groups were unable to secure confirmation of a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The organizations — including the Japan Business Federation, the Japan-China Economic Association, and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry — said the trip, scheduled for late January, was unlikely to yield meaningful results and set no new date.

The decision reflects the sharp downturn in bilateral ties following Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's November remarks that a Taiwan contingency could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan, implying possible Self-Defense Forces involvement alongside the United States.

Beijing has demanded the comments be retracted and signaled that political tensions are now constraining high-level economic exchanges. [Kyodo News]

Adding to the tensions, China on January 6 imposed an immediate ban on the export of dual-use goods to entities linked to Japan's military, saying it will block transfers that could strengthen Japan's defense capabilities. [SCMP]

Japan's Prime Minister Takaichi seeks March U.S. visit to meet Trump

(dql) Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and U.S. President Donald Trump agreed in a phone call on January 2 to begin planning a visit by Takaichi to the United States this spring, with Tokyo seeking a March trip to reinforce the strength of the bilateral alliance ahead of Trump's planned visit to China in April. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan]

The conversation, initiated by Japan, was framed by Takaichi as an important signal of alignment early in the year, particularly amid tensions with Beijing and concerns over stability in the Taiwan Strait.

In addition, the two leaders discussed Indo-Pacific security and affirmed close strategic coordination, including cooperation with South Korea and support for a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

For Tokyo, the visit is intended both to demonstrate unity to domestic and international audiences and to ensure Washington does not tilt toward a softer stance on China before Trump's China trip. The planned visit would be Takaichi's first to the U.S. since taking office last October. [Asia News Network]

The call took place amid heightened tensions with China following large-scale People Liberation Army drills around Taiwan last week — Beijing's closest-ever live-fire exercise near the island — and after Takaichi's comments in November suggesting Japan could intervene in a Taiwan conflict, which sharply worsened relations with Beijing.

While Tokyo had hoped for strong U.S. backing in response to the exercises, Washington's reaction has been cautious, urging China to show restraint but otherwise downplaying the drills as Trump appears to pursue a broader trade agenda ahead of his planned China visit. [The Japan Times] [Kyodo News]

Laos, South Korea strengthen partnership to counter online scam networks in Southeast Asia

(ms) Laos and the Republic of Korea have agreed to deepen cooperation against online scam operations in Southeast Asia after upgrading bilateral relations to a comprehensive partnership in December 2025.

The move followed talks between Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung marking the 30th anniversary of restored diplomatic ties. As part of the agreement, the two sides signed mutual legal assistance and extradition treaties,

enabling closer cooperation between police and judicial authorities, including evidence sharing and the repatriation of suspects.

Officials also agreed to establish a direct hotline between the South Korean embassy in Vientiane and Lao police. The cooperation targets scam networks operating across Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, a region identified by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime as a global hub for online fraud.

Scam operations, often based in repurposed hotels and casinos, have caused global losses exceeding USD 63.9 billion in 2024, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, while also fueling other forms of transnational crime. [Indo-Pacific Defense Forum]

Malaysia condemns US seizure of Venezuelan President Maduro

(dql) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has condemned the US military operation that captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, calling it a violation of international law and a dangerous precedent for forcibly removing a sitting head of state.

Anwar urged their immediate release and stressed that Venezuela's political future should be determined by its own people, warning that external interventions often worsen economic and social crises. [Free Malaysia Today] [Anadolu Ajansı]

China, Mongolia reaffirm commitment to advancing comprehensive strategic partnership

(fs) Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia Amartuvshin Gombosuren met with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Mongolia Shen Minjuan on December 30.

Gombosuren underlined that relations with China remain a key priority of Mongolia's foreign policy and expressed his intention to work closely to further expand bilateral cooperation. Minjuan welcomed the opportunity to continue cooperation, reaffirming China's readiness to further develop the comprehensive strategic partnership.

The two sides also exchanged views on priority areas of cooperation, as well as planned visits and joint activities scheduled for 2026. [Montsame]

China nominates senior Asia affairs official as new ambassador to Nepal

(lm) China has proposed Zhang Maoming as its next ambassador to Kathmandu and has formally submitted a request to Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Zhang currently serves as a deputy director in the Department of Asian Affairs at China's Ministry of Foreign AffairsAsia. He is expected to replace Chen Song, who has returned to China after completing a three-year term in Kathmandu and has since been promoted to head the ministry's Department of Policy and Planning, which oversees strategic foreign policy analysis and diplomatic planning. [The Kathmandu Post]

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un highlights "invincible" alliance with Russia in new year speech

(dql) Kim Jong-un used his New Year message to celebrate North Korea's tightening partnership with Russia, portraying the country's participation in the Ukraine war as helping forge an "invincible alliance" between Pyongyang and Moscow. He praised North Korean troops deployed abroad for supporting Russia's military campaign, urging them to remain steadfast and suggesting that further overseas operations may follow. [KCNA]

Intelligence assessments from South Korea and Western governments indicate that thousands of North Korean personnel have been sent to aid Russia, with heavy casualties reported. In return, Pyongyang is believed to be receiving economic assistance, energy supplies and military-related technology, providing Kim with crucial relief from sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

Reports also point to severe conditions for North Korean troops on the battlefield, including orders not to be taken prisoner, while some captured soldiers in Ukraine have reportedly sought to defect. [The Guardian]

For 2026, analysts expect Pyongyang to continue leveraging global instability to strengthen ties with

Russia and China. Cooperation with Moscow is projected to expand into a reciprocal military relationship, trading ammunition, missiles and manpower for technological transfers that could accelerate advances in missiles, submarines, drones and defense systems — an arrangement that also helps bypass sanctions. Relations with China will remain essential as an economic safety net and political buffer, providing stability while limiting the risks of escalation.

More broadly, analysts assess that North Korea's foreign policy in 2026 will emphasize caution and strategic opportunism — avoiding major provocations while deepening great-power alignments that enhance regime security and military capacity. Pyongyang is likely to refrain from dramatic nuclear or long-range missile tests ahead of Donald Trump's planned April 2026 summit with Xi Jinping, in hopes of preserving the possibility of a direct meeting with the U.S. president. Any prospective summit, however, would be conditioned on Washington softening its longstanding demand for full denuclearization.

At the same time, North Korea is expected to maintain its hardened posture toward South Korea, continuing a policy of non-engagement and denying Seoul political relevance in inter-Korean affairs. Pyongyang views only the United States — working through the UN Security Council — as capable of delivering sanctions relief and security guarantees and therefore sees South Korea as unable to affect its core strategic needs.

This stance is likely to be codified at the upcoming Ninth Party Congress through a narrative framing the two Koreas as separate and adversarial states. [The Diplomat] [SCMP] [Kyodo News]

Pakistan and Egypt finalize extradition agreements and expand security cooperation

(lm) Pakistan and Egypt have finalized agreements on the extradition and transfer of criminal suspects and agreed to expand cooperation in security-related areas.

The agreements were discussed during a meeting in Islamabad between Pakistan's state minister for interior and Egypt's ambassador to Pakistan. According to the interior ministry, both sides agreed to complete the legal framework covering mutual assistance in the extradition and transfer of criminals, as well as cooperation in counter-narcotics. The meeting also

reviewed broader bilateral engagement, including measures aimed at facilitating people-to-people contacts.

In a separate diplomatic engagement, Pakistan and Egypt reaffirmed their support for dialogue and diplomacy as the preferred means of addressing regional conflicts, including the situation in Yemen, during a telephone call between the two countries' foreign ministers. [Arab News]

China conducts law enforcement patrols near disputed Scarborough Shoal, also claimed by Philippines

(ms) China has reported conducting law enforcement patrols near Huangyan Dao, also known as Scarborough Shoal or Bajo de Masinloc, a disputed maritime feature in the South China Sea that is also claimed by the Philippines. In a statement, the China Coast Guard said the patrols took place within what Beijing considers its territorial waters and were carried out in accordance with Chinese laws and regulations. The agency added that similar patrols have been conducted regularly since December.

According to the statement, the patrols are intended to regulate maritime activities and address what China describes as illegal incursions or provocations in the area. China maintains that it has sovereignty over the shoal and surrounding waters, a position it has long asserted despite a 2016 arbitral ruling that found no legal basis for China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Philippine authorities have not issued an official response to the latest Chinese patrols. Manila, however, has consistently cited the arbitral ruling and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in asserting that Scarborough Shoal lies within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

Separately, Philippine officials said an aircraft was deployed to monitor and challenge a Chinese research vessel operating near Cagayan province in northern Luzon. The Philippine Coast Guard said its pilot issued radio challenges to the vessel, seeking clarification of its activities and reminding it of requirements for prior authorization for marine scientific research in Philippine waters. The Chinese vessel did not respond to the radio calls, according to the Philippine side.

The developments come amid continued diplomatic exchanges between Beijing and Manila over maritime

rights in the West Philippine Sea. China has reiterated calls for both sides to manage differences and address what it describes as overlapping claims through dialogue, while the Philippines has maintained that its claims are supported by international law and the 2016 ruling. [Anadolu Ajansi] [PhilStar 1] [PhilStar 2]

Seychelles destroys Sri Lankan fishing vessel after interception in territorial waters

(ms) Seychelles authorities intercepted and destroyed a Sri Lankan multi-day fishing trawler found operating illegally in the country's territorial waters on December 30, an incident that has since prompted calls for an investigation from fishing industry groups in Sri Lanka.

According to reports emerging on January 5 and 6, the vessel was seized by Seychelles maritime enforcement agencies during a patrol operation aimed at combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Six Sri Lankan nationals who were on board the trawler were arrested and remain in custody pending further legal proceedings.

The All Ceylon Multi-day Trawler Owners' Association has urged the Sri Lanka government, as well as international maritime and environmental bodies, to investigate the incident. The association questioned the necessity of destroying the vessel and raised concerns about possible marine pollution resulting from fuel, oil, or waste released during the process.

Seychelles authorities have not publicly detailed the circumstances under which the trawler was destroyed. However, the country has consistently maintained a zero-tolerance stance toward illegal fishing, which it views as a serious threat to national sovereignty, food security, and marine ecosystems. Enforcement measures in Seychelles waters have previously included the seizure and disposal of foreign vessels found in violation of fisheries laws. [The Island]

South Korean President Lee meets Chinese President Xi

(co/mis) President Lee Jae Myung embarked on a four-day state visit to China from January 4 to 7, including a summit with Xi Jinping on January 5, marking the first such visit by a South Korean president since 2019. The trip aims to fully restore the South Korea–China

strategic cooperative partnership, according to National Security Adviser Wi Sung-lac.

The two leaders took part in a series of official engagements, beginning with a formal welcoming ceremony and summit, followed by the signing of 14 memorandums of understanding covering the economy, industry, climate, environment and transportation, as well as a state banquet.

Lee and Xi agreed to hold annual leaders' meetings and restore strategic communication channels, including on unresolved maritime boundaries in the Yellow Sea, revive foreign, security and defense dialogues, and pursue vice minister-level consultations on maritime delimitation this year.

They also agreed to gradually expand cultural exchanges within mutually acceptable limits and reaffirmed a shared interest in peace on the Korean Peninsula, with China expressing willingness to play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue with North Korea. [The Korea Herald 1]

A memorandum was linked to establishing a regular commercial cooperation dialogue, institutionalizing what had previously been sporadic ministerial-level talks between Seoul's trade ministry and Beijing's commerce ministry, alongside agreements to deepen cooperation on South Korea–China industrial parks and supply-chain integration. Additional memorandums expanded collaboration from small and medium-sized enterprises to startups, underscoring that the visit aimed not only at summit symbolism but at rebuilding the practical machinery of bilateral economic cooperation. Bilateral trade between China and South Korea reached a peak of approximately USD 310.3 billion in 2022 before entering a downturn from 2023 onward. [The Korea Herald 2]

The meeting was seen as being marked by a notably warm atmosphere, underscored by a selfie posted by Lee that was taken on a Chinese Xiaomi phone gifted by Xi at the APEC summit late last year. Lee said the summit serves as a foundation stone for restoring South Korea-China relations, while National Security Office Director Wi Sung-lac told reporters the two leaders had built personal rapport through their recent summits. [The Korea Times]

In addition to the summit with Xi, Lee held meetings with Zhao Leji, head of China's National People's Congress, and Premier Li Qiang on January 6. The talks emphasized rebuilding "political and civic trust," expanding parliamentary and people-to-people

exchanges, and strengthening the South Korea–China strategic cooperative partnership.

Lee sought to anchor cooperation in livelihoods, peace and economic stability, while encouraging broader cultural and societal engagement — including a symbolic request for an additional panda loan — as a way to improve public sentiment in both countries. Beijing signaled support for deeper cooperation across legislatures, youth, culture and local-government channels, and welcomed Lee's invitation for Zhao to visit Seoul.

With Li Qiang, Lee called for widening practical economic collaboration beyond manufacturing into services, tourism, content and consumer industries, and linked China's economic leadership role to regional peace and trilateral coordination with Japan.

The visit was backed by a 400-member South Korean business delegation, underscoring Seoul's effort to stabilize ties and protect supply-chain interests, particularly in semiconductor-linked industrial regions such as the Yangtze River Delta. [The Korea Herald 3]

South Korea and China made tangible progress in economic and political cooperation, though observers caution against overinterpretation and stress the need for a balanced assessment. Academics note that, after years of diplomatic stagnation, the meeting's primary significance lies in the improved tone and tentative normalization of relations rather than in the volume of immediate agreements. [The Korea Herald 4]

The visit also reflected a broader recalibration in Seoul's foreign policy following Lee's election in a snap vote last year. Lee, who represents the ruling—more left-leaning—Democratic Party of Korea, has pledged to maintain South Korea's security alliance with the United States while pursuing a more pragmatic and less confrontational approach toward China and North Korea than his predecessor Yoon Suk-yeol of the conservative opposition People Power Party. [Deutsche Welle] [South China Morning Post]

Ahead of the visit, Lee Jae Myung reaffirmed South Korea's commitment to the one-China policy, describing it as a "core guideline" governing bilateral relations with China. His remarks come amid heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait, following large-scale military exercises conducted by Beijing near the island earlier this week. [Yonhap News Agency]

North Korea launches missile strikes ahead of Seoul-Beijing summit

North Korea fired what are believed to be several ballistic missiles into the East Sea on January 4, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, continuing a recent show of force. The timing — a day before President Lee Jae Myung's summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing — has fueled assessments that Pyongyang is sending a political signal to Seoul and its allies. The missiles flew roughly 900 kilometers and landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, prompting a National Security Office meeting in Seoul condemning the launches as violations of UN resolutions.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un called the tests—which according to state media involved a hypersonic weapon system—"necessary" in light of what he described as escalating geopolitical crises and increasingly complex international events, state media reported. He added that Kim the tests demonstrated the operational readiness of North Korea's nuclear forces while emphasizing the need to continuously upgrade offensive weapon systems to place the country's nuclear deterrent on a fully practical war footing. [Anadolu Ajansı] [Euronews]

Analysts note the test comes amid intensified North Korean weapons development, including Kim's recent inspection of munitions factories and orders to sharply boost precision-guided missile production. [The Korea Herald 5]

Pentagon downplays report on U.S. aviation squadron shutdown in South Korea

(dql) The U.S. Defense Department has announced that no final decision has been made regarding the reported deactivation of the 5th Air Cavalry Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, stationed at Camp Humphreys in South Korea, declining to comment on what was described as a "pre-decisional" force-structure matter.

The clarification followed a Congressional Research Service report stating the unit ceased operations in mid-December, fueling speculation that the Trump administration may be considering adjustments to U.S. ground forces on the peninsula as part of a broader realignment to address challenges from China.

Since 2022, the squadron which fields Apache attack helicopters and reconnaissance drones, has supported the 2nd Infantry Division—the core U.S. ground combat formation in South Korea which plays a central role in deterrence against North Korea and combined

operations with the South Korean military. [Yonhap News Agency]

U.S. awards Lockheed contract to supply Taiwan with new long-range infrared tracking systems for Air Force

(dql) The U.S. Department of War has approved a new foreign military sales contract with Lockheed Martin to provide Taiwan's Air Force with Legion infrared search-and-track systems, with funding allocated to start the program and delivery expected through 2031. [Taiwan News] [Defence Industry Europe]

The NTD 10.3 billion (USD 328.5 million) deal is part of a growing pipeline of U.S. arms packages still pending delivery and comes on the heels of recent large-scale Chinese military drills around the island (see AiR No. 52, December/2025, 5).

Cambodia-Thailand ceasefire strained amid competing legal claims and parallel security developments

(bk/lm) Between late December 2025 and early January 2026, tensions along the Thailand–Cambodia border resurfaced despite a formally agreed ceasefire, with Bangkok and Phnom Penh issuing opposing legal and factual accounts while military, humanitarian, and transnational security developments unfolded in parallel.

On December 27, 2025, Thailand and Cambodia signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement following months of clashes linked to long-standing disputes over the demarcation of their approximately 800-kilometer shared border, much of which is based on colonial-era maps. The ceasefire was intended to halt hostilities while established bilateral mechanisms—notably the General Border Committee (GBC) and the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC)—address unresolved boundary issues. This December ceasefire followed an earlier truce brokered in July 2025 by the United States, China, and Malaysia, which temporarily halted fighting but subsequently collapsed.

Against this backdrop, and following several days of renewed accusations, Cambodia on January 6, 2026 proposed convening a bilateral border committee meeting later in January in Siem Reap, presenting the initiative as a means to address border surveying and

demarcation through existing mechanisms. Thailand responded that while it remained committed to bilateral frameworks, substantive discussions on surveying and demarcation might need to be deferred until after Thailand's February 8 general election, citing the limited mandate of the caretaker government during the election period. [Bangkok Post 1]

In the immediate aftermath of the ceasefire, both sides undertook humanitarian and confidence-building measures.

On December 31, 2025, Thailand released 18 Cambodian soldiers captured during fighting in July 2025. The release followed a requirement that the ceasefire be observed for at least 72 hours and was conducted under monitoring by the International Committee of the Red Cross and regional observers. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

On January 3, 2026, Cambodian authorities repatriated 162 Thai nationals who had been detained in Siem Reap province during earlier border tensions.

During the same period, Thai security forces detained 67 Cambodian nationals, including women and children, who crossed illegally into eastern Thailand. According to Thai officials, those detained cited economic hardship and lack of employment in Cambodia as their reason for attempting entry. [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5]

Despite these exchanges, competing accusations soon re-emerged. Between January 2 and 5, Cambodia issued a formal protest note alleging that, between December 7 and December 27, 2025—that is, prior to the ceasefire—Thai forces had conducted coordinated military operations across multiple sections of the border. Phnom Penh claimed that Thai actions involved the seizure of territory in Banteay Meanchey, Pursat, Preah Vihear, and Oddar Meanchey provinces, as well as the demolition of civilian homes and cultural structures. Cambodia cited the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions, and multiple bilateral agreements concluded during 2025, and called on Thailand to halt unilateral actions, withdraw personnel and equipment, and respect established border-demarcation mechanisms. Cambodia's Joint Boundary Commission lodged a formal protest with its Thai counterpart and urged international scrutiny. [Thai PBS World 1] [Thai PBS World 2] [Bangkok Post 6]

Thailand formally rejected these allegations. Through statements by the Joint Press Centre on the Thailand–Cambodia Border Situation and senior military spokespersons, Bangkok maintained that all Thai troop

deployments remained within Thai sovereign territory or in areas long subject to bilateral dispute and review. Thai authorities stated that no new incursions into Cambodian territory had occurred either before or after the ceasefire, arguing that Cambodia had, over decades, encroached on Thai-claimed areas by stationing troops and supporting civilian settlements. According to Thai officials, recent operations constituted the recovery and securing of territory Thailand considers its own and were defensive in nature, aimed at protecting civilians and preventing escalation. Thailand also accused Cambodia of employing "information warfare" by mischaracterizing the legal status of disputed areas. [Bangkok Post 7] [Bangkok Post 8] [Bangkok Post 9]

The ceasefire was further strained on January 6, when the Thai army reported that Cambodian forces fired mortar rounds into the Chong Bok area of Ubon Ratchathani province, wounding one Thai soldier. Thailand described the incident as a violation of the ceasefire; no Cambodian response was reported at the time. [Bangkok Post 1]

The border tensions have also intersected with transnational crime and economic security concerns. On January 5, Thai police identified a new scam center in Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey province, believed to have relocated deeper into Cambodian territory following Thai crackdowns near the border and cooperation with China and Myanmar against scam networks. Thai authorities reported thousands of scam cases domestically in the preceding week alone. [Bangkok Post 10]

In parallel, on December 27, the Thai navy seized a Thai-registered oil tanker in the Gulf of Thailand suspected of smuggling fuel to Cambodia in violation of Thailand's post-conflict ban on border trade, citing national security concerns. [Bangkok Post 11]

Vietnam and China looking to increase cooperation in trade, investment and finance

(In) On January 3, Vietnam's Minister of Finance, Nguyễn Văn Thắng, met with Chinese Ambassador to Việt Nam, Ha Wei, in Hanoi and held a working session to discuss hopes of increased cooperation in trade, investment and finance.

Nguyễn underlined the strong growth in Vietnam and China's economic relations with bilateral trade between the two countries exceeding USD 200 billion

within the first ten months of 2025. Currently, Chinese investors are involved in more than 6,000 projects in Vietnam worth USD 35 billion. He mentions how China's 15th Five-Year Plans regarding socioeconomic development is similar to Vietnam's current socioeconomic development plans and its helpfulness in the finance ministry's policy advice. The countries would continue to effectively cooperate within finance, state-owned enterprise (SOEs) and strategic infrastructure, with plans for Vietnam to learn from China's SOE overhaul experience. Additionally, he called for a continuation of China's financial support and general aid in the Hà Nội-Hải Phòng-Lào Cai railway project. Reflecting on the amicable relationship between the countries, Nguyễn showed appreciation for the Chinese government and its people for the USD 500,000 aid package to help Vietnam in its flood recovery.

Ambassador Ha Wei reaffirmed Vietnam and China's relationship is entering a "second golden period" as economic and trade ties are thriving with many Chinese firms investing in Vietnam. He also acknowledged the plans for Chinese firms to increase their operations in Vietnam and vice versa. [Vietnamnews]

United States bans seafood import from 12 fisheries from Vietnam

(ln) On January 1, the United States banned seafood imports from 12 Vietnamese fisheries after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) denied comparability findings for the fisheries based on the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The ban affects a variety of Vietnamese seafood exports including tuna, mackerel, squid and more.

The NOAA compatibility findings establish whether "a foreign export or exempt fishery has met applicable conditions to ensure the safety of marine mammals during commercial fishing". Under the MMPA, the United States has banned imports for fish that have been caught using methods that kill or injure marine mammals more than the country's standards. The fisheries in which the NOAA has approved compatibility findings still require a Certificate of Admissibility (COA). NOAA assistant administrator, Eugenio Piñeiro Soler, said that the import provisions "guarantee that foreign fisheries meet the gold standard that is set by American fishermen". (NOAA)

The NOAA have reported that some Vietnamese fisheries have gaps in its fishery management system,

especially regarding monitoring, reporting and mitigating interactions with marine animals. With the ban in effect from January 1, the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers have predicted economic losses of USD 500 million annually for Vietnam's ocean economy. As a response, the Deputy Director of the Directorate of Fisheries under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Lê Trần Nguyên Hùng, said that authorities advise "businesses to strengthen exports to existing markets and promptly explore new ones to reduce pressure from the U.S. ban." The Directorate of Fisheries also held an online conference with local fishing authorities and enterprises to provide support and guidance, especially about administrative issues regarding the COA. [TuoiTre]

Vietnam, Spain take steps toward upgrading bilateral relations

(ms) Vietnam and Spain have taken concrete steps toward upgrading their bilateral relationship, following a series of diplomatic and economic developments in 2025, according to remarks by Spanish Ambassador Carmen Cano De Lasala.

A key milestone was the official visit of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to Hanoi in April 2025, the first such visit since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1977. During the visit, Sánchez and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính agreed to work toward elevating ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership. The initiative was followed by the first meeting of the Joint Committee for Economic, Trade and Investment Cooperation, held in Madrid later in the year.

Economic links have expanded, supported by the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement. Trade between Vietnam and Spain increased 17 percent in 2024 to around EUR 6 billion (USD 7 billion), while overall EU–Vietnam trade has grown significantly since the agreement took effect. Spanish officials, however, have pointed to persistent trade imbalances and non-tariff barriers as issues that could limit further expansion.

Tourism and business exchanges have also increased, with close to 100,000 Spanish tourists visiting Vietnam annually. Cooperation has extended into fisheries and maritime management, particularly in efforts to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, following the signing of a bilateral memorandum of understanding in April.

Officials on both sides indicate that progress in these practical areas will shape the pace and scope of any formal upgrade in relations. [Vietnam Law]

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính calls for deeper AFK Sistema–Vietnam cooperation across high-tech and strategic sectors

(hn) On January 5, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính urged Russian conglomerate AFK Sistema to deepen cooperation with Vietnamese firms and translate high-level Vietnam–Russia agreements into concrete results during a reception in Hà Nội.

He reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment to strengthening its long-standing partnership with Russia and highlighted priority cooperation areas where Russia has strengths and Vietnam has demand, including digital transformation, cybersecurity, banking, pharmaceuticals, nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, telecommunications, metro projects, space-related initiatives and tourism. Chinh also outlined Vietnam's plans to streamline investment through a national one-stop mechanism and encouraged greater technology transfer, governance sharing and workforce training, while calling for progress on an intergovernmental agreement for the Ninh Thuận 1 nuclear power plant.

AFK Sistema's founder Vladimir Evtushenkov affirmed Vietnam as a trusted partner, pledged expanded cooperation, increased localization, technology transfer and workforce training, and highlighted the group's ambition to become a global leader in high-tech investment. [Vietnamnews] [Hanoitimes]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

7 January 2026 @ 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Battlefield Lessons from Ukraine: Rethinking Defense Production

The ongoing war in Ukraine has highlighted rapid shifts in battlefield technology and the strain on arms procurement as Ukraine relies on U.S. and European support. This online panel will examine lessons for U.S. and allied defense procurement, addressing current shortfalls, corrective steps taken, and how strategies must evolve to meet the demands of modern warfare. For more information and registration, please see [Carnegie].

8 January 2026 @ 10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

AI, supply chains, and trade resets: The global economy in 2026

In this online talk Jan Hatzius, chief economist at Goldman Sachs, will discuss prospects for the global economy in 2026. Reflecting on a year marked by US tariffs, China's export controls, shifting trade balances, central bank policy moves, and developments in digital currencies, Hatzius will highlight the key economic indicators and trends—also considering how the accelerating global race in artificial intelligence is reshaping supply chains and investment flows. For more information and registration, please see [Atlantic Council].

12 January 2026 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

2026 in the Americas: Stories that may drive the news

This online panel will explore the political, security, and economic developments set to shape Latin America and the Caribbean in 2026. Journalists will discuss key stories to watch, potential surprises, and the implications of electoral shifts, geopolitical pressures, and evolving U.S. engagement across the region.

For more information and registration, please see [Atlantic Council].

12 January 2025 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

Next Steps for the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Deterrence, Cybersecurity, and Indo-Pacific Partnerships

This webcast will explore opportunities and challenges facing U.S.-Japan relations, focusing on strengthening deterrence, operational readiness, cybersecurity, and regional partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. For more information and registration, please see [CSIS].

13 January 2026 @ 6:00-7:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

The Director's Annual Lecture 2026

At this hybrid event, Bronwen Maddox, Director and Chief Executive of Chatham House, will examine the global struggle to shape the future international order. She will address key questions, including the likely outcome of the US–China contest, the relevance of international law today, and the prospects for national resilience.

For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

Recent Book Releases

Isak Ladegaard, ***Open Secrecy: How Technology Empowers the Digital Underworld***, University of California Press, 304 pages, published May 20, 2025. For a review, see [LSE].

Rian Thum, ***Islamic China: An Asian History***, Harvard University Press, 304 pages, published November 25, 2025. For a review, see [Asian Review of Books].

Zachary Abuza, ***The Vietnam People's Army: From People's Warfare to Military Modernization?***, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 323 pages, published July 10, 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].

Jobs and Positions

RTI International seeks a **Director – Surveys and Observational Studies**. The deadline for application submission is March 31, 2026. For more information, see [RTI].

The **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** seeks a **Senior Project Manager**. The deadline for application submission is January 9, 2026. For more information, see [ICMPD].

Action Against Hunger seeks a **Program Director – South Sudan**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [Action Against Hunger].

The **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)** seeks a **Supply Chain Team Leader**. The deadline for application submission is January 19, 2026. For more information, see [DRC].

FHI 360 seeks a **Project Director – Manila, The Philippines**. The deadline for application submission is January 19, 2026. For more information, see [FHI 360].

The **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** seeks a **Managing Director – Southeastern Europe**. The deadline for application submission is January 7, 2026. For more information, see [EBRD].

The **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** seeks an **Associate Human Rights Officer** (Capacity-building).

Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [OHCHR].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **National Displacement Consultant.** The deadline for application submission is January 7, 2026. For more information, see [IOM].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks a **Project Manager.** The deadline for application submission is January 10, 2026. For more information, see [ILO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks **Project Coordinator**. The deadline for application submission is January 14, 2026. For more information, see [FAO].

The **World Bank** seeks an **Operations Analyst**. The deadline for application submission is January 9, 2026. For more information, see [World Bank].

The **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)** seeks a **Research Assistant – Aerospace Security Project**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, see [CSIS].

Team:

Aika Sagheer (as), Alex Bushnell (ab), Amy Carlotti Lu (acl), Aung Naing Lin (anl), Azra Selvi Kapu (ask), Busawan Kachonnarongvanish (bk), Christopher Ocker (co), Dániel Babcsán (dnb), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Edda Árnadóttir (ea), Elif Cagatay (ec), Felix Serna Calvo (fs), Gemelee Hirang Domnik (ghd), Grey Pilarczyk (gp), Hoa Khanh Ngo (hn), Henning Glaser (hg), Linh Nguyen (ln), Lucas Meier (lm), Marina Martinez Lopez (mml), Marcus Irving (mi), Michel Schuh (mis), Morten Strantzen (ms), Muhammed Yulmaz (my), Myat Sandar Zaw (msz), Nat Ng Ther Li (nl), Po Po Myint Shein (ppms), Sibghat Ullah (su), Sreepreya Srinivasan (ss), Thoon Nadi Lynn (tl), Venus Phuangkom, Yamonyongyos Anankajeerapong (ya), Yi-Chen Lin (yl)

We would greatly appreciate your feedback! Please send any feedback you have regarding this newsletter to: info@cpg-online.de

Also, don't forget to Like CPG on Facebook, and browse our *website* for other updates and news!

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

www.cpg-online.de
www.facebook.com/cpgtu

Preferences | Unsubscribe