Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

No. 8, February/2024, 4

Brought to you by CPG and Dynamic Minds

Dear Readers,

The Asia in Review (AiR) team is pleased to present you this week´s AiR issue with the latest events, developments and trends in domestic politics, international relations and geopolitics in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Wishing you an informative read, I extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Independence Day of the Dominican Republic, Estonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Day of Brunei and Kuwait, and the March 1st Movement Day of South Korea 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: Stronger scrutiny of officials with family members overseas

(ms) China has widened its long-running anti-corruption campaign by tightening restrictions on government officials and executives at state-owned enterprises who have close family members living abroad, according to people familiar with the matter and media reports.

The latest measures expand oversight beyond so-called “naked officials,” a term used for cadres whose spouses and children reside overseas. For more than a decade, such individuals have faced limits on promotions and leadership appointments due to concerns over corruption risks, capital flight, and divided loyalties.

Recent inspections, however, have broadened the focus to include a category described by analysts as “quasi-naked officials” — those whose children live abroad while their spouses remain in China. Individuals in this group are now subject to heightened monitoring and reporting requirements, sources told the South China Morning Post.

The issue is particularly sensitive in China, where sending children overseas for education has long been common among wealthy families, business elites, and government officials. International study is often viewed as a pathway to advanced education, global networks, and career opportunities. Even among senior Chinese leaders, overseas education for family members has not been unusual, reflecting broader social and economic trends rather than solely political considerations.

According to people familiar with the inspections, reviews have been conducted since early last year across government bodies and major state-owned enterprises. The scrutiny centers on overseas family connections, residency status, and compliance with disclosure rules. Some officials have reportedly seen promotions delayed or lost positions following the reviews.

Chinese authorities have not publicly detailed the new enforcement steps, however the campaign fits into Xi more and more regulated agenda, however it should be noted, that Xi’s daughter studied in the US herself. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [Zaobao in Chinese]

China: Benchmark lending rates unchanged for 9 months in a row

(ms) China left its benchmark lending rates unchanged in February, marking the ninth consecutive month without a cut. The one-year loan prime rate (LPR) remained at 3.0 percent, while the five-year LPR stayed at 3.5 percent.

The decision signals a cautious policy stance following recent targeted easing measures. Analysts say authorities are not rushing into broad rate reductions despite economic headwinds. While China met its roughly 5 percent growth target last year, growth is expected to slow in 2026 amid weak domestic demand and global uncertainties. The central bank has indicated room for future policy adjustments, including possible reserve requirement ratio reductions.

China: Alibaba unveils new AI model as domestic agent competition intensifies

(ms) Alibaba has launched Qwen3.5, a new artificial intelligence model aimed at the emerging “agentic AI” market, where systems are designed to execute tasks across applications rather than simply generate text. The release comes amid growing competition with Chinese rivals including ByteDance’s Doubao and DeepSeek.

According to Alibaba, Qwen3.5 delivers substantial efficiency gains, with usage costs reduced by 60 percent and workload capacity expanded eightfold compared with its predecessor. The company also highlighted “visual agentic capabilities,” enabling the model to interact with mobile and desktop apps. Alibaba reported that internal benchmark tests showed Qwen3.5 outperforming rival US models, though the results were self-reported.

The launch underscores intensifying competition in China’s AI sector. ByteDance recently upgraded Doubao, while DeepSeek is widely expected to introduce a new model generation. Qwen3.5 is offered in two versions: an open-weight model for independent deployment and a cloud-based API service. The open-weight variant contains 397 billion parameters, supports 201 languages and dialects, and is designed for compatibility with open-source AI agent frameworks. [Reuters] [CNBC]

China: New 155mm naval gun on spotted on experimental vessel

Recent images circulating on Chinese social media show a previously unseen 155mm naval gun mounted on the bow of a People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy) Type 910 weapons trials ship at Liaoning Shipyard in Dalian. The sighting marks the first known appearance of a weapon of this caliber on a modern Chinese naval platform and suggests the system has entered an evaluation phase.

The Type 910 vessel is designed for testing and integration of emerging technologies, allowing the PLA Navy to assess new weapons and sensors without affecting operational warships. Analysts say the platform choice indicates the gun remains under development, with trials likely focused on recoil

behavior, structural stress, and fire control compatibility.

The turret and barrel configuration resemble a 155mm naval gun previously linked to Inner Mongolia Northern Heavy Industries Group, a subsidiary of China North Industries Group Corporation (NORINCO). Data associated with earlier images of the system indicated a total assembly weight of approximately 21,800 kilograms. That figure exceeds the mass of the 130mm H/PJ-38 guns currently installed on China's Type 052D and Type 055 destroyers, implying that significant reinforcement or redesign would be required for deployment aboard frontline combatants.

Chinese defense authorities have not released technical details. Prior reporting suggested the gun may be designed to fire guided projectiles, a capability that could expand its operational flexibility. China's largest widely deployed naval gun, the 130mm H/PJ-38, is estimated to achieve a maximum range of roughly 23 kilometers with conventional ammunition. A shift to 155mm could provide greater payload capacity and potentially longer reach, depending on munition types.

Naval analysts note that larger-caliber systems typically deliver heavier shells but involve trade-offs, including slower firing rates and reduced ammunition storage. Any operational adoption would depend on how the system complements missile-based strike capabilities, which dominate modern naval warfare.

The test installation follows earlier Chinese experimentation with ship-mounted electromagnetic railguns first observed in 2018. Unlike those systems, a conventional 155mm gun would rely on mature artillery technologies, potentially reducing technical risk.

The PLA Navy has not commented on the images or the program's intended role. [TWZ] [South China Morning Post]

China: 'Reverse Great Firewall' raises barriers to overseas access

(mis) A growing share of Chinese government websites is no longer accessible from abroad, according to new research that points to the emergence of a so-called "reverse Great Firewall". While China's original firewall restricts domestic access to foreign platforms, the new pattern limits foreign access to Chinese official data.

The study, published in the Journal of Cybersecurity, examined more than 13,000 government websites and found that over half were inaccessible from overseas locations. About 10 percent showed clear signs of deliberate geo-blocking through server-side or DNS-based restrictions, while the remainder were attributed to infrastructure bottlenecks rather than coordinated national policy.

Geo-blocking, meaning access is restricted based on a user's IP location, appears to reflect a broader interpretation of cybersecurity by Chinese authorities. Beyond countering hacking or sabotage, the research suggests Beijing aims to curb foreign data mining and open-source intelligence gathering, especially where publicly available material has been used in international reporting and policy debates.

The restrictions are not uniformly imposed nationwide. Instead, they tend to emerge at provincial or prefectural levels, suggesting localized responses to central-level cybersecurity pressures and a possible process of "institutional learning", according to the paper.

Analysts warn that the shift could further fragment the global information environment, complicating research, due diligence and cross-border business engagement. From a cybersecurity perspective, it also narrows access to open-source material used in threat intelligence and risk analysis. [South China Morning Post] [Scientific China]

China-Hong Kong: Court rejects appeal in Hong Kong 47 national security case

(ms) Hong Kong's Court of Appeal has dismissed the appeals of 12 opposition activists seeking to overturn their convictions or reduce their sentences in the city's largest national security trial to date, while also upholding the acquittal of barrister Lawrence Lau.

The ruling, delivered at the West Kowloon Law Courts Building, marks another significant development in the long-running Hong Kong 47 case, which stems from the prosecution of prominent pro-democracy figures under the Beijing-imposed national security law. The defendants were originally charged with conspiracy to commit subversion over their roles in an unofficial primary election organized in 2020.

According to court proceedings and local media reports, the panel of appellate judges rejected all challenges brought by the 12 activists. The

government's separate appeal against Lau's acquittal was also dismissed, leaving the former defendant cleared of criminal liability. Lau told reporters after the hearing that he was encouraged by the decision but declined to comment further.

The Hong Kong 47 case has become a focal point of international attention, reflecting the sweeping legal and political changes that followed the introduction of the national security law in 2020. Prosecutors argued that the activists' plan to secure a legislative majority and potentially veto government budgets amounted to a scheme that could trigger a constitutional crisis. Trial judges previously accepted this argument, leading to convictions for most defendants.

Sentences imposed in the original trial varied widely, with legal scholar Benny Tai receiving the longest term of 10 years. Other activists were handed multi-year prison terms based on their perceived roles and levels of involvement. Two defendants, including Lau, were acquitted at trial.

Security was visibly tight around the courthouse ahead of the appeal decision. Media outlets described a heavy police presence, with officers conducting crowd management and access control outside the building. Members of the public, as well as representatives from several foreign consulates, were seen attending the proceedings.

The national security law, enacted by Beijing following months of political unrest in 2019, criminalizes acts deemed to involve secession, subversion, terrorism, or collusion with foreign forces.

The Court of Appeal's decision effectively exhausts one of the remaining legal avenues for the defendants who contested their convictions. Further appeals to Hong Kong's top court remain possible, though such cases typically face a high threshold. [Hong Kong Free Press] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Prime Minister Takaichi secures second term, eyes sharper rightward shift in security and social policy

(dql) In a parliamentary vote on February 18, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi secured a second term after a decisive victory in the February 8 House of Representatives snap election, in which her Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won a two-thirds supermajority (see AiR No. 6, February/2026, 2), consolidating her mandate to steer Japan in a more nationalist, militarily

assertive and socially conservative direction. Takaichi took office in October following her predecessor Shigeru Ishiba's resignation and dissolved the lower house in January to call a snap election. [Kyodo News]

Backed by a two-thirds supermajority in the lower house, Takaichi is expected to use her parliamentary dominance to advance policies that can override resistance from the House of Councillors where the ruling coalition of the conservative LDP and the center-right Japan Innovation Party (JIP) does not hold the majority.

Push for constitutional change

Speaking the day after the vote in the Diet, Takaichi vowed to push ahead with long-sought constitutional reform — the first ever in post-war Japan —, signaling a renewed drive by the LDP to reshape Japan's postwar framework. She pledged to create conditions for initiating formal constitutional amendment proposals and holding a national referendum.

Takaichi is especially pushing to revise Article Nine, the cornerstone of Japan's post-war pacifist order and one of the most distinctive provisions in any modern constitution. Adopted in 1947 under Allied occupation, it commits Japan to permanently renouncing war as a sovereign right and prohibits the threat or use of force to settle international disputes. To give effect to this principle, the article further states that Japan will not maintain land, sea, or air forces or any other form of "war potential," and that the state does not possess the right of belligerency.

Central to the LDP's Article 9 platform is clarifying the legal status of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and advancing other revisions that have stalled for years. Takaichi argued that parliamentary debate on constitutional change has "matured" and should now move toward concrete action. [The Asahi Shimbun]

While the LDP has long sought to formally recognize the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and expand Japan's ability to exercise collective self-defense alongside allies, constitutional change faces steep procedural barriers: a two-thirds majority in both chambers of the National Diet and approval in a national referendum. Takaichi has the lower house numbers but still falls short in the upper house, making support from coalition partners and independents—or success in future elections—crucial. Public backing is another uncertainty, as the ruling bloc's vote share remains well below the threshold typically needed to win a referendum.

If formal amendment proves unattainable, Takaichi may pursue incremental change through legislation or constitutional reinterpretation, following past practice. Any route that dilutes Article Nine would mark a significant shift away from Japan's traditional pacifist posture, even if it stops short of full remilitarization. [Nikkei Asia] [The Conversation]

Reform of succession law

Takaichi also stressed the urgency of revising the Imperial House Law, particularly to secure stable imperial succession, calling it a foundational issue for the state. She expressed hope that discussions, under the leadership of both houses' speakers, would gain momentum.

The law restricts succession to male heirs in the male line of the imperial family. Women may become empress only as the spouse of a reigning emperor, not as a reigning monarch in their own right. The law also sharply limits the number of eligible heirs by excluding descendants of former imperial branches that were abolished after World War II. As a result, the pool of potential successors is extremely small.

Reform has gained urgency because Japan is facing a structural succession crisis. At present, the imperial line effectively rests on only a handful of male heirs. Against this backdrop, the idea of Princess Aiko, the only child of Emperor Naruhito, eventually succeeding to the throne is gaining broader acceptance among the Japanese public. [The Chosun Daily] [Grand Pinnacle Tribune]

Policy priorities

Beyond the reforms of the constitution and the succession law, Takaichi's immediate priority, however, is the delayed fiscal 2026 budget, held up by the snap election. She aims to secure its passage before the fiscal year ends in March, with the LDP considering shorter debate schedules to expedite approval. [Nippon.com]

Her agenda further includes higher defence spending, expanded arms exports, stricter immigration rules and the reinforcement of conservative social norms, including male-only imperial succession and opposition to same-sex marriage and dual surnames for married couples.

In the near term, domestic economic pressures may constrain her ambitions. Rising prices, weak wage growth and a delayed budget have pushed her to prioritize cost-of-living relief, including a proposed two-

year sales tax cut on food. Economists warn that looser fiscal policy could fuel inflation and slow efforts to rein in Japan's large public debt.

Geopolitically, Takaichi is positioning Japan as a more robust security partner of the United States while taking a harder line on China. She is preparing for a high-stakes meeting with Donald Trump, who openly supported her re-election and has pressed Tokyo to deepen defence and economic cooperation. Japan has already committed funding to major US industrial and energy projects under a large bilateral investment framework and faces continued pressure to raise defense outlays. [Channel News Asia]

Japan: Opposition party lower house candidate detained over alleged election law breach

(lr) Nokubo Irie, a lower house candidate from the opposition Democratic Party for the People (DPP), was arrested on suspicion of violating Japan's election laws during her campaign in the recent lower house election. Two company executives, Kyoka Sugahara and Yoshiko Sato, were also arrested in connection with the case.

Investigators allege that during the official campaign period between late January and early February, compensation was paid to five female campaign staff members in violation of election laws, with the payments allegedly made through a company operated by Sugahara.

Authorities further suspect that additional payments were made to more than ten recruited campaign workers during the election period, most of whom were students, including some interns at Sugahara's company.

Irie had contested the Tokyo No. 7 constituency as an opposition candidate in the lower house race. [Japan Times]

Japan: First decline in tourist arrivals in four years amid China tensions

(lr) In January 2026, Japan saw the first drop in foreign visitors in four years, with total inbound arrivals falling about 5 percent from a year earlier to roughly 3.6

million. This marked the first year-on-year decrease since early 2022.

The decline was mainly driven by a sharp slump in Chinese tourists, whose numbers fell by 61 percent after Beijing warned its citizens against travel to Japan. The advisory came amid worsening diplomatic strains between Tokyo and Beijing following parliamentary remarks by Sanae Takaichi in November suggesting that a Chinese assault on Taiwan could pose an existential threat to Japan and potentially warrant a military response from Tokyo. A shift in the timing of the Lunar New Year holiday also weighed on January travel.

Meanwhile, visitor numbers from other markets — especially South Korea (which set a monthly record), Taiwan, and the United States — climbed, helping offset part of the overall drop. [Reuters]

Japan: Government considers expert panel to pave way for counterespionage law

(dql) Japan is preparing to advance counterespionage legislation as the government considers establishing an expert panel as early as this summer to shape a new legal framework for protecting sensitive state information from foreign interference. The panel's findings are expected to inform a draft bill later this year or in 2027, following parallel efforts to set up a new national intelligence secretariat during the current session of the National Diet.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara framed the initiative as essential to strengthening Japan's intelligence capabilities and countering external influence. Proposed measures under discussion include a registration system for individuals lobbying on behalf of foreign governments, modeled on frameworks already in place in the United States and United Kingdom.

At the same time, the plan has sparked concern over potential expansion of state surveillance and possible constraints on freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution of Japan. Critics warn that vague definitions of espionage or foreign influence could allow arbitrary enforcement. [The Mainichi] [The Asia Business Daily]

Japan: Government seeks to loosen arms export rules for jointly developed and lethal weapons

(dql) Signaling Japan's latest effort to become a more active player in the global defense industry, the government and ruling coalition — the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the center-right Japan Innovation Party (JIP) — are moving to significantly loosen restrictions on arms exports by revising the implementation guidelines of the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology.

The planned changes would allow weapons jointly developed with other countries to be exported to third states beyond the original development partners—extending an exception previously limited to the Global Combat Air Program. Involving Japan, Britain and Italy, the program is a defense initiative to jointly develop a next-generation stealth fighter aircraft intended to enter service in the mid-2030s (see AiR No. 7, February/2026, 3).

The revisions are expected to be advanced during the current National Diet session and do not require formal legislative amendments.

At the same time, the government intends to abolish a separate guideline that limits exports of domestically produced defense equipment to non-lethal purposes, effectively opening the door to overseas transfers of lethal weapons.

To prevent an uncontrolled expansion, exports would be restricted to countries that have defense equipment and technology transfer agreements with Japan—currently 17 nations—and especially lethal items may require Cabinet of Japan approval.

Decisions on most weapons exports would remain within the executive, either through the Cabinet or the National Security Council, with no prior approval role for the Diet, signaling the limited role envisaged for parliamentary oversight. [The Asahi Shimbun] [Nippon.com]

Adopted in 2014, the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology set Japan's basic rules for arms exports, replacing a near-total postwar ban and allowing limited defense cooperation under strict constraints. Transfers are barred if they violate international treaties, fuel conflict, or involve countries under UN arms embargoes, and are permitted only when they support Japan's security, international peace, or cooperation with allies. Even then, exports

are tightly controlled through case-by-case approval and strict limits on end use and re-export, with implementation guidelines traditionally restricting transfers to non-lethal equipment or specific purposes such as rescue, surveillance, and minesweeping.

Mongolia: Parliamentary working group reviews economic policy, legislative reform agenda

(fs) A working group established by order of the Speaker of the Mongolian parliament met on February 16 to formulate recommendations on economic, business, banking and financial matters and to draft related legislative proposals.

The group received briefings from the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Mongolia, the Financial Regulatory Commission, and the Ministry of Economy and Development on policy lessons since 2016 and future reform priorities.

Director of the Monetary Policy Department at the Bank of Mongolia B. Bayardavaa presented the macroeconomic outlook, warning that inflation is projected to rise due to poor harvests, persistently high meat prices, public sector wage increases, potential dzud conditions (natural disaster characterized by extreme winter conditions that lead to mass livestock mortality), fuel supply risks, and demand pressures from domestically financed mega projects. Bayardavaa noted that medium-term prospects remain dependent on the external environment, commodity prices, and fiscal policy.

Although growth is recovering, inflation remains above target, and structural constraints persist, including burdensome licensing, weak investor grievance mechanisms and limited property rights guarantees. The working group is advancing reforms to reduce regulatory barriers, strengthen governance, and modernize tax and customs administration. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Industrial output jumps 55 percent in January, reinforcing mining dependence

(dql) Mongolia's industrial output surged in January 2026, underscoring the economy's continued dependence on extractive industries. Preliminary data

show total industrial production reaching MNT 5.4 trillion (USD 1.5 billion), up 55 percent year on year, with nearly all growth driven by mining and related energy supply.

According to the National Statistics Office of Mongolia, mining and quarrying expanded by more than two-thirds, accounting for the vast majority of the increase, while electricity and gas supply also posted solid gains. The mining boost was led by sharp rises in metal ore production and coal output, although several other minerals—including gold, crude oil, and zinc—saw notable declines.

Manufacturing showed a mixed picture: output of items such as beverages, cement, and cashmere products rose strongly, but production fell for staples including flour, dairy, cigarettes, and copper cathodes, highlighting uneven industrial diversification.

Industrial sales more than doubled to MNT 8 trillion (USD 2.2 billion), largely due to mining, with exports playing a central role. Almost all foreign sales came from the mining sector, dominated by metal ores and coal. [Montsame]

In response to the economy's heavy reliance on mining, the government has stressed the need to diversify growth through mining-based industrialization and broader private-sector development. Officials have warned of the risks posed by excessive dependence on coal and outlined plans to develop additional growth engines, with copper identified as a second pillar of the mining sector, followed by rare earth elements and other critical minerals. [Mining Insight]

North Korea: Kim Jong Un re-elected as ruling party's chief, reaffirming consolidated rule

(dql) On February 22, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was re-elected secretary-general of the Workers' Party of Korea, extending his 15-year grip over the country's sole ruling party. The decision was announced by state media on the fourth day of the party congress, a five-yearly gathering that also selected new Central Committee members and revised party rules without disclosing details. The congress, attended by thousands of party officials in Pyongyang, also serves as a key venue for shaping national strategy, from foreign policy to defense planning. [Al Jazeera]

Kim, who assumed power following the death of Kim Jong Il in 2011, further cemented his authority in 2019 when constitutional amendments formalized his overarching control over state affairs.

In his congress-concluding remarks on February 24, Kim portrayed the past five years as a period of perseverance and achievement despite sanctions and external pressures but also acknowledged persistent economic shortcomings and managerial inefficiencies.

He announced that the new five-year plan will focus on stabilizing and strengthening the economy, improving living standards, and gradually upgrading industrial and technological capacity. However, he made clear that economic goals remain embedded within the party's longstanding doctrine of the "three revolutions" — ideological, technological, and cultural transformation — with ideological discipline prioritized as the foundation of progress.

A significant portion of the speech focused on combating bureaucratic complacency, poor facility management, and short-term thinking among officials. Kim called for stricter discipline, stronger centralized guidance, scientific planning, and renewed emphasis on the "ideology-first" and "people-first" principles. He framed these reforms as essential to achieving long-term national strength ahead of key party anniversaries in the coming decades. [KCNA 1]

Notably, Kim made no reference to South Korea or the United States, despite recent overtures from both governments to resume dialogue with Pyongyang. Such silence is unusual, as party congresses typically include pointed messaging toward Washington or Seoul.

Analysts interpret the omission as a deliberate "wait-and-see" posture amid shifting geopolitical dynamics, including the anticipated April summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The restraint suggests Pyongyang may be assessing broader strategic developments before clarifying its diplomatic direction. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

However, Kim's confrontational stance towards North Korea appears unchanged. In his opening speech on February 19, Kim reiterated his hardline position on inter-Korean relations, defining them as ties between two hostile states and rejecting reconciliation or unification. [KCNA 2] [Yonhap News Agency 2]

New nuclear-capable missile launchers

Ahead of the congress, the regime staged a high-profile military display ahead of a major ruling party congress, unveiling the deployment of 50 new launch vehicles for nuclear-capable short-range missiles aimed at South Korea. State media said leader Kim Jong Un presided over a ceremony highlighting what Pyongyang describes as advanced, AI-enabled rocket launcher systems designed for “strategic” missions, a term widely understood to imply a nuclear role. [KCNA 3]

According to Korean Central News Agency, the launch vehicles support 600-millimeter multiple rocket launchers that analysts say blur the line between artillery and short-range ballistic missiles, enhancing North Korea’s ability to overwhelm South Korean missile defenses.

Kim said the upcoming congress of the Workers' Party of Korea would adopt new plans to further expand the country’s nuclear-armed forces, which already threaten U.S. allies in Asia and potentially the U.S. mainland. [Military.com]

Kim Yo Jong promoted, warns South Korea of tougher border vigilance

Meanwhile, Kim Yo Jong, the leader’s influential sister, was elevated within the ruling Workers' Party. She was appointed full department director after previously serving as a deputy director, formalizing her senior status in the party hierarchy.

Born in the late 1980s and educated in Switzerland alongside her brother, Kim Yo Jong rose swiftly after Kim Jong Un assumed power in 2011 following the death of their father, Kim Jong Il. She gained international prominence during her 2018 visit to South Korea for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and has frequently issued authoritative statements on relations with Seoul and Washington. [France 24]

During the congress, she publicly welcomed an official South Korean statement acknowledging that drones originating from the South had crossed into North Korean airspace — an unusual admission from Seoul about such incursions.

In her remarks carried by state media, she said she “highly appreciates” the recognition and reiterated that preventing further violations of North Korea’s sovereignty is in South Korea’s own interest. At the same time, she warned that Pyongyang will reinforce military vigilance along the inter-Korean border, stressing that the boundary with what she described

as “the enemy” must be firmly secured. [KCNA 2] [Reuters]

These statements and developments at the party congress are indicative of Pyongyang further cementing the institutionalization of a hostile “two-state” posture on the Korean Peninsula and reinforcing military deterrence, at a time when inter-Korean dialogue remains frozen and nuclear talks with the United States have stalled since 2019.

South Korea: Former President Yoon sentenced to life imprisonment over leading insurrection

(co) The Seoul Central District Court on February 19 sentenced former President Yoon Suk Yeol to life imprisonment after finding him guilty of leading an insurrection through his December 2024 martial law declaration.

The court ruled that Yoon ordered the deployment of troops to the National Assembly with the purpose of paralyzing or limiting its functions and subverting the constitutional order, thereby meeting the legal definition of insurrection under Article 87 of the Criminal Act. While it found no conclusive evidence that he sought to extend his presidential term, the judges determined that the use of military force against a representative legislative body constituted a violent uprising. Yoon was also found to have ordered the capture of then-opposition leader and now President Lee Jae Myung.

Yoon insisted on the sincerity of his action, saying he acted in the nation’s interest, but apologized about the fallout of the decree. [The Korea Herald 1]

The special council, which requested the death penalty, expressed disappointment about the sentence. Yoon’s legal team sharply critized the ruling, accusing the judge of following a pre-written script before delivering the sentence. Both parties are expected to appeal, which would send the case to the Supreme Court.

The ruling Democratic Party (DP) denounced the conviction, saying the court misinterpreted Yoon's self-coup attempt and that only a death penalty could prevent a recurrence in the future. The main opposition People Power Party (PPP), also criticized the ruling, arguing that the court failed to provide sufficient grounds to overturn the party’s longstanding

claim that the martial law declaration did not constitute insurrection.

In response, DP members condemned the remarks as irresponsible and accused the PPP of aligning itself with insurrectionist forces. The DP further asserted that the PPP's stance could justify a petition for party dissolution, deepening partisan tensions in the wake of the verdict. [The Chosun Daily 1]

DP lawmakers on February 20 used their majority in the parliament to swiftly pass a bill to restrict presidential pardons for individuals convicted of insurrection, aiming to prevent any future clemency for Yoon (see article below). [The Korea Herald 2] [The Chosun Daily 2]

The verdict, delivered 443 days after the failed decree, further intensified political polarization, as supporters and opponents of Yoon gathered outside the courthouse to respectively denounce and celebrate the conviction. Over the weekend, protests by conservative and liberal groups erupted across Seoul. [The Korea Herald 3]

Meanwhile, civilians who blocked armored vehicles and troops from entering the National Assembly building on the night of the martial law crisis have been recommended as recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize for their role in defending democracy. [The Korea Times]

While the insurrection conviction marks the gravest charge, Yoon still faces six pending trials, including allegations of aiding an enemy state and violating campaign finance laws. [The Korea Herald 4] [BBC]

Former defense minister and senior military and police officials sentenced to imprisonment

In the same trial, former Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun was sentenced to 30 years in prison, along with Commissioner General Cho and Seoul Police Chief Kim who were found to have aided the plot.

Kim Yong-gun, the former chief of the defence ministry investigation bureau, and Yoon Seung-yeong, a former official at the police investigation bureau, were found not guilty.

Additionally, the Defense Ministry imposed disciplinary measures on 35 senior military officials, including the dismissal of 14 generals, following a six-month investigation into misconduct related to the martial law incident. Among the dismissed personnel is Navy Chief of Staff Admiral Kang Dong-gil who was relieved of his

duties two weeks ago. [The Korea Herald 5] [Anadolu Ajansı]

In previous rulings, then-Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and then-Interior Minister Lee Sang-min were sentenced to 23 and seven years in prison, respectively, for aiding the insurrection.

South Korea: Parliamentary panel backs contentious curbs on presidential pardons for insurrection and treason

(dql) A parliamentary subcommittee dominated by the ruling Democratic Party (DP) approved on February 20 a revision to the Pardon Act that would sharply limit presidential pardons for crimes such as insurrection and offenses against the state.

The amendment, passed after lawmakers from the opposition People Power Party (PPP) staged a walkout, would allow such pardons only with the approval of three-fifths of all members of the National Assembly of South Korea. The PPP argues the plan is unconstitutional because it undermines the president's exclusive pardon powers under the Constitution.

The vote followed closely on the sentencing of former president Yoon Suk Yeol to life imprisonment for leading an insurrection linked to his brief imposition of martial law in late 2024 (see article above), highlighting the bill's immediate political context.

The move signals an effort by the ruling party to curb executive clemency in cases seen as threatening the constitutional order, while intensifying partisan disputes over presidential powers and legislative overreach. [Yonhap News Agency] [The Asia Business Daily]

South Korea: Bills on birth registration for undocumented migrant children stall amid immigration concerns

(dql) Several bills aimed at creating a birth registration system for undocumented migrant children born in South Korea remain pending in the National Assembly of South Korea, leaving thousands of children without legal recognition or reliable access to health care, education, and social protection. Under current rules, only South Korean nationals can be entered into the

family registry, excluding children born to foreign parents even if they are born in the country.

The proposed legislation would establish a separate legal framework for registering the births of non-Korean children, allowing parents, courts, or local governments to ensure births are recorded, while limiting automatic information-sharing with immigration authorities to reduce risks for undocumented parents.

Supporters argue the absence of registration places children in legal limbo and violates international child rights standards, a view also reflected in past court rulings emphasizing the state's responsibility to record all births.

Despite broad recognition of the problem, legislative progress has been slow due to concerns that a new system could intersect with immigration enforcement, encourage irregular stays, or create administrative and budgetary burdens.

As a result, advocacy has increasingly shifted to civil society and local governments, highlighting ongoing tension between child protection obligations and immigration policy in South Korea. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Police seek arrest warrant for suspect in drone flights to North Korea

(co) Investigators on February 20 sought an arrest warrant for a graduate student suspected of sending drones into North Korea in September and January, an incident that causing intense friction with North Korea.

According to police, the drones departed from Ganghwa Island and flew over Kaesong and Pyongsan before returning south, prompting charges including benefiting the enemy and violating aviation and military installation laws.

Authorities said the flights heightened inter-Korean tensions and compromised military interests, as a broader joint probe continues into multiple individuals allegedly linked to the operation. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan: President Lai signals willingness to deliver national affairs report to legislature

(yl) Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said he is willing to deliver a national affairs report at the Legislative Yuan in line with constitutional procedures, following a rare Lunar New Year gathering with the heads of the government's five branches.

The meeting — the first of its kind convened by a Taiwanese president — brought together leaders of the Executive (cabinet), Legislative (parliament), Judicial, Examination and Control (government watchdog) Yuans, including Legislative Speaker Han Kuo-yu and Premier Cho Jung-tai. Discussions covered contentious issues such as the central government budget, US tariffs, fiscal reform and a special arms procurement bill.

Han said Lai would address lawmakers in a question-and-answer format, with the legislature giving the session special attention. Lai framed the gathering as a step toward easing political divisions and strengthening coordination among branches, acknowledging deep partisan tensions but urging dialogue and unity. [Focus Taiwan]

The development signals a tentative effort to reduce confrontation between the presidency and an opposition-influenced legislature, at a time when the special defense budget and other major bills remained stalled in the opposition-controlled legislature.

The backdrop to this outreach is a months-long dispute over whether the opposition-controlled legislature can compel the president to attend formal questioning sessions. Lawmakers from the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) have pushed to expand parliamentary oversight powers, arguing that direct presidential questioning would strengthen democratic accountability.

Lai's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), however, maintains that under Taiwan's semi-presidential system the president is not subject to routine legislative interpellation, and that forcing such appearances would upset the constitutional balance between branches.

Taiwan: Opposition calls for renegotiation of U.S. trade pact after U.S. tariff ruling

(yl) Taiwan's opposition parties on February 21 called on the government to launch renegotiations of the recently signed Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) with the United States (see AiR No. 7, February/2026, 3) after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down tariffs

imposed by President Donald Trump under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

The ruling found that Trump had exceeded his authority in imposing sweeping tariffs under emergency powers. The decision raised questions over the legal basis of several trade arrangements, including the ART signed with Taiwan earlier this month, which had reduced tariffs on most Taiwanese goods from 20 percent to 15 percent.

The Kuomintang (KMT), the main opposition party, urged the government to clarify whether the agreement remains valid and called for renegotiation if necessary, arguing that Taiwan's investment commitments were tied to tariff concessions that may no longer stand. The Taiwan People's Party (TPP) similarly said the ruling presents an opportunity to reassess provisions of the pact.

Separately, the cabinet said an initial assessment indicated that a temporary 10 percent global tariff announced by Trump following the court ruling would have a limited impact on Taiwan. The government said it would continue monitoring developments and maintaining communication with Washington. [Focus Taiwan1] [Focus Taiwan 2]

Taiwan: Martial Law-era political archives fully declassified

(yl) Taiwan's National Security Bureau (NSB) announced that it has completed the full declassification of political archives from the Martial Law period and transferred them to the National Archives Administration (NAA).

The NSB said it spent 16 months reviewing, digitizing and transferring materials dated before 1992. A total of 23,757 folders comprising 566,415 items were reviewed, of which 1,369 folders containing 51,133 items were identified as political archives. These materials were manually reviewed and fully declassified without redactions before being transferred in 94 archival boxes along with digital image files.

The archives cover topics including public security and counterintelligence systems during the Martial Law era, surveillance records, and intelligence operations related to overseas independence groups. The Martial Law period in Taiwan lasted from 1949 to 1987. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Defense minister urges parliament to fast-track US arms deals before budget approval

(dql) Defense Minister Wellington Koo has urged the Legislative Yuan, Taiwan's parliament, to authorize the signing of three US arms purchase agreements before lawmakers complete review of a proposed NTD 1.25 trillion (USD 39.5 billion) special defense budget.

Koo warned that failing to sign the Letters of Offer and Acceptance (LOAs) before their March 15 deadline could lead to delays or cancellation of the packages, potentially disrupting Taiwan's force modernization plans. The draft US offers cover follow-on purchases of TOW missiles, additional Javelin anti-tank missiles, and M109A7 self-propelled howitzers.

He stressed that the special budget was developed over more than a year of consultations between Taiwanese defense authorities and US officials. He added that Washington views it as strengthening Taiwan's deterrence capabilities.

The appeal comes amid ongoing political wrangling between the ruling and opposition camps over defense spending, highlighting how partisan gridlock could directly affect Taiwan's procurement timeline and broader security posture. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Advancing missile defense and armored upgrades amid push to strengthen domestic defense industry

(dql) Taiwan is moving forward with major indigenous defense modernization efforts, as a newly developed long-range air defense missile prepares for mass production and an upgraded M60A3 tank prototype enters testing. The twin developments highlight Taipei's drive to enhance deterrence capabilities while positioning its defense sector for potential export opportunities.

Indigenous long-range air defense missile clears evaluation

Taiwan's domestically developed Strong Bow missile system has completed operational testing and is set to move into mass production once the parliament approves the proposed NTD 1.25 trillion (USD 39.5 billion) special defense budget (see article above).

The long-range air defense platform is designed to intercept targets at altitudes of up to 70 kilometers and features a new Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar with a detection range exceeding 500 kilometers.

According to local reports, the upgraded radar enhances early warning capabilities against Chinese ballistic missiles and emerging hypersonic threats, offering improved resistance to electronic jamming and stronger multi-target tracking performance. [Taiwan News 1]

Taiwan upgrades tanks with advanced fire control system, eyes potential arms exports

Meanwhile, a prototype M60A3 Patton tank is undergoing fire control and targeting upgrades at the Army Armaments Bureau's maintenance center in Nantou, with post–Lunar New Year testing scheduled to begin soon.

The upgrade integrates a digital hunter-killer system to enhance gun stabilization and targeting precision for the 105mm main gun, alongside third-generation thermal imaging and night-vision capabilities. Leonardo DRS has deployed technical staff to support the program on site.

Officials say several countries that still operate M60A3 tanks have expressed interest in the upgraded fire control package. If Taipei grants export approval, it will mark Taiwan's first formally authorized arms export through official government channels in 25 years — a potential milestone for its defense industry and international profile. [Taiwan News 2]

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

Bangladesh: New prime minister consolidates executive control as business-heavy cabinet and adviser layer take shape ahead of first parliamentary session

(lm) Newly sworn-in Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has formally allocated ministerial responsibilities through a gazette notification, consolidating authority over key executive institutions while structuring a cabinet that blends senior figures of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) with selected actors associated with the 2024 student-led uprising that led to the removal of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Rahman has retained direct authority over the Cabinet Division (the central administrative coordinating body), the Ministry of Defence, and the Armed Forces Division, signaling close oversight of executive coordination and security institutions. Key ministries — including finance, home affairs, foreign affairs, energy, commerce, law, education, health, and transport — have been distributed among senior BNP leaders and close allies, reflecting the party's commanding parliamentary majority of 209 out of 297 contested seats.

In parallel to the formal cabinet, Rahman appointed ten advisers under his direct authority, eight of whom have now been assigned portfolios at minister or state minister rank. At minister rank, Mirza Abbas Uddin Ahmed, Nazrul Islam Khan, and Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed were appointed political advisers; Md Ismail Zabiullah was assigned Public Administration; and economist Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir was given Finance. At state minister rank, Brigadier General (retd) Shamsul Islam was assigned Defence; Mahdi Amin was given Education, Primary and Mass Education, Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, and Labor and Employment; and Rehan Asif Asad was assigned Posts, Telecommunications and Information

Technology, and Science and Technology. Two adviser portfolios remain pending. This adviser structure creates a parallel executive layer, allowing senior BNP figures who were not given cabinet portfolios to remain embedded within the governing architecture. [Dhaka Tribune 2] [Dhaka Tribune 3]

At the same time, several long-standing BNP leaders who previously held major ministries were left out of the cabinet despite the party's comfortable majority. Given that coalition arithmetic did not require such exclusions, this appears to be an intentional internal recalibration — signaling generational adjustment and selective renewal within the party's executive leadership. [Dhaka Tribune 4]

Notably, the cabinet includes two first-time lawmakers, Nurul Haque Nur and Zonayed Saki, who gained prominence during the 2024 uprising. Both were appointed as state ministers, reflecting an attempt to incorporate protest-era political actors while maintaining core executive control within the party's established leadership. [Al Jazeera 1] [Al Jazeera 2]

The composition of the cabinet has drawn scrutiny for its professional background. Of 50 ministers and state ministers, 35 — approximately 70 percent — declared business as their profession in affidavits submitted to the Election Commission. 19 cabinet ministers and 16 state ministers identified as businesspersons, including Finance Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed. Transparency International Bangladesh has cautioned that the dominance of business figures could pose conflict-of-interest risks if safeguards are not maintained. [Dhaka Tribune 5]

Bangladesh: New prime minister vows rule of law, anti-graft drive and Ramadan market stability in first address

(lm) In his first televised address as Prime Minister, Tarique Rahman pledged to restore the rule of law, intensify anti-corruption efforts, dismantle criminal syndicates and ensure equal rights for all citizens, framing his administration as accountable to the electorate following the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's decisive election victory.

Law and order and anti-corruption were presented as immediate priorities. Rahman announced a crackdown on narcotics and illegal gambling networks, stating that law enforcement agencies have been instructed to take firm action. He emphasized that all constitutional,

public and private institutions would operate strictly under statutory rules and regulations, declaring that the rule of law — not party influence or force — would guide governance.

With Ramadan beginning, the prime minister urged traders not to manipulate prices or engage in excessive profiteering, stressing that public hardship should not increase during the holy month. He assured citizens of uninterrupted gas, electricity and water supply during Sehri, Iftar and Taraweeh, and instructed authorities accordingly. He also called for responsible consumption of utilities as part of social responsibility.

In a symbolic governance measure, Rahman announced that lawmakers from his party would forgo certain traditional privileges, including tax-free vehicle imports and government plot allocations, presenting the move as a commitment to ethical standards in public office.

Addressing structural challenges, he acknowledged that traffic congestion in Dhaka has become severe and announced plans to reorganize and coordinate the Ministries of Railways and Roads to strengthen rail transport, reduce pressure on the capital and support more balanced regional development.

He also highlighted youth employment, technology and skill development as strategic priorities, noting the importance of artificial intelligence and the need to transform Bangladesh's demographic strength into skilled human capital. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Referendum and reform blueprint face legal challenge

(lm) Bangladesh's post-election constitutional reform process has entered a legally and politically contested phase following multiple writ petitions and a sharp parliamentary split over implementation of the July National Charter.

The July National Charter, drafted under the interim administration following the 2024 student-led uprising, outlines more than 80 proposed constitutional and institutional reforms. These include term limits for the prime minister, enhanced presidential powers, expanded fundamental rights and the creation of a 100-member upper chamber in addition to the existing Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament).

Last week, two separate writ petitions have been filed with the High Court Division of the Supreme Court.

One seeks cancellation of the February 12 referendum results, challenging the legality of the vote in which 60.26 percent of participating voters approved the proposed constitutional changes. The second writ petition seeks a declaration that the July National Charter itself is unconstitutional and requests a stay on its implementation. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Meanwhile, implementation of the reform blueprint requires the formation of a Constitutional Reform Council composed of members of parliament who must take a second oath committing to the Charter, which the Council is mandated to implement within 180 days. However, newly elected lawmakers from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – which secured a parliamentary majority of 209 out of 297 contested seats - declined to take this Reform Council oath, arguing that the Council has not yet been incorporated into the Constitution and therefore lacks legal standing. In contrast, members of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami – Bangladesh's main Islamist party and a former BNP ally - and the NCP -a student-led party that emerged directly from the 2024 mass protests - took both oaths [see AiR No. 7, February/2026, 3]. [The Daily Star 1]

The dispute centers on how the proposed upper chamber would be constituted. The BNP favors allocation based on existing parliamentary seat distribution under the first-past-the-post system, while Jamaat and the NCP support proportional representation, which would more closely reflect overall vote share. [Al Jazeera]

Against this backdrop, leaders from both Jamaat and NCP have intensified pressure on the government to activate the Constitutional Reform Council. Nahid Islam, NCP and Chief Whip of the Opposition, stated that parliament would hold "no value" without the Council, arguing that the election and referendum are legally interconnected and require lawmakers to take both oaths. Meanwhile, Shafiqur Rahman, Ameer of Jamaat, similarly warned that failure to implement the July reform agenda would prompt opposition action, calling refusal to take the Council oath a betrayal of the July uprising that enabled the current government. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh: Student party leader nominated opposition chief whip of 13th Parliament

(lm) Nahid Islam, convenor of the National Citizen Party (NCP), has been unanimously nominated as opposition chief whip of the 13th National Parliament following a parliamentary party meeting held after the swearing-in of newly elected members of parliament. Nahid Islam is a prominent figure associated with the 2024 student-led uprising that contributed to the fall of the previous government. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Parliament is expected to convene its first session of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad on or around March 12. The session will elect a Speaker and Deputy Speaker and consider ordinances issued during the interim government period, marking the formal operational start of the new legislature under the BNP-led administration. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: Interim advisory council dissolved as new government formally takes office

(lm) Bangladesh's political transition has formally entered its consolidation phase following the dissolution of the interim government's advisory council and the publication of a government gazette confirming the transfer of executive authority.

Under Article 56(3) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the President appointed Tarique Rahman as Prime Minister as the leader of the majority in the 13th National Parliament. With the formation of the new government, the interim advisory council was automatically dissolved. The Cabinet Division issued a notification formalizing this change, thereby closing the post-2024 transitional framework and restoring full executive authority to an elected administration.

The move follows the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's decisive victory in the February 12 parliamentary elections, in which it secured 209 of 297 contested seats, comfortably surpassing the 151-seat threshold required to form a government in the 300-seat Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament). [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: New chief prosecutor appointed to International Crimes Tribunal

(lm/ms) Bangladesh's new government has appointed Advocate Md Aminul Islam as the new chief prosecutor

of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), replacing Mohammad Tajul Islam, according to an official notification issued by the Ministry of Law.

The order, signed under Section 7 of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, formally cancels Tajul Islam's earlier appointment and confirms that Aminul Islam will assume the role with full rank, salary, allowances, and benefits until further orders. Tajul Islam had been serving as chief prosecutor since September 8, 2024.

The ICT is a special domestic tribunal tasked with prosecuting crimes against humanity and related offenses. It is currently handling cases linked to the July 2024 uprising that led to the fall of the Awami League government, including proceedings against former political figures and members of the security forces accused of involvement in killings and injuries during the unrest. The tribunal is also pursuing cases related to alleged enforced disappearances between 2009 and 2024.

Tajul Islam was appointed following the political transition triggered by the July movement. Prior to becoming chief prosecutor, he had served as defense counsel in earlier ICT cases, including those involving leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Authorities have not publicly stated the reasons for the leadership change, but officials indicated that tribunal activities and prosecutions will continue without disruption under the new chief prosecutor. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: New government to reverify list of 1971 war veterans

(lm) Liberation War Affairs Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed announced that the government will reverify the official list of individuals recognized as freedom fighters in the 1971 war of independence against Pakistan, a designation that carries legal status and access to state benefits. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs with members of the Jatio Muktijodha Council (Jamuka), the statutory body responsible for certification of war veterans.

The minister stated that the 1971 Liberation War remains the foundational basis of the state and expressed concern over what he described as political misuse and distortion of its history. He indicated that the reverification aims to ensure that only verified

participants in the independence war retain official recognition. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Government approves withdrawal of 2,208 politically filed cases

(lm/ms) Bangladesh's government has approved the withdrawal of 2,208 criminal cases it has classified as politically motivated, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed announced, consolidating what authorities describe as a review of prosecutions initiated during the previous Awami League administration led by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

According to government officials, the cases were filed over a 17-year period and were allegedly used to harass opposition party leaders and activists as well as suppress dissent. Authorities stated that the decision followed a formal review process conducted by the ministry and relevant legal bodies to assess claims of politically driven litigation.

The government said the withdrawals form part of a broader effort to address what it characterises as abuses of the legal system under the prior administration. Officials emphasised that the cases were examined before inclusion and that the withdrawal process will proceed through the courts in line with existing legal procedures.

While no comprehensive breakdown of the charges was released, earlier official statements indicated that many of the cases involved criminal allegations lodged against political opponents. The administration framed the move as corrective, saying it aims to ensure justice, uphold democratic principles and restore public confidence in the judicial system. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: Probe into attacks on leading newspapers stalls amid election duties

(lm) Investigations into the December 18 attacks on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo appear to have stalled, with no new arrests since December 26 despite the scale of the incidents.

Two separate cases were filed on December 22 following vandalism, arson and looting at both newspaper offices. A total of 37 individuals were arrested in the immediate aftermath — 11 in connection with the attack on The Daily Star and 26 in

the Prothom Alo case — all before the Detective Branch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police assumed control of the investigations.

Investigators have stated that election-related duties temporarily slowed progress. Officials confirmed that video footage and online material, including social media content allegedly used to incite the attacks, have been collected, but no additional suspects have been detained.

The Daily Star filed its case against 350 to 400 unidentified individuals under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance. Estimated losses are approximately BDT 400 million (USD 3.28 million). The court has set March 8 as the deadline for submitting the investigation report.

Prothom Alo filed its case against 400 to 500 unidentified individuals under similar charges. Reported losses include BDT 25 million (USD 205,000) in looted property and approximately BDT 320 million (USD 2.62 million) in damage from vandalism and arson. The court has set March 5 for submission of the probe report. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: UN panel reviews LDC deferral request amid warnings over trade exposure and rising debt risks

(lm) The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) has begun reviewing Bangladesh's request to defer its scheduled graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by three years, as new international assessments warn of substantial structural and macroeconomic vulnerabilities ahead of the November 2026 transition date. [The Daily Star 1]

Bangladesh is currently set to graduate after meeting the three required criteria — income per capita, human assets, and economic vulnerability — in successive reviews, with the United Nations General Assembly approving graduation in 2021 and granting a five-year preparatory period. However, a new independent United Nations assessment concludes that the preparation phase was largely consumed by crisis management rather than structural reform. Political instability, governance disruptions, the 2024 student-led uprising, and a mounting macroeconomic crisis are cited as factors that delayed coordinated reform efforts.

Trade exposure is identified as the most immediate vulnerability. Approximately 73 percent of Bangladesh's merchandise exports currently benefit from LDC-specific duty-free preferences, with the European Union accounting for roughly half of total exports. Following graduation, apparel exports to the EU are expected to face tariffs of around 12 percent after the transition period, while competitors such as India and Vietnam would continue to benefit from zero-duty access under separate trade arrangements. Studies cited in public discussions estimate potential export losses of around USD 8.0 billion annually. [The Daily Star 2]

Macroeconomic indicators further complicate readiness. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), public debt has risen to USD 188.79 billion, equivalent to 41 percent of gross domestic product in fiscal year 2024–25. Debt servicing is projected to reach USD 30.59 billion this fiscal year and USD 33.84 billion next year. Domestic debt servicing alone consumed 89.4 percent of government revenue in fiscal year 2024–25. The IMF has warned of rising "rollover risks," meaning refinancing maturing debt could become more difficult and costly without improved revenue mobilization. Bangladesh's tax-to-GDP ratio remains below 7 percent, with the government indicating a target of 8 percent in the upcoming budget. [The Daily Star 3]

The UN assessment also highlights structural competitiveness gaps, including logistics costs estimated at 16 percent of GDP, high levels of non-performing loans, and slow implementation of the Smooth Transition Strategy adopted in February 2025. Revenue mobilization declined to 6.8 percent of GDP in fiscal year 2024–25, while sustained inflation and slower growth have contributed to increased poverty levels. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Government launches 180-day reform plan for second-largest sea port

(lm) Shipping Minister Shaikh Rabiul Alam announced a 180-day transformation plan for Mongla Port, Bangladesh's second-largest seaport located in the southwest near the Bay of Bengal, signaling an early infrastructure and trade priority under the new government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman. Mongla serves as a key maritime gateway for the southwestern region and functions as a strategic complement to Chittagong Port, the country's primary

seaport, which has faced periodic congestion pressures. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Government signals police changes as army leadership reshuffled after transition

(lm) The new government under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman initiated leadership changes across both civilian and military security institutions, indicating a broader consolidation of control following the recent political transition.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed stated that changes will be made at the top levels of the Bangladesh Police, confirming that "some changes will definitely come." No specific positions or timelines were announced. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

In parallel, the Bangladesh Army announced a significant reshuffle of its senior leadership. Lieutenant General Muhammad Mainur Rahman was appointed Chief of General Staff (CGS), replacing Lieutenant General Mizanur Rahman Shamim, who has proceeded on retirement leave. Major General Kaiser Rashid Chowdhury was appointed Director General of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), the country's principal military intelligence agency, replacing Major General Mohammad Jahangir Alam, who has been posted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as ambassador. Lieutenant General Mir Mushfiqur Rahman was appointed Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division, while outgoing PSO Lieutenant General SM Kamrul Hasan has also been transferred to the Foreign Ministry as ambassador.

Additional command-level postings were announced, including changes to divisional and regimental leadership. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bhutan: Plan launched to centralize ministries in capital under wider decongestion strategy

(lm) Bhutan's Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport has begun procuring design services for a centralized government district in the capital, Thimphu, intended to consolidate ministries currently dispersed across the capital and reduce administrative friction for citizens. The planned office complex is budgeted at BTN 200 million (USD 2.4 million) and would be split

across two proposed sites, with final allocation to be determined in detailed design. The initiative sits within a broader BTN 847 million (USD 10.2 million) urban development program for fiscal year 2025–26 and is framed as part of the Thimphu Structure Plan 2023–2047 to address congestion pressures tied to projected population and vehicle growth. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Study reports accelerated glacier retreat across Bhutanese Himalaya

(lm) A peer-reviewed international study published on February 21 reports accelerated glacier retreat across the Bhutanese Himalayan region between 1976 and 2024. According to the research, 524 glaciers across the transboundary Bhutanese Himalaya — including glaciers within Bhutan and those draining north into Tibet — have disappeared since the mid-1970s.

The study finds that total glacier area in the broader region declined from approximately 2,297 square kilometers in 1976 to about 1,584 square kilometers in 2024, representing a loss of nearly one-third. The annual rate of glacier area shrinkage increased from roughly 0.38 percent (1976–1998) to about 0.95 percent (1998–2024), indicating acceleration after the late 1990s. Glaciers terminating in lakes retreated significantly faster than land-terminating glaciers. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Violent crime and fraud highlight shifting security pressures in 2025

(lm) Bhutan's 2025 crime data show several high-profile violent cases alongside continued increases in sexual offenses, domestic violence, and cyber-enabled financial fraud.

During the year, multiple murder cases resulted in life sentences, including the killing of a senior Buddhist religious figure in Punakha and separate homicide cases in Thimphu. A high-value temple burglary in Lhuentse involved the theft of 1.31 kilograms of gold worth over BTN 12 million (USD 144,000). A former opposition Member of Parliament was convicted of child molestation, with the sentence upheld on appeal. A custodial death in November 2025 led to an official investigation and disciplinary action against eight police personnel.

Drug-related cases declined slightly compared to 2023. However, reported battery and domestic violence cases increased, as did sexual offense cases, which rose from 108 in 2022 to 152 in 2025, while suicide figures remained relatively stable, with 104 cases recorded in 2025.

Cybercrime cases have been rising since 2022. Between 2024 and 2026, police recorded 318 financial scam cases involving total losses of BTN 37.08 million (USD 444,960). Of this amount, BTN 12.86 million (USD 154,320) was recovered. [Kuensel]

India: Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi faces court hearing in 2018 defamation case

(dql) Opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi is scheduled to appear in March before a court in Sultanpur in connection with a defamation case stemming from remarks he made during the 2018 election campaign.

The case relates to comments allegedly targeting a local ruling Bharatiya Janata Party leader and has been proceeding through the courts for several years.

Gandhi, who represents Wayanad in Kerala and serves as a member of India's lower house of parliament, has denied the allegations and maintained that his remarks were political in nature. [The Tribune]

India: Government bets on rare earth corridor, magnet manufacturing to cut strategic dependence on China

(dql) India is accelerating efforts to secure its rare earth supply chains, combining long-term plans for a Rare Earth Corridor with near-term moves to begin domestic production of rare-earth permanent magnets. The push reflects growing concern over import dependence and the strategic risks posed by China's dominance of global rare earth processing.

Rare earth corridor

India has unveiled plans for a rare earth corridor spanning Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, states that are central to the country's rare-earth ambitions due to their coastal beach sand deposits containing rare earth minerals. The initiative

signals a strategic effort to convert India's sizeable mineral reserves into geopolitical and industrial leverage.

Although India holds the world's third-largest rare earth reserves, it accounts for less than 1 per cent of global production, constrained by limited mining, processing and manufacturing capacity. The corridor aims to address these gaps by building an end-to-end domestic ecosystem, covering mining, refining of rare earth oxides, research and downstream manufacturing of permanent magnets used in electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, electronics and defence.

The push comes amid rising concern over China's dominance of rare earth supply chains, particularly in processing and refining, where it controls the bulk of global capacity and has previously imposed export restrictions that affected Indian imports. Policymakers increasingly view rare earths not merely as commodities but as strategic inputs with national security implications. [Channel News Asia]

Rare earth magnet production

As part of this broader effort, the government plans to begin domestic production of rare-earth permanent magnets by the end of this year, according to Mines Minister G. Kishan Reddy. The initiative follows cabinet approval of a manufacturing scheme to produce up to 6,000 metric tons annually, backed by USD 802 million in funding, aimed at reducing reliance on foreign suppliers.

Speaking at a summit hosted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Reddy said the government is seeking to close longstanding value-chain gaps, where raw materials are often exported for processing due to the lack of domestic facilities. Plans include establishing specialized critical mineral processing parks in several states, alongside investments in research and development.

The government is also exploring recycling and urban mining, including the recovery of critical minerals from electronic waste, and may import scrap materials to support these efforts. Officials see circular resource use as a way to boost supply without opening new mines or triggering additional environmental clearances.

Despite the momentum, experts caution that India faces structural hurdles, including limited access to advanced processing technology, regulatory complexity linked to radioactive thorium in beach sands, environmental management challenges, and a

lack of heavy rare earth elements needed for high-performance magnets. While government-backed entities are expected to dominate mining, private firms are likely to focus on downstream processing and manufacturing, supported by subsidies and new facilities. [India News Network]

India: Government launches first national counter-terror policy

(dql) India has unveiled its first national counter-terrorism policy, Prahaar, formalising a “zero tolerance” approach centred on intelligence-led prevention and the disruption of extremist networks. The framework aims to cut off access to funding, weapons and safe havens for militants operating within or outside the country.

Built on seven pillars, the strategy combines prevention and proportionate response with stronger inter-agency coordination, adherence to rule-of-law standards, efforts to counter radicalisation, expanded international cooperation and societal resilience. It places particular emphasis on upgrading technological capabilities, partnering with the private sector and curbing the misuse of digital platforms for terrorist purposes.

While officials say multi-agency action has improved India’s ability to thwart attacks, the policy calls for deeper intelligence-sharing, regular updates to counter-terror legislation and standardized capacity-building of state-level counter-terror units. [The Tribune 1]

Meanwhile, two senior commanders of the outlawed Communist Party India (CPI) (Maoist) — Thippiri Tirupati (Devji) and Malla Raji Reddy, both members of the group’s Central Committee, have surrendered to the Telangana Police, dealing a significant setback to the insurgent organization's leadership. Devji, who carried a bounty on his head and helped establish the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), and Raji Reddy laid down arms in February and are expected to be formally presented by authorities soon.

Their surrender comes weeks before the Union government’s March 31 deadline to eliminate Naxalism — a left-wing extremist movement in India that seeks to overthrow the state through armed struggle — nationwide and follows a period in which many Maoist leaders were either killed or have surrendered.

Despite this development, security sources say more than 300 Maoist insurgents are believed to remain active along the Chhattisgarh–Telangana border. Security forces have intensified operations, launching "Operation Black Forest 2.0" to further clear the Korreguttalu (KG) Hills, a former Maoist stronghold characterized by cavernous terrain that provides natural hideouts. [The Tribune 2] [The Tribune 3]

India: Counter-terror presence strengthened with new high-altitude temporary bases in Jammu and Kashmir

(dql) Indian security forces, led by the Central Reserve Police Force and other agencies, have established over 40 temporary operating bases (TOBs) in the high-altitude regions of Jammu and Kashmir to improve the hunt for militants and prevent cross-border infiltration. The move follows the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, after which authorities reassessed tactics as militants increasingly used rugged, remote Himalayan terrain for safe havens.

Situated at elevations above about 6,000 feet, these bases are staffed by roughly 16 to 30 personnel each and equipped with specialized gear — from high-altitude boots and multi-layered jackets to satellite communication equipment — to sustain operations in harsh weather and difficult terrain. By positioning troops closer to suspected militant hideouts, security forces aim to deny safe havens, sever supply routes, and strengthen area domination. [Business Standard]

Officials say the TOBs have helped sustain tactical pressure on terrorist networks before they can regroup or carry out attacks. This forward deployment strategy reflects a broader shift in counter-terrorism efforts to address evolving militant tactics and secure mountainous and previously unreachable areas of the Union Territory. [The Times of India]

The move comes as security forces announced the dismantling of a seven-member militant cell linked to Jaish-e-Mohammed — a Pakistan-based Islamist militant organization that seeks to separate Jammu and Kashmir from India and merge it with Pakistan — after an 18-month counter-insurgency campaign in the high-altitude areas of Kishtwar district in Jammu and Kashmir. The group, referred to as the "Israel Group", had allegedly infiltrated in April 2024 and was involved in 17 encounters with security personnel.

Police officials stated that the final three members, including a self-styled commander identified as

Saifullah, were tracked and killed in the Chhatroo area, marking the conclusion of sustained joint operations by the Army, Jammu and Kashmir Police and the Central Reserve Police Force. Authorities described the module as heavily armed and responsible for significant attacks on security forces.

The operation, codenamed “Operation Trashi-I”, began in January based on multi-agency intelligence inputs. Forces conducted prolonged pursuits across mountainous terrain under harsh weather conditions, using drone surveillance, night-vision equipment and Special Forces reinforcements. [The Tribune]

India: Army validates effectiveness of counter-drone grid

(dql) The Kharga Corps, part of the Indian Army’s Western Command, successfully tested its counter-unmanned aerial system (UAS) grid during a Combat Readiness Test Exercise at the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in north-west Rajasthan.

The evaluation involved various air-defence systems, including surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft guns, radars, surveillance and communications equipment, which were used in live-firing drills to engage hostile aerial targets, including different types of drones, with high precision in both daytime and nighttime simulated battlefield conditions.

The exercise reflects the growing emphasis by the Indian Army on drone and counter-drone warfare, a domain that has become central to modern conflicts and was highlighted during recent clashes such as Operation Sindoor between India and Pakistan in May 2025, when numerous drones and missiles were employed and largely neutralized by India’s integrated air defence network. [The Tribune 1]

At the same time, the Army has issued an urgent requirement for a Drone Interception System (DIS) capable of detecting and destroying small hostile drones at close ranges, amid rising use of unmanned aerial systems for attack, surveillance and disruption.

The proposed system is intended to counter low radar cross-section drones, including swarm threats, using kinetic “hard-kill” methods such as guns, missiles, lasers or directed-energy weapons. It must be deployable either independently or integrated with existing air-defence assets and operate across India’s varied terrain — from plains and deserts to high-altitude areas above 16,000 feet.

The DIS is expected to combine surveillance, detection, tracking, and targeting with an autonomous fire-and-forget interceptor. Sensor requirements include electronically scanned array technology, 360-degree coverage, and the ability to track at least 20 drones simultaneously, with detection ranges of up to 4 km for nano and micro drones and 10 km for small drones.

The system must also feature robust electronic counter-countermeasures and be compatible with Akashteer and the Army Data Network. [The Tribune 2]

The move follows a separate recent requirement for a Drone Catcher System using non-kinetic means, underlining a layered approach to counter-UAS defence (see AiR No. 7, February/2026, 3).

India: Navy commissions indigenous anti-submarine warfare craft

(dql) India is set to bolster its coastal defence capabilities with the commissioning of Anjadip, the third vessel in its eight-ship Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC) program. The warship will join the Eastern Naval Command at Chennai on February 27 in a ceremony led by Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi.

Reflecting New Delhi's drive for defense indigenization, the vessel is designed for operations in shallow coastal waters. It is equipped with indigenous anti-submarine systems, including Hull Mounted Sonar Abhay, lightweight torpedoes and ASW rockets, enabling it to detect and neutralize hostile submarines. It can also undertake surveillance, low-intensity maritime missions and search-and-rescue tasks.At 77 meters in length and capable of speeds up to 25 knots through water-jet propulsion, the ship enhances rapid response capacity along India's eastern seaboard. [DD News]

India: Air Force grounds indigenous fighter jet fleet

(dql) The Indian Air Force has temporarily grounded its entire fleet of HAL Tejas light combat jets — the country's flagship indigenous fighter program —, following an accident on February 7, when one aircraft veered off a runway at a forward base and suffered damage while the pilot escaped with injuries.

The move affects all 35 operational jets, which are now undergoing thorough maintenance and technical inspections to identify any systemic issues in components such as undercarriage metallurgy, braking systems, and onboard software. A Court of Inquiry has been ordered to determine the cause of the incident.

This is the third loss of a Tejas aircraft since its induction in 2016, with previous accidents near Jaisalmer in 2024 and at the Dubai Airshow in 2025, where a pilot was killed. [The Tribune]

Maldives: Ruling party projects sweeping local election victory

(lm) The ruling People's National Congress (PNC) has projected a decisive victory in the upcoming local council and Women's Development Committee (WDC) elections scheduled for April 4, with senior party figures predicting between 800 and 900 seats out of 1,356 total positions.

PNC Parliamentary Group Leader Ibrahim Falah stated that, based on internal calculations, the party expects to secure roughly two-thirds of the seats. A total of 678 council members and 678 WDC members will be elected across 226 constituencies. The PNC has already secured 69 seats uncontested.

Nearly 2,962 candidates are contesting the elections. According to Falah, only the PNC and the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) are fielding candidates at scale, while many smaller parties have limited participation. A significant number of independent candidates are also running.

Other PNC figures offered even more ambitious projections, with one lawmaker predicting the party could secure up to 98 percent of the vote. Campaign activity has intensified in recent weeks, with both major parties framing the elections as a test of policy direction and political momentum ahead of the midpoint of President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's term. [The Sun]

Maldives: High Court judge appointed to Judicial Service Commission

(lm) President Mohamed Muizzu has appointed High Court Judge Hassan Shafeeu as a member of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), representing the judges of the High Court.

The Judicial Service Commission is the constitutional body responsible for overseeing the administration, discipline, and appointments of judges in the Maldives. It plays a central role in maintaining judicial accountability and independence within the country's legal framework.

Judge Shafeeu, who was appointed to the High Court earlier this month, replaces former High Court Judge Mohamed Niyaz, who retired in December, thereby vacating his seat on both the High Court and the Judicial Service Commission. [The Sun]

Maldives: Rifath Abdulla appointed to Elections Commission

(lm) President Mohamed Muizzu has appointed Rifath Abdulla, former head of the legal department of the Elections Commission (EC), as a member of the Commission.

He replaces Dr. Mohamed Zahir, whose term expired on February 22. Although Zahir had sought reappointment, President Muizzu nominated Rifath instead. The Parliament, where the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) holds a supermajority, endorsed the nomination with a unanimous vote of 58 members.

Rifath's appointment comes as the Commission prepares for Local Council Elections and Women's Development Committee Elections scheduled for April 4, as well as a national referendum on whether future presidential and parliamentary elections should be held concurrently. [The Sun]

Maldives: Civil Court orders former political party leader to repay USD 262, 000 debt

(lm) The Civil Court has ruled that former Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP) leader Mohamed "Colonel" Nasheed is personally liable for a debt of MVR 4.04 million (USD 262,600) owed by the now-dissolved party. The Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party, commonly known as DRP, was one of the Maldives' major political parties during the country's transition to multi-party democracy in the late 2000s.

Although the party had accumulated an additional MVR 16.3 million (USD 1.06 million) in fines for non-

payment, the High Court previously determined that only the original service fees were recoverable. The case later reached the Supreme Court, but proceedings were overtaken by the party's dissolution after it failed to meet statutory requirements to remain registered as a political party.

Following the dissolution, the Elections Commission determined that the individual serving as party leader at the time would be responsible for settling outstanding liabilities. Nasheed, who was party president when the party was dissolved, did not respond to the proceedings, and the Civil Court proceeded in his absence. [The Sun]

Maldives: President's flat allowance and fine waiver trigger political and legal scrutiny

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's decision to waive accumulated fines on state housing flats and grant MVR 100,000 (approximately USD 6,500) to each eligible owner of the Sinamale' and Male' Hiyaa flats has generated public backlash and prompted a review by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The two housing complexes, constructed in the 1990s as social housing in Male', have long faced complaints over structural deterioration, including water leakage and malfunctioning elevators. After meeting residents, the President announced that all penalties for non-payment of flat fees would be waived and that each qualifying owner would receive a MVR 100,000 allowance, citing prolonged delays in resolving ownership and division issues.

Criticism has focused on three main issues: fiscal transparency, legality, and political timing. Commentators questioned how the payout—unbudgeted in the 2026 state budget—would be financed, and whether altering legally binding housing agreements through executive decision is permissible. Others argued that repeated fine waivers disadvantage compliant payers and risk encouraging non-payment.

The ACC confirmed that it is reviewing a formal complaint regarding the decision, amid allegations that the measure could constitute misuse of public funds or politically motivated distribution ahead of the upcoming local council and women's development committee elections scheduled for April. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Lawmaker challenges USD 156 million pension fund bond placement, cites potential legal breaches

(lm) A Maldivian opposition lawmaker has formally escalated the ongoing controversy surrounding the government's use of pension assets, submitting a parliamentary resolution seeking clarification over a MVR 2.4 billion (USD 156 million) bond transaction involving the Maldives Pension Administration Office (MPAO).

The move forms part of a wider debate over fiscal management and the independence of state financial institutions. In recent weeks, concerns have mounted over reports that the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA)—the country's central bank—placed approximately MVR 2.5 billion (USD 162.5 million) from the national pension fund into a government bond. The MPAO manages mandatory retirement savings under the Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme and is legally required to safeguard contributors' assets.

North Galolhu MP Mohamed Ibrahim argued that the transaction may breach key statutes, including the Public Finance Act (2006), the Pensions Act (2009), and the Fiscal Responsibility Act (2024), particularly if the bond placement effectively enables expenditure beyond the approved budget framework without parliamentary authorization. The Fiscal Responsibility Act limits short-term borrowing for cash-flow purposes to 91 days and caps it at 2.5 percent of government revenue.

The controversy intensified after several senior MPAO officials resigned, including the board chair, chief executive officer, and chief financial officer. Critics interpret the resignations as signaling internal concern regarding governance, legal exposure, and fiduciary responsibility.

Opposition actors and former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom have publicly criticized the transaction, arguing that pension assets should not be used to address short-term liquidity pressures. The lawmaker further warned that such actions could weaken confidence in the financial system, exert pressure on the Maldivian rufiyaa, and fuel inflation. [The Sun]

Maldives: Foreign mission spending rises to USD 3.51 million per month amid scrutiny over political appointments

(lm) Government spending on embassies and high commissions has increased to MVR 54 million per month (USD 3.51 million), according to data released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nearly doubling from an average of MVR 32 million (USD 2.08 million) reported for the period between October 1, 2024 and January 31, 2025.

The figures were disclosed in response to successive Right to Information requests seeking updated details on overseas missions, staffing, and salary structures. As of December 31, 2025, the Maldives maintained 21 foreign missions.

The increase in overseas mission expenditure has drawn criticism from the opposition, which alleges that the number of political appointees has expanded under President Mohamed Muizzu's administration, including appointments of individuals with political affiliations. The government has rejected claims of nepotism.

The President's Office stated in July that there were 992 individuals holding political positions across government at that time. The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has disputed that figure, arguing that overall salary and allowance expenditure suggests the number of political appointees may be significantly higher. [The Sun]

Maldives: Activists refile court challenge over partial lifting of shark fishing ban

(lm) Environmental activists have resubmitted a constitutional petition to the Maldives High Court challenging the government's decision to allow limited gulper shark fishing, partially reversing the country's blanket shark fishing ban that has been in place since 2010.

In November 2025, the government lifted the ban specifically for gulper sharks, a deep-sea species, ending the Maldives' position as one of the few remaining full shark sanctuaries globally. The activists argue that the decision undermines environmental protections and have asked the High Court to invalidate the policy. Their earlier petition was dismissed in December on procedural grounds, prompting a revised submission. [The Sun]

Maldives: Police chief retires after eight months

(lm) Commissioner of Police Ismail Naveen retired on February 18 after nearly 32 years in uniform. Naveen had been appointed to the post in June 2025 following the resignation of his predecessor, Ali Shujau, making him the second police chief under President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's administration. [The Sun 1]

Deputy Commissioner of Police Farhad Fikry has been appointed Acting Commissioner by the Minister of Homeland Security pending a formal appointment. Under Maldivian law, candidates for Commissioner of Police are vetted by the Police Board, with the final appointment made by the President upon the recommendation of the Homeland Security Minister. [The Sun 2]

Both Naveen and Farhad have previously faced parliamentary scrutiny. Naveen was the subject of a recommendation for suspension by Parliament's Security Services Committee over alleged private meetings with shareholders of a company under investigation in a cigarette smuggling case; the recommendation was not implemented. Farhad has faced whistleblower allegations relating to the alleged destruction of evidence in a 2018 rape case involving his son. No court findings have been reported in either matter.

Former Commissioner Mohamed Hameed publicly warned that the frequent turnover of police chiefs—three commissioners within roughly two and a half years—risks undermining institutional stability, officer morale, and public confidence. He argued that leadership instability in the Maldives Police Service could blur the line between professional policing and political influence, particularly as the current administration approaches the midpoint of its term. [The Sun 3]

Maldives: High Court halts first major gang designation case under new law

(lm) The Maldives High Court has cancelled a scheduled hearing on a motion to designate the Addu-based "Scoope Group" as a gang under the country's new Gang Prevention Act. No reason was provided.

This is the first case to reach the High Court under the law, which was introduced last year to strengthen tools against organized youth crime. The Prosecutor

General's Office (PGO) argues that the group meets statutory criteria based on alleged involvement in coordinated assaults, intimidation and extortion. Prosecutors are also seeking to formally identify nine individuals as members and to dissolve a local sports club alleged to function as a front.

The case is politically sensitive. President Mohamed Muizzu has previously stated that no group currently meets the threshold for gang designation, despite the government promoting tougher anti-gang measures. [The Sun]

Maldives: Rise in violations of domestic violence protection orders, 38 arrests recorded

(lm) Maldives Police Service reported a notable increase in breaches of court-issued domestic violence protection orders in 2025, with 99 violations recorded and 38 individuals arrested. Of the 99 reported violations, 24 cases were forwarded to the Prosecutor General's Office for criminal prosecution. [The Sun]

Nepal: Election Commission criticized for inaction as security reinforced ahead of March 5 polls

(lm) Nepal's Election Commission is facing criticism for failing to enforce the election code of conduct ahead of the March 5 parliamentary elections, while authorities separately reinforce security following localized political and communal unrest.

The constitutional election management body enforced the code of conduct on January 19 after consultations with political parties. In the 35 days since implementation, it has received hundreds of complaints and issued 79 clarification notices to individuals and institutions accused of violations, including repeat notices in several cases.

Allegations have included campaigning in schools, the use of children in election activities, and the distribution of money during campaigns. In addition, more than half of the parties contesting the election did not publish their manifestos within the prescribed deadline, and a majority of candidates did not comply with directives requiring the opening of dedicated campaign bank accounts for financial transparency.

Despite prior warnings, no punitive action has been taken. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Separately, security has been tightened across Nepal in response to recent incidents in several districts. The government has reinforced deployments ahead of the March 5 vote following two distinct types of unrest: election-related confrontations between party supporters and localized communal violence in parts of Madhesh Province in the southern Tarai bordering India.

Political tensions have been most visible between the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP). Incidents including the burning of party symbols in Tulsipur in western Nepal and confrontations at campaign events in eastern districts have prompted increased security presence. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Separately, communal and youth-group clashes occurred in Gaur Municipality in Rautahat district and in Birgunj Metropolitan City in Parsa district, both in Madhesh Province near the India border. Temporary curfews and prohibitory orders were imposed, and security forces were deployed. Restrictions were later eased following security assessments and local mediation efforts, although monitoring continues. [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4] [The Kathmandu Post 5] [The Kathmandu Post 6] [The Kathmandu Post 7]

Authorities have also cited the proximity of the Holi festival as an additional security consideration, noting that celebrations in the Tarai can coincide with localized unrest. [The Kathmandu Post 8]

Nepal: Major parties outline competing reform, welfare, and growth agendas ahead of March 5 polls

(lm) Ahead of the March 5 House of Representatives elections, Nepal's three main parties—the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), and the Nepali Congress—have unveiled manifestos centered on governance reform, economic growth, and improved public service delivery, though with distinct emphases and policy tools.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), founded in 2022 and led by former television presenter Rabi Lamichhane, seeks to capitalize on widespread public frustration with corruption, patronage politics, and

governance failures—sentiments that culminated in the September 2025 mass protests and the subsequent dissolution of Parliament. The party positions itself as a clean-governance reform force, pledging to investigate the assets of all public office holders since 1990 and to nationalize illegally acquired property. It promises to reopen dormant corruption cases, mandate public asset disclosure prior to assuming office, digitize public services, streamline administrative structures, and reduce the number of federal ministries.

The RSP manifesto includes a notable focus on resolving Nepal's ongoing cooperative crisis, pledging to return small savers' funds quickly and to conditionally release jailed cooperative operators willing to refund depositors. This pledge is politically significant given that RSP chair Lamichhane himself faces ongoing legal challenges tied to cooperative fraud cases, with charges filed in multiple districts alleging embezzlement and misuse of cooperative funds linked to the now-defunct Gorkha Media Network and several savings cooperatives, though some organized-crime and money-laundering charges have been paused amid legal contests. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The CPN-UML, one of Nepal's two major leftist parties and led by KP Sharma Oli – who served as prime minister when Parliament's lower house was dissolved, presents an expansive welfare and growth agenda under the slogan "UML builds". It aims to expand Nepal's economic size to NPR 100 trillion (approximately USD 740 billion) within five years and NPR 200 trillion (approximately USD 1.48 trillion) within a decade, targeting annual growth of 7 to 9 percent. The manifesto includes wide-ranging social and cash incentives: interest-free student and entrepreneurial loans of up to NPR 2 million (approximately USD 14,800), a minimum monthly wage of NPR 25,000 (approximately USD 185), digital support packages including youth dollar cards worth up to USD 10,000, and expanded welfare transfers for women, youth, migrant workers, and low-income families. While ambitious, the manifesto offers limited detail on the fiscal sustainability of these commitments. [The Kathmandu Post 3] [The Kathmandu Post 4]

The Nepali Congress, Nepal's oldest democratic party – now under new leadership, foregrounds political transformation, institutional strengthening, and anti-corruption as central pillars of its "Pratigya Patra" - a formal pledge document presented as a binding promise to voters. It pledges to eradicate corruption, strengthen the rule of law, clarify federal powers, and restore trust in public institutions while honoring

demands arising from the Gen Z uprising. Economically, it envisions a liberal, production-oriented and equitable economy, targeting over 7 percent growth and 1.2 million jobs in five years. It emphasizes private-sector promotion, agricultural modernization, green growth, expanded health insurance, quality education, and diaspora engagement under the slogan “Prosperous Nepal, Dignified Nepalis.” [The Kathmandu Post 5] [The Kathmandu Post 6]

Nepal: Ex-prime minister Oli narrows campaign focus as main reform challenger expands outreach

(lm) With the March 5 parliamentary elections approaching, campaign dynamics are highlighting a tightening contest between established leadership and emerging political forces.

Former prime minister and chair of the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), KP Sharma Oli, has largely concentrated his campaign in his parliamentary constituency of Jhapa-5 in eastern Nepal rather than traveling nationwide as in previous elections. Instead of leading large national rallies, he has been conducting door-to-door outreach and smaller community meetings. Analysts interpret this shift as a sign of a more competitive race than in past elections. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Oli faces a direct challenge from Balendra Shah, a former Kathmandu mayor and senior leader of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, who resigned his mayoral post to contest the seat. Shah has combined grassroots campaigning in the constituency with broader outreach across the country. Speaking in Sudurpashchim Province, he framed his candidacy as a mandate to deliver results rather than merely seek votes, emphasizing development, infrastructure completion, education, and healthcare. He argued that the concerns of Nepal’s far western region must be represented more effectively in the federal capital. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Reform-oriented party hit by resignations ahead of March 5 election

(lm) A wave of provincial-level resignations has affected the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), a relatively new reform-oriented political party that has sought to

capitalize on transparency demands and anti-establishment sentiment following the September 2025 mass protests, ahead of the March 5 election. Departing leaders have cited allegations of financial irregularities, dissatisfaction over candidate selection, and concerns about internal democracy.

In recent days, several provincial officeholders publicly have stepped down, alleging that the party had failed to uphold its stated commitments to transparency and fair internal procedures. Criticism focused on the absence of a timely general convention, the handling of internal primaries, and claims that candidate selection decisions were influenced by financial considerations. In at least one case, a prospective candidate stated that a participation fee of NPR 25,000 (approximately USD 183) was collected for a primary that was ultimately not conducted.

Party treasurer Lima Adhikari rejected the allegations, stating that all financial matters were managed in accordance with party regulations and that primary-related fees were administrative and non-refundable under agreed rules. She said the resignations would not materially affect the party's electoral performance. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Former king questions legitimacy of March 5 polls and urges postponement

(lm) Former king Gyanendra Shah has called for postponement of the March 5 parliamentary election, arguing that holding polls amid widespread public dissatisfaction will not resolve Nepal's political instability and may instead deepen conflict.

In a video message issued on the eve of Democracy Day, Shah stated that elections conducted "against public sentiment" cannot produce durable solutions to what he described as a national crisis. He questioned the legitimacy of the interim government overseeing the vote, noting that it was not formed through a fully constitutional process, and warned that constitutional values are being undermined for political interests. He suggested that electoral participation without prior resolution of underlying political disputes could aggravate instability after the vote.

Shah was removed by parliamentary decision in July 2008, ending Nepal's monarchy. Despite that constitutional transition, recurrent government changes, party fragmentation, and governance concerns have kept monarchist discourse present in segments of the political landscape.

The government rejected Shah's position and reiterated its commitment to holding the election as scheduled. Authorities have also detained Durga Prasain, a controversial businessman aligned with monarchist activism, on charges related to alleged attempts to disrupt the electoral process.

The pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra Party has supported calls for a "new agreement" to address systemic political instability before proceeding to elections. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Transitional justice regulations set for cabinet endorsement amid leadership dispute

(lm) The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs has finalized long-pending regulations required to operationalize the amended Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, clearing a procedural bottleneck that has delayed substantive investigations into conflict-era cases.

Separate regulations for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission on the Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) are being forwarded to the Cabinet for endorsement. Their absence has prevented both bodies from launching full-scale investigations despite being reconstituted in May 2025 following legislative amendments.

The transitional justice process addresses abuses committed during the 1996–2006 Maoist insurgency. Since reconstitution, the TRC has received 15,191 new complaints, bringing its total caseload to 78,909, including 63,718 previously pending cases. The disappearance commission has received 68 new complaints and continues to hold approximately 2,500 unresolved cases. Under the revised Act, both commissions have four years to complete their mandates; roughly one year has already elapsed.

The government is moving forward despite opposition from sections of victims' groups and human rights advocates who contest the legitimacy of the current office-bearers appointed in May 2025 under the previous administration. These groups are calling for fresh appointments and argue that proceeding without leadership changes undermines trust in the process.

Institutionally, endorsement of the regulations would allow the commissions to activate investigation

procedures, deploy field teams, and expand staffing. Proposed organizational restructuring would increase the TRC's central staff and create district-level investigation teams, while the disappearance commission also seeks additional personnel. [The Kathmandu Post]

Sri Lanka: 2009 war-end surrender allegations resurface amid UK university event controversy

(lm) Sri Lanka's long-running debate over how its 26-year civil war ended has resurfaced after former army commander Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka alleged that political leaders considered surrender arrangements with Tamil Tiger (LTTE) leaders in the final 48 hours of the conflict.

Sri Lanka's civil war ended on May 19, 2009, when government forces killed LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and militarily crushed the separatist organization. The final weeks took place in a small coastal strip in the northeast, where tens of thousands of civilians were trapped between advancing government troops and retreating LTTE fighters.

The official government narrative has long held that the LTTE refused to surrender and that the war ended through complete military defeat. However, human rights groups and some former officials have argued that elements within the LTTE attempted to negotiate surrender in the final days — and that those attempts were either rejected or mishandled. Allegations related to these final hours remain central to international war-crimes debates.

Against this backdrop, Fonseka, who commanded the military during the final offensive, stated at a recent press conference that on May 17, 2009, then President Mahinda Rajapaksa, then Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and Basil Rajapaksa discussed possible surrender modalities involving international intermediaries such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International.

According to Fonseka, LTTE leaders sought to surrender to a neutral third party rather than directly to the Sri Lankan army. He alleged that political authorities insisted on surrender to the military instead. Fonseka also stated that he was abroad at the time and was not informed of the discussions, adding that the army's position was to defeat the LTTE leadership militarily. [Daily Mirror 1]

In response to renewed attention, Namal Rajapaksa cited separate remarks by Fonseka in which the former army commander said Mahinda Rajapaksa was not a "murderer." He argued that the military campaign targeted the LTTE rather than the Tamil civilian population and emphasized that the objective had been to end the conflict while minimizing civilian casualties. [Daily Mirror 2]

The controversy gained international visibility during Namal Rajapaksa's visit to the United Kingdom. Planned speaking engagements at the Oxford Union and Cambridge Union were cancelled following protests by Tamil student groups and diaspora organizations. Protesters argued that hosting a member of the Rajapaksa family ignored unresolved allegations related to civilian casualties, enforced disappearances, and post-war militarization in Tamil-majority areas. [Daily Mirror 3]

Rajapaksa expressed disappointment at the cancellations, stating that universities should remain spaces for open dialogue and that he was prepared to engage critics directly. SLPP officials accused sections of the Tamil diaspora of attempting to prevent discussion. [Daily Mirror 4] [Daily Mirror 5] [Daily Mirror 6]

Sri Lanka: Parliamentary select committee appointed to address Provincial Council election framework

(lm) The Speaker of Parliament has appointed a parliamentary select committee to examine the framework for holding Provincial Council elections, which have been suspended nationwide since 2018.

The committee, chaired by a cabinet minister and comprising members from both government and opposition parties, is tasked with determining the applicable electoral system and reviewing proposed amendments to the Provincial Councils Amendment Bill.

Provincial Councils — established under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution as Sri Lanka's subnational governance tier — have remained dissolved after disputes over electoral reforms introduced in 2017. Those reforms sought to replace the previous proportional representation model with a mixed-member system combining constituency-based and proportional seats. However, the required delimitation of new constituencies was contested and

never fully implemented, creating a legal and procedural impasse.

In the absence of elections, provincial administration has been carried out by centrally appointed governors, effectively suspending elected provincial governance across all nine provinces.

The select committee's work is intended to determine whether elections proceed under the previous proportional system or a revised legislative framework, a decision with constitutional and political significance, particularly in relation to the devolution structure under the 13th Amendment. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Parliament abolishes MPs' pension scheme after two-thirds approval

(lm) Sri Lanka's Parliament has approved legislation repealing the pension scheme for Members of Parliament (MPs), completing all stages of the Parliamentary Pensions (Repeal) Bill on February 17.

The second reading of the bill passed with a two-thirds majority, with 154 MPs voting in favor and two against. The third reading was subsequently approved without a vote. Proposed amendments seeking to remove the retrospective effect of the legislation and to retain pensions for MPs over the age of 65 were rejected. A division on one such amendment resulted in 152 votes against and four in favor. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

The repeal marks a significant change to the benefits structure for legislators. Under the previous framework, MPs were entitled to a lifetime pension after completing a specified period in office.

During the parliamentary debate, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa argued that pension provisions can serve as a safeguard against corruption, noting that some countries provide post-tenure financial security to elected representatives for that purpose. He also linked the debate to broader reductions in public sector pension entitlements. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: United National Party signals restructuring by December

(lm) The United National Party (UNP), one of Sri Lanka's oldest political parties and historically one of the country's two dominant governing parties, has

announced plans for internal restructuring and greater youth participation by December 2026.

Speaking in Colombo on February 23, UNP Deputy General Secretary Harin Fernando stated that the party would begin grassroots-level restructuring from March and present a “new look” by December, with younger members assuming a greater role. He also said steps would be taken to ensure that the experience and institutional knowledge of party leader Ranil Wickremesinghe are transmitted to emerging leaders within the party. [Daily Mirror]

The UNP’s national standing declined sharply after a major internal split ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections, when a large number of senior members left to form the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) under Sajith Premadasa, the current leader of the opposition. Since then, the party has maintained only limited representation in Parliament, while the SJB has functioned as the principal opposition bloc.

In recent months, senior figures from both the UNP and the SJB have held discussions on possible cooperation or alignment ahead of future electoral contests. These discussions have not resulted in a formal merger but indicate continued dialogue between the two formations.

Sri Lanka: Muslim Left Front seeks election commission recognition

(lm) The Muslim Left Front has formally applied for registration as a political party with Sri Lanka’s Election Commission. The Muslim Left Front describes itself as the country’s first Muslim-oriented left political formation. It states that its platform focuses on advancing the political rights of Sri Lanka’s Muslim community—an officially recognized minority comprising roughly 9–10 percent of the population—while promoting social justice, equality, good governance, and national unity. If approved, the party will contest elections under the “cricket bat” symbol, which must be allocated by the Election Commission as part of the registration process. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former first lady seeks alternative arrangements after CID summons in public funds probe

(lm) Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has summoned Maithree Wickremesinghe, wife of former President Ranil Wickremesinghe, to provide a statement in an ongoing probe into the alleged use of public funds for a private overseas visit in late 2023. [Daily Mirror 1]

The inquiry concerns approximately LKR 16.9 million (USD 57,460) allegedly spent in connection with the trip, which coincided with Professor Wickremesinghe's graduation ceremony, raising questions about whether state resources were used for a private purpose while the former president was abroad on official business.

Wickremesinghe was instructed to appear before investigators on February 20 but informed the CID in writing that she was unable to attend due to health reasons. She indicated that officers could visit her residence if necessary. [Daily Mirror 2]

The inquiry has also implicated former Presidential Secretary Saman Ekanayake, who was previously remanded over the alleged facilitation or release of state funds for the visit and was later granted bail. Proceedings are continuing before the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court.

Sri Lanka: Deputy secretary general of parliament challenges interdiction in court

(lm) A senior parliamentary official has filed a petition in Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal challenging his interdiction, escalating an internal administrative dispute within Parliament into a formal legal case.

Chaminda Kularatne, Deputy Secretary General and Chief of Staff of Parliament, has named the Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the General Secretary of Parliament, and several other parliamentary officeholders as respondents. Among those cited are the Chief Opposition Whip, the Leader of the House, a cabinet minister, the Assistant General Secretary of Parliament, and the designated inquiring officer.

Kularatne has requested an interim order suspending his interdiction pending judicial review and has also sought legal costs. The respondents include members of the Parliamentary Staff Advisory Committee, which is responsible for matters relating to senior administrative appointments and disciplinary processes within Parliament.

The case introduces a judicial dimension to what had been a political and procedural dispute. Opposition lawmakers have repeatedly questioned the legality and procedural basis of Kularatne's interdiction in parliamentary debates, indicating broader institutional tensions within the legislature. The Court of Appeal will now assess the administrative legality of the disciplinary action. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: IMF chief urges sustained reforms and rural revival amid post-cyclone recovery

(lm) IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva met President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Colombo to review Sri Lanka's economic recovery under the ongoing IMF-supported reform program and to assess post-disaster reconstruction needs following Cyclone Ditwah.

Sri Lanka is currently implementing a USD 2.9 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program approved by the International Monetary Fund in March 2023 after the country's 2022 sovereign debt crisis. Disbursements are tied to periodic performance reviews. In addition to regular program financing, the IMF has provided over USD 200 million in emergency support to help address fiscal and balance-of-payments pressures stemming from recent natural disasters.

Cyclone Ditwah, which struck in late November 2025, caused widespread flooding and landslides across multiple districts, resulting in significant loss of life, displacement, and large-scale damage to housing, infrastructure, and agricultural assets. The disaster hit rural and plantation regions particularly hard, compounding recovery challenges in communities already vulnerable to economic shocks.

During discussions at the Presidential Secretariat, Georgieva emphasized the importance of "staying the course" on reforms to secure durable and inclusive growth. She stressed raising medium-term growth rates to 7–8 percent, promoting private sector investment, and accelerating governance and anti-corruption reforms as foundations for sustainable recovery. Agricultural productivity, rural economic diversification, and expanded livelihood opportunities featured prominently, alongside coordination with development partners such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Georgieva also visited cyclone-affected communities, highlighting the need for housing reconstruction, land

rehabilitation, and medium-term economic revitalization in impacted areas. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Separately, Opposition Member of Parliament Harsha De Silva, who chairs the parliamentary Committee on Public Finance, welcomed IMF support but argued that engagement should extend beyond fiscal stabilization to deeper governance reforms. He credited cross-party backing for helping Sri Lanka stabilize more rapidly than some peer economies and stressed the importance of maintaining a strong working relationship with the IMF. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Doctors' union action disrupts state hospitals as dispute enters second week

(lm) Disruptions to Sri Lanka's public hospital system are deepening as trade union action by the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA), which represents state-sector doctors, has now entered its second week, reaching nearly two weeks in duration.

The GMOA says the Ministry of Health has failed to provide satisfactory responses to its demands. Although the union has not declared a full nationwide strike, its phased escalation is increasingly affecting service delivery across state hospitals.

Outpatient departments are reporting delays in routine consultations and treatment, impacting patients who depend on the public health system for medicines and primary care. Specialist doctors have also stopped providing inter-hospital cover — a system that allows consultants to temporarily support understaffed facilities — adding pressure to already stretched institutions.

Since February 18, regional health officials affiliated with the union have refrained from submitting operational data to the Health Ministry's central database. The system is used to coordinate national health services and monitor hospital performance. The withholding of data represents a strategic escalation aimed at increasing administrative pressure on the ministry. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Parliament debate focuses on coal import losses and quality concerns

(lm) A parliamentary debate has centered on allegations that the purchase of eight coal shipments resulted in losses to the state totaling LKR 7.9 billion (USD 26.86 million), based on figures presented by an opposition member who chairs the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Infrastructure Development. The opposition cited correspondence from the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), the state-owned utility responsible for operating the Norochcholai coal power plant, as the basis for the figures. [Daily Mirror 1]

Separately, Agriculture Minister Lal Kantha acknowledged that inferior quality coal had been supplied in recent shipments but stated that there was no fraud or corruption in the tender process. He said there are mechanisms and criteria in place to recover financial losses caused by inferior coal and that the government would act in accordance with those procedures. [Daily Mirror 2]

Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa stated that the ninth coal shipment was also of inferior quality based on operational data. He said the shipment generated 250 megawatts of electricity, compared to a stated average standard of 300 megawatts and 275 megawatts achieved during a previous cycle. He noted that the ninth shipment was sourced from a South African supplier. [Daily Mirror 3]

During the parliamentary debate, opposition members alleged irregularities in the tender process, including changes to submission deadlines. The Minister of Power and Energy rejected claims that inferior-quality coal had damaged turbines at the Norochcholai plant and stated that procurement procedures had been revised in line with recommendations issued by the Auditor General in 2023. [Daily Mirror 1]

Sri Lanka: Government plans independent petroleum regulator amid market liberalization

(lm) Sri Lanka's Power and Energy Ministry has initiated steps to establish an independent regulatory authority for the petroleum sector, citing capacity constraints as new international operators enter the market.

At present, national-level regulatory functions are handled directly by the government for major entities including the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC), its storage arm Ceylon Petroleum Storage Terminals Ltd, Lanka IOC (the Sri Lankan subsidiary of India's state-owned Indian Oil

Corporation), and the Petroleum Development Authority.

Regulatory pressures have intensified following the entry of new foreign operators. These include Sinopec Energy Lanka, the local subsidiary of China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (Sinopec)—one of the world's largest state-owned oil and petrochemical companies—and R.M. Parks, a United States-based fuel and logistics firm licensed to import and distribute petroleum products in Sri Lanka. Their participation marks a significant shift from Sri Lanka's traditionally state-dominated fuel market toward a multi-operator structure.

The broader liberalization effort has also generated additional non-tax revenue. An annual license fee of USD 2 million is now charged to four key petroleum import and distribution entities. License fees across related segments—including lubricants, tar, and bunker fuel—were increased by 20 percent from January 1, 2023. The aviation fuel market has also been opened to private participation, with two companies licensed to trade Jet A-1 fuel. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government rejects LPG shortage claims as supply dispute with private distributor intensifies

(lm) Sri Lanka's government is seeking to contain renewed tensions in the domestic liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) market, rejecting opposition claims of a looming shortage while pressing a major private distributor over supply instability.

Authorities maintain that there is no structural shortage of LPG. Trade and Food Security Minister Wasantha Samarasinghe told Parliament that state-owned Litro Gas Lanka Ltd — which supplies the bulk of the domestic market — has secured adequate stocks and increased cylinder releases to stabilize availability. The government attributes recent supply disruptions to shipment delays at private supplier LAUGFS Gas, whose procurement model relies on shipment-by-shipment imports rather than long-term annual supply contracts. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2] [Daily Mirror 3]

LAUGFS officials have been summoned for further discussions this week as the government seeks to prevent market instability. Additional shipments are expected, and officials say panic buying has compounded temporary distribution gaps. [Daily Mirror 4]

Opposition parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa disputed the government's assurances, citing widespread complaints of difficulty in obtaining cylinders. He called for immediate release of gas stocks from the Hambantota Port Economic Zone terminal, which is currently used primarily for re-export operations, and suggested revising existing policy to allow supplies to be diverted to the domestic market. [Daily Mirror 5]

Sri Lanka: Government rejects high-security zone claim in lawyer's killing, expands protective measures

(lm) Sri Lanka's Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala has rejected opposition claims that the recent killing of an attorney-at-law and his wife occurred within a designated high-security zone, stating in Parliament that Akuregoda—where the shooting took place—has not been formally declared as such by security authorities.

The opposition questioned this position, noting the proximity of the Defence Headquarters, located roughly 600 meters from the crime scene. The minister responded that security forces had confirmed the area does not carry official high-security status and described the double homicide as an isolated criminal incident that does not pose a broader threat to national security.

In response to concerns raised by members of the legal community, the government announced it would enhance security for lawyers and investigating officers based on intelligence-led threat assessments. The minister stated that protective measures have already been extended to certain judges and officers of the Attorney General's Department following security evaluations. He emphasized that the killing should not deter legal professionals from representing clients, underscoring that legal representation is constitutionally protected.

Authorities have launched a multi-agency investigation involving 12 police teams, including the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the Special Task Force (STF), the Colombo Crimes Division (CCD), and the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB). Two suspects have reportedly been arrested for aiding and abetting the crime, and further arrests are expected. The minister added that investigators are examining whether recent isolated shootings are interconnected or linked to political motives. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Rear admiral appointed director general of coast guard

(lm) Sri Lanka's Cabinet of Ministers has approved the appointment of Rear Admiral Rohan Joseph as Director General of the Coast Guard Department with immediate effect. The position became vacant following the retirement of the previous officeholder on October 7, 2025, upon reaching the mandatory retirement age of 55. The appointment was proposed by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in his capacity as Minister of Defence. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Over 99,000 arrested under nationwide 'Ratama Ekata' anti-drug campaign

(lm) Sri Lankan police report that more than 99,000 suspects have been arrested under the nationwide "Ratama Ekata" anti-drug operation, a large-scale enforcement drive aimed at disrupting narcotics supply networks across the island.

According to the Police Media Division, 99,540 individuals have been taken into custody in connection with 100,247 raids conducted nationwide. Detention orders have been obtained for 1,973 suspects, while 1,639 individuals have been referred for rehabilitation. Investigations into suspected illicitly acquired assets have been initiated against 137 persons. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Properties worth USD 3.4 million confiscated from alleged underworld figures

(lm) The Minister of Public Security told Parliament that properties valued at more than LKR 1 billion (USD 3.4 million) have been confiscated from alleged underworld figures as part of ongoing enforcement measures. According to the minister, the assets include two land parcels valued at over LKR 50 million (USD 170,000) and additional properties worth approximately LKR 250 million (USD 850,000) linked to individuals identified as organized crime figures. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government advances electronic monitoring law amid justice-

system reform push

(lm) The government is drafting legislation to allow selected prisoners to serve sentences under house arrest with electronic monitoring, as part of a broader response to acute prison overcrowding and systemic judicial delays.

According to the Minister of National Integration and Justice, Sri Lanka's prisons currently hold over 39,000 inmates despite a capacity of roughly 10,000. A significant share consists of remand prisoners, many linked to drug-related offenses. At the same time, nearly one million civil and criminal cases remain pending before courts, reflecting structural congestion across the justice system.

The proposed electronic monitoring framework is positioned as a corrective measure within a wider reform agenda. The ministry cites low judicial staffing levels — approximately 20 judges per one million people — as a key contributor to delays. Measures underway include digitization of higher courts through electronic filing, expansion of court infrastructure, and recruitment to reduce staffing shortages.

In parallel, the government has reiterated plans to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act and introduce new legislation aligned with international human rights standards. A public consultation period is open until February 28. [Daily Mirror]

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

Cambodia: Rights groups urge release of journalists

(dql) Rights groups and media advocates have called for the immediate release of two Cambodian journalists sentenced to 14 years in prison for treason, arguing their case should have been handled under the Press Law rather than the Criminal Code.

Phorn Sopheap and Pheap Pheara, reporters for local digital media outlet TSP 68 TV Online, were convicted by the Siem Reap Provincial Court under Article 445 for allegedly supplying information deemed harmful to national defence. The charges stem from their coverage of the July 2025 clashes between Cambodian and Thai forces near Ta Krabey Temple, where prosecutors said images posted online revealed military positions and possibly exposed mine locations.

The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association and the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association described the sentence as excessive and warned it could deter reporting on sensitive issues such as border tensions. The Committee to Protect Journalists likewise condemned the ruling, urging authorities to stop applying broadly defined national security laws to journalistic work. [Khmer Times]

The convictions of the two TSP 68 TV Online reporters form part of a broader pattern of legal action against media workers covering the Cambodia–Thailand border tensions and nationwide scam crackdowns.

On February 13, journalist Luot Sophal was detained in Oddar Meanchey and later charged under multiple provisions of the Criminal Code, including incitement and undermining military morale. The accusations stem from a Facebook video in which he criticized water shortages affecting frontline troops. Authorities ordered the video removed, and he subsequently issued a public apology before being released. If found guilty, he faces a potential prison term of up to seven years.

According to a joint report shared with CamboJA News and the rights group LICADHO, at least six cases involving journalists were recorded in February alone in connection with their reporting. The report documented 32 arrests between July 2025 and February, including opposition figures, activists, and media workers.

LICADHO warned that the wave of arrests and forced apologies has drawn criticism and further constrained press freedom in Cambodia, particularly on sensitive

issues linked to national security and border disputes. [Kiripost]

Cambodia: Teenage pregnancy remains major challenge

(dql) A three-year project by Plan International has sharply reduced child and early marriage in Cambodia's northeastern provinces, particularly Ratanakiri and Stung Treng, while significantly improving girls' education and employment outcomes.

The evaluation found that marriage before age 18 among girls fell from 26.3% to 9.5 percent, school completion and sex education coverage rose markedly, and economic independence among participants increased, demonstrating the impact of targeted community, education, and vocational interventions.

Despite these gains, teenage pregnancy remains persistently high nationwide, especially among girls with little or no education, highlighting a major policy gap. National data cited by UNICEF show only a gradual decline in child marriage overall, with ethnic minority provinces still disproportionately affected.

In response, the Cambodian government—through the Health Ministry and the Ministry of Women's Affairs—is developing longer-term strategies and a 2025–2030 national action plan with international partners to curb child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, underscoring the issue's significance for gender equality, human capital development, and social stability. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia: Authorities deport over 1,000 foreigners in intensified crackdown on online scam networks

(dql) Cambodia has deported more than a thousand foreign nationals in a sweeping crackdown on transnational scam networks and immigration violations.

Over a three-day period from February 20-23, the General Department of Immigration expelled 1,090 individuals from 17 countries, including China, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, and several African and Southeast Asian states.

Authorities said those removed were implicated in online fraud schemes, unlawful border entry, visa breaches, and unauthorized employment. Nearly 500 Chinese nationals and over 160 Myanmar nationals were among those flown out on special flights, while others were processed through immigration police channels. [Khmer Times 1]

In parallel, Phnom Penh authorities have inspected 2,700 sites in just over two weeks this month as part of an intensified nationwide drive to dismantle online scam networks, uncovering more than 21,000 foreign nationals at suspected locations.

According to the Secretariat of the Commission for Combating Online Scams, coordinated sweeps conducted between February 3 and 18 covered all 14 districts of the capital. The operation targeted offices, residential compounds, boreys, guesthouses and hotels believed to host cyber fraud activities. During the inspections, officials identified 21,104 foreigners.

Separately, law enforcement broke up 40 scam cases during the same period, arresting 284 foreign suspects from 13 countries. Eleven cases have been forwarded to court, with several alleged ringleaders — including Chinese, Singaporean and Cambodian nationals — formally charged.

The campaign forms part of the government's nationwide "XXL" operation, which aims to eliminate online scams before Khmer New Year in April. Interior Ministry figures indicate that since the crackdown began, at least 210,000 foreigners have voluntarily left Cambodia, while over 48,000 have been deported in connection with scam operations. Courts have sentenced more than 500 masterminds and accomplices in the past eight months, and authorities report seizing tens of thousands of devices across roughly 200 cases.

The sweeping operations respond to mounting international scrutiny of organized online fraud in Cambodia. [Khmer Times 2]

Indonesia: Military retiree takes helm of state health insurer BPJS Kesehatan, stirring debate over role of military in civilian institutions

(ms) President Prabowo Subianto has appointed retired military cardiologist Maj. Gen. (ret.) Prihati Pujowaskito as president director of BPJS Kesehatan,

the agency that runs Indonesia's national health insurance program (JKN), a system covering more than 270 million people. The decision has renewed debate about the role of former military officers in civilian institutions and the future direction of one of the country's most financially strained public bodies.

BPJS Kesehatan functions as Indonesia's single-payer health insurer, reimbursing hospitals, clinics, and doctors for services provided under JKN. The program is central to the country's universal healthcare ambitions but has faced recurring budget deficits, rising treatment costs, and persistent complaints over service quality, reimbursement delays, and data accuracy. Healthcare spending has climbed sharply in recent years, driven by inflation, expanding coverage, and higher utilization rates.

Government officials have framed Prihati's appointment as part of a broader reform effort. Coordinating Minister for Community Empowerment Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar said the new leadership marks a "momentum for transformation," with priorities including improving beneficiary data, refining subsidy targeting, and stabilizing the insurer's finances. Policymakers have also warned that contribution rates may need adjustment to keep pace with medical cost growth.

Critics, however, view the appointment through a wider political lens. Indonesia's democratic reforms after 1998 sought to reduce military influence in civilian governance, making senior placements of retired officers symbolically sensitive. Some analysts argue that leadership roles in complex social insurance systems require specialized expertise in health economics, actuarial science, and public administration rather than hierarchical command experience, which Prihati has not. They argue that especially his good connections to Prabowo, were the deciding factor for his appointment, aligning with a broader trend under the current administration, alivating allies, many with military background, like Prabowo himself, into leading positions. [Antara] [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Anti-corruption agency reviews Religious Affairs Minister's use of private jet linked to businessman

(ms) Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) is assessing Religious Affairs Minister Nasaruddin Umar's use of a private jet during a February 15 working visit to Takalar, South Sulawesi, after the trip triggered public scrutiny on social media.

The controversy emerged when images of the minister's arrival circulated online, prompting questions about whether the flight constituted an improper benefit. The aircraft was provided by Oesman Sapta Odang, a prominent Indonesian businessman and political figure who chairs the Hanura Party and leads the diversified OSO Group conglomerate. The visit was connected to the inauguration of a religious and educational facility affiliated with a foundation associated with Odang.

The KPK confirmed that Nasaruddin has reported the flight to its Gratification Directorate, a step required under Indonesia's anti-corruption regulations. Public officials are obligated to disclose gifts, benefits, or facilities connected to their position within 30 working days. Such disclosures do not automatically indicate wrongdoing but allow the commission to determine whether the benefit was permissible.

Nasaruddin stated that the private jet was used due to scheduling and logistical considerations and said he is prepared to accept any consequences resulting from the review. The KPK emphasized that the process is a routine compliance verification rather than a criminal investigation.

The commission has up to 30 working days to evaluate whether the flight represents a legitimate operational arrangement or a gratuity requiring reimbursement to the state. The case has drawn wider attention amid ongoing discussions in Indonesia regarding ethics rules, transparency standards, and the use of privately funded facilities by government officials. [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post] [Voice of Indonesia]

Indonesia: January budget deficit reaches USD 3.25 billion as spending surges under President Prabowo

(ms) Indonesia recorded a January budget deficit of IDR 54.6 trillion (USD 3.25 billion), reflecting a sharp increase in government spending at the start of the fiscal year. The deficit, equal to 0.21 percent of gross domestic product, marks a rare January shortfall for Southeast Asia's largest economy, which typically posts early-year surpluses supported by strong revenues and slower disbursement cycles.

State spending rose 25.7 percent year on year to IDR 227.3 trillion (USD 13.53 billion), exceeding revenue growth of 20.5 percent, with total state income reaching IDR 172.7 trillion (USD 10.28 billion). Authorities said the imbalance was driven by front-

loaded expenditures designed to reinforce economic growth.

A key contributor to January spending was President Prabowo Subianto's free meals program, which accounted for IDR 19.5 trillion (USD 1.16 billion). The initiative has expanded rapidly, with officials reporting more than 60 million beneficiaries as of late February, compared with fewer than one million recipients early last year.

The Finance Ministry projects first-quarter spending will reach IDR 809 trillion (USD 48.15 billion), roughly 30 percent higher than the same period in 2025. Economic growth is forecast between 5.5 percent and 6 percent for the quarter.

Markets remain attentive to Indonesia's fiscal trajectory following Moody's recent outlook downgrade to negative, while Fitch Ratings has begun consultations with policymakers. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Indonesia: Police investigate USD 1.48 billion money laundering case tied to illegal gold mining

(ms) Indonesia's National Police have opened a large-scale money laundering investigation after financial authorities traced roughly Rp 25.8 trillion, equivalent to about USD 1.48 billion, in transactions linked to illegal gold mining operations. The case centers on an unlicensed mining network previously shut down in West Kalimantan, with investigators now following the flow of funds through businesses in East Java.

Police from the Directorate of Special Economic Crimes conducted coordinated searches at multiple properties, including residences and a gold shop in Nganjuk and Surabaya. Officers seized cash, gold, electronic devices, and financial documents believed to be connected to the storage, processing, and sale of gold originating from illegal mines.

The probe was triggered by an analysis from Indonesia's Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK), which reviewed financial activity connected to the mining operation between 2019 and 2022. According to police statements, dozens of individuals were convicted in the original illegal mining case, but the financial investigation aims to identify actors involved further along the supply chain.

Authorities say the suspected laundering scheme involved routing proceeds through gold traders, refining companies, and exporters. Investigators have so far questioned 37 witnesses, with no suspects formally named.

The scale of the case reflects broader concerns about illegal mining in Indonesia. PPATK estimates that transactions associated with unlawful gold mining nationwide reached Rp 185 trillion between 2023 and 2025. Law enforcement agencies have mapped more than 1,500 illegal mining sites across the country, as elevated global gold prices continue to drive expansion of unlicensed extraction activities. [The Jakarta Post] [Voice of Indonesia]

Indonesia: Security Forces' response to August protests described as harshest since 1998 new order period

(ms) An independent fact-finding commission, by Indonesia's leading civil society groups, has accused Indonesian security forces of carrying out the most extensive crackdown on civil dissent since the fall of the New Order era, citing mass arrests, digital intimidation, and procedural abuses following the nationwide unrest of August 2025.

The investigation, conducted by KontraS, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), and LBH Jakarta, examined 115 police investigation files, interviewed 63 informants, and compiled large volumes of open-source evidence across eight provinces and 18 cities. The commission's findings describe what it calls a "colossal arrest operation" targeting activists, students, and young demonstrators.

According to the report, 6,719 people were detained during and after the protests. As of February 14, 2026, 706 individuals remained in legal proceedings categorized by rights groups as political prisoners, while 506 had been convicted. Authorities charged 348 detainees under Article 170 of the Criminal Code, a provision commonly used in public disorder cases. Thirteen activists were accused of incitement.

Researchers allege that arrests were often based on social media activity rather than direct involvement in violence. The report further claims that many detainees were released without clear legal justification, raising concerns about arbitrary detention and due process violations.

Beyond physical arrests, the commission documented what it described as “digital terror.” Activists and students reported online harassment, doxing, and disinformation campaigns that investigators say contributed to a climate of fear. The inquiry also points to alleged coordinated efforts to shape public narratives, including rapid shifts in online messaging during the unrest.

The fact-finding team additionally cited video evidence suggesting the presence of unidentified actors who appeared to encourage escalation at several protest sites. Investigators said similar individuals were observed across different locations, though these claims remain contested.

Constitutional law scholar Bivitri Susanti criticized what she characterized as indiscriminate law enforcement tactics, warning that such practices risk undermining democratic freedoms. Student participants likewise reported heightened security presence and intimidation on university campuses ahead of demonstrations.

Government officials have defended police actions as necessary for maintaining order, noting that many charges relate to alleged violations of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law. Rights groups, however, argue that the scale and pattern of enforcement reflect a broader attempt to deter political activism among younger Indonesians.

The findings have intensified debate over civil liberties, policing standards, and the state’s response to dissent in Indonesia’s post-Reformasi era. [IndoLeft] [Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Jakarta moves to officially ban Ramadan restaurant raids amid religious tensions

(ms) Jakarta’s provincial government has ordered a halt to restaurant raids during Ramadan, addressing a practice that has repeatedly surfaced during the fasting month when members of conservative mass organizations conduct informal “sweeping” operations. Governor Pramono Anung said public order enforcement remains the responsibility of state institutions, instructing that such actions would not be tolerated in the capital.

The raids, typically framed by participating groups as efforts to uphold fasting norms, have long generated controversy. Business owners and civil society

organizations have raised concerns over intimidation, legal uncertainty, and pressure on establishments serving non-fasting customers. Jakarta's directive places regulatory authority firmly with municipal agencies, particularly the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP).

Restaurant operations during Ramadan are governed through Jakarta's licensing and public order regulations. It is not illegal for restaurants to open during fasting hours, but businesses are expected to comply with administrative guidelines issued by local authorities. These commonly involve service adjustments, operating hour modifications, and measures limiting the visibility of daytime dining, reflecting sensitivities during the holy month.

Indonesia's social context shapes the policy's significance. The country has the world's largest Muslim population, with Islam playing a dominant role in public life. While the state formally recognizes multiple religions under the Pancasila ideology, debates over religious expression and minority protections remain persistent features of national discourse.

Ramadan raids have periodically highlighted these tensions, as non-state actors seek to influence public behavior and suppress "anti-islamic behavior" through such aggressive actions. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Amnesty condemns alleged police killing of 14-year-old in Maluku

(jn) Amnesty International has criticized Indonesian police over the death of a 14-year-old boy in Tual City, Maluku, describing the incident as a possible extrajudicial killing.

The teenager, Arianto Tawakal, died on February 19 after being struck during a police operation targeting alleged illegal street racing. According to his family, a police officer hit him in the face with a helmet while he was riding downhill on a motorcycle, causing him to lose control and crash. He later died in hospital from severe brain hemorrhaging. His brother, who was riding with him, sustained injuries.

Police said the officer had been attempting to signal riders to stop and that the helmet strike occurred unintentionally during the operation. The family has rejected claims that Arianto was involved in street racing and disputed the police account of events.

The officer, identified as Second Brigadier Masias Siahaya, has been detained and will face criminal and disciplinary proceedings. Authorities said an internal investigation is ongoing to determine whether procedures were followed.

Amnesty International Indonesia stated that the case reflects broader concerns over police use of force and urged a transparent and thorough investigation. [TEMPO]

Indonesia: President Prabowo signals growth push in talks with global investors

(ms) Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto used a series of investor meetings in Washington this week to argue that Indonesia is ready to translate its scale into sustained growth, even as international money managers remain alert to recent market turbulence and policy uncertainty.

Speaking to executives from 12 major global investment firms, Prabowo said Indonesia should no longer be viewed as a “sleeping giant,” according to officials who attended the session. The firms represented at the meeting manage about USD 16 trillion in assets, highlighting the pool of capital Jakarta is trying to attract as Southeast Asia’s largest economy pushes infrastructure expansion and industrial downstreaming.

Investment Minister Rosan Roeslani, who also leads the state-backed investment vehicle Danantara, said the discussion focused on improving Indonesia’s investment climate, maintaining macroeconomic stability, and strengthening legal certainty. Danantara’s Chief Investment Officer, Pandu Sjahrir, said investors welcomed Prabowo’s emphasis on rule of law and regulatory clarity as prerequisites for long-term allocations. Several participants indicated interest in structuring investments through partnerships, potentially using Danantara as a local counterpart, officials said.

The outreach comes at a sensitive moment for Indonesian markets. Earlier this month, Bloomberg reported that investor confidence was shaken by a sharp selloff in local equities and concerns linked to resource policy, including reports that Danantara had considered a takeover of a major gold mine. The episode added to questions about how far Prabowo’s administration may go in asserting state control over strategic assets and how clearly those decisions will be communicated to investors.

Also regulators moved quickly after MSCI warned Indonesia could face a downgrade in market classification unless transparency and free-float issues improve. Officials pledged reforms intended to bolster market credibility, including steps to raise free-float thresholds. Moody's, meanwhile, lowered its outlook on Indonesia's sovereign credit rating to negative, citing concerns around policy stability under Prabowo.

Against that backdrop, Prabowo's team framed the Washington meetings as a signal that the government wants to crowd in long-term capital rather than rely primarily on domestic financing. In addition to group discussions, Prabowo held one-on-one conversations with each executive to explore cooperation, officials said. The delegation included senior economic, energy, and foreign-affairs officials, along with the head of Indonesia's chamber of commerce. [Antara 1] [Antara 2] [Bloomberg] [Tempo] [Voice of Indonesia]

Indonesia: External debt nears USD 432 Billion as ratio edges close to 30 percent of GDP

(ms) Indonesia's external debt rose modestly in the fourth quarter of 2025, reaching USD 431.7 billion, according to Bank Indonesia, highlighting continued reliance on foreign financing while maintaining what policymakers describe as a manageable risk profile.

The increase from the previous quarter's USD 427.6 billion reflects a combination of government borrowing and shifts in global capital flows. Despite the uptick, the country's external debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 29.9 percent, a level widely viewed by economists as moderate for an emerging market of Indonesia's size.

A central feature of Indonesia's debt structure remains the dominance of long-term liabilities. Bank Indonesia reported that 85.7 percent of total external debt carries long-term maturities, a composition that helps limit refinancing pressures and reduce vulnerability to short-term market volatility. Long-term debt is generally considered less risky because repayment obligations are spread over a longer horizon.

Government external debt accounted for the bulk of the quarterly increase, climbing to USD 214.3 billion from USD 210.1 billion. The rise was partly attributed to foreign investor demand for Indonesian sovereign bonds, suggesting that international appetite for government securities has remained resilient even amid persistent global financial uncertainty.

Officials said government borrowing continues to be directed toward priority sectors, including health and social services, education, and infrastructure-related spending. Nearly all government external debt is classified as long-term, further easing near-term repayment risks.

By contrast, private sector external debt declined slightly to USD 192.8 billion, reflecting reduced overseas borrowing by nonfinancial corporations. Private external obligations remain concentrated in key industries such as manufacturing, financial services, energy, and mining, sectors closely tied to Indonesia's export base and industrial activity.

Bank Indonesia reiterated that coordination between the central bank and the government is being strengthened to monitor debt dynamics and safeguard macroeconomic stability. Authorities maintain that external debt will continue to play a role in financing development and growth, provided that risk controls and prudent management are preserved. [Antara] [IDN Indonesia]

Indonesia: Land constraints challenge President Prabowo's prestige Red and White cooperatives program

(ms) Indonesia's effort to expand its nationwide Red and White Cooperatives network is encountering practical obstacles, as many villages struggle to secure land for the facilities required under the program. The initiative, a central pillar of President Prabowo Subianto's economic agenda, is designed to strengthen grassroots economic activity by establishing cooperative centers intended to serve as local hubs for production, distribution, and services.

The Red and White Cooperatives program aims to modernize village economies by providing shared infrastructure where small businesses, farmers, and microenterprises can access financing, storage, logistics, and digital tools. Policymakers have framed the cooperatives as engines of rural development, seeking to reduce supply-chain inefficiencies, improve bargaining power for producers, and expand participation in higher-value economic activities. The scale of the project is significant, with authorities targeting tens of thousands of cooperative sites across the archipelago.

However, implementation has proven uneven. Central government guidelines require villages to allocate at least 1,000 square meters of legally owned land for

each cooperative building. Sites must be immediately usable, accessible, and supported by essential utilities such as electricity, clean water, and internet connectivity. In many regions, especially urbanized or densely populated areas, suitable land is scarce.

Geography further complicates the rollout. Some villages are located in mountainous terrain, where preparing construction-ready plots can involve costly land leveling. In other cases, village-owned land is distant from transportation routes, reflecting persistent infrastructure gaps that undermine accessibility and operational viability.

The challenges highlight the complexity of translating a nationally coordinated development strategy into diverse local contexts. While the cooperatives are intended to stimulate inclusive growth and improve rural productivity, land acquisition and preparation have emerged as critical bottlenecks. For external observers, the situation illustrates the broader structural constraints that often shape large-scale development programs in emerging economies, where regulatory ambitions must contend with local capacity, land-use patterns, and infrastructure limitations. [The Jakarta Post]

Laos conducts National Assembly elections under single-party framework

(ms) Laos has held elections for its 175-seat National Assembly and provincial People's Councils, on February 22, with authorities presenting the vote as a routine component of the country's political cycle while observers pointed to the structural limits shaping the process.

More than 4.7 million citizens were eligible to cast ballots, according to official data. As in previous elections, candidates were screened through party-led mechanisms tied to the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), which has governed the Southeast Asian nation for nearly five decades. Laos does not allow opposition parties, and political competition outside the party framework remains prohibited.

State officials and media outlets framed the elections as a step supporting stability, governance continuity, and economic development. Coverage also emphasized what authorities described as a changing candidate profile, including greater participation by younger nominees and ongoing gender representation targets.

Despite the official narrative, the elections unfolded amid developments that drew attention to the country's restrictive political climate. Rights organizations reported the recent death of Bao Mo Khaen, a social media commentator known for publicly criticizing corruption and governance practices. Advocacy groups cited prior threats and alleged security force involvement in his disappearance, though authorities have not publicly confirmed those claims or connected the case to the electoral process.

Separately, Valy Vetsaphong, one of the National Assembly's few non-party-affiliated lawmakers and a figure known for outspoken remarks on financial governance and corruption, withdrew from the race shortly before voting. She publicly attributed her decision to personal considerations. Her exit generated notable discussion on Lao social media platforms, where political commentary is typically muted due to strict laws governing dissent and online speech.

The newly elected legislature is expected to convene in the coming weeks to endorse government leadership appointments and policy directions, in line with established procedures. [Asia News] [Daily Journal] [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Drug crimes remain dominant despite overall decline in 2025

(ms) Drug-related offences continued to represent the largest share of criminal activity in Laos in 2025, even as overall crime figures declined, according to data released by the Ministry of Public Security.

Authorities recorded 3,660 drug cases nationwide, a decrease of 111 compared to 2024. Police detained 5,643 suspects, including 531 women and 322 foreign nationals. Seizures included 244 million methamphetamine pills, 5,686 kilograms of ketamine, and 4,483 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine, alongside smaller quantities of heroin, marijuana, and opium. Officers also confiscated vehicles, firearms, and cash equivalent to approximately USD 60,000.

Bokeo Province remained a key hotspot, with 293 cases and 380 suspects. Enforcement operations there resulted in the seizure of 151.9 million methamphetamine pills, more than 3,000 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine, and 4,765 kilograms of ketamine. Police also reported the destruction of 36.45 hectares of opium plantations.

Officials linked the persistent flow of narcotics to trafficking routes associated with the Golden Triangle, a long-standing regional production and transit zone. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has previously warned that synthetic drug production, particularly in Myanmar's Shan State, continues to drive record seizures across Southeast Asia. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: State utility expands dam and solar projects as new 100 MW plant planned

(ms) Laos' state electricity provider Electricité du Laos (EDL) says it will accelerate hydropower and solar investments as electricity demand continues to rise, while separately advancing plans for a new 100-megawatt solar facility in Oudomxay Province.

At its annual review meeting, EDL officials warned that growing consumption is placing increasing strain on the national grid. The utility confirmed it will prioritize completion of the Nam Ngum 3 hydropower project, scheduled to come online by 2027, as part of efforts to prevent supply shortages.

Alongside hydropower expansion, EDL plans to fast-track 12 large-scale solar farms with a combined capacity of 830 megawatts. Authorities say the projects are intended to strengthen domestic supply and reduce the risk of seasonal disruptions, particularly during peak demand periods when electricity use typically surges.

Separately, EDL signed an agreement with a South Korean private firm to explore development of a 100-megawatt solar plant near the Namhin Reservoir in Oudomxay's Xay district. The project is currently in the feasibility study phase, with construction expected to begin in 2027 if approved. Once operational, the facility is projected to generate around 160 gigawatt-hours of electricity annually, with most output earmarked for export to Vietnam under planned cross-border power arrangements.

Beyond generation capacity, EDL plans nationwide upgrades to transmission and distribution networks, including modernization of the 115-kilovolt system and installation of additional transformers, particularly in high-demand areas such as Vientiane Capital. The utility aims to reduce voltage instability and mitigate blackout risks.

Government data presented at the meeting indicated Laos currently operates 107 power plants with total

installed capacity of 4,962 megawatts. In 2025, EDL handled 19,298 gigawatt-hours of electricity, including domestic production and imports.

EDL also outlined internal reforms, including tariff adjustments, debt restructuring, and expanded deployment of smart meters. The company further confirmed plans to establish a Cyber Security Operations Center at its Vientiane headquarters by the end of 2026 to monitor digital threats targeting critical power infrastructure. [The Laotian Times 1] [The Laotian Times 2] [The Laotian Times 3]

Laos: January trade surplus signals export rebound as recovery faces labor strains

(ms) Laos opened 2026 with a renewed trade surplus as exports climbed sharply in January, reflecting a marked improvement from the deficit recorded a year earlier and reinforcing signs of broader economic stabilization.

Official data show exports reached USD 886.7 million in January, a 36 percent increase compared with the same month in 2025. Gold remained the country's largest export commodity, while fuel continued to dominate imports, highlighting Laos' structural reliance on energy purchases.

The January outcome contrasts with trends seen in 2025, when imports slightly outpaced exports, resulting in a full-year trade deficit of USD 88.8 million. That followed a strong surplus of USD 1.54 billion in 2024, driven largely by electricity and commodity exports.

Recent macroeconomic indicators suggest recovery momentum is building. International institutions have projected GDP growth above 4 percent, supported primarily by mining and electricity exports, while headline inflation has eased to just over 5 percent.

However, conditions on the ground reveal persistent pressures. Businesses across Vientiane continue to report difficulty recruiting and retaining workers despite the stabilization narrative. Employers cite rising living costs, wage pressures and outward labor migration as key constraints.

Although inflation has slowed, the Consumer Price Index remains elevated, indicating that the cost of living has not significantly declined. Business owners say higher expenses have diluted the impact of earlier

minimum wage increases, while many young workers continue seeking better-paying opportunities abroad.

Economists note that Laos' recovery remains uneven, with export-driven sectors outperforming while small businesses and labor markets struggle to keep pace. Sustained export growth, alongside workforce and productivity reforms, is expected to be critical to maintaining stability. [The Laotian Times 1] [The Laotian Times 2]

Malaysia: Bills tabled to separate Attorney General–Public Prosecutor roles and limit prime minister's tenure

(tl) Malaysia's government introduced two significant bills in the House of Representatives on February 23. Those were to separate the roles of Attorney General and Public Prosecutor, and to cap the Prime Minister's tenure at 10 years or 2 terms.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Azalina Othman Said said that the Bill on the Separation of the Roles of the Attorney General and Public Prosecutor will proceed to second reading on March 2. The proposed reforms aim to strengthen institutional independence by assigning prosecutorial authority to a separately appointed Public Prosecutor (PP), instead of the Attorney General (AG) handling prosecutorial cases. The position would carry an equivalent rank to the Attorney General, requiring a minimum of 10 years' litigation experience, and be subject to a fixed seven-year term.

The separation of the roles of the AG and the PP is a longstanding issue in Malaysia because both functions are currently vested in a single office, creating concerns over conflicts of interest and political influence. Under the constitution, the AG serves as the government's chief legal adviser while simultaneously holding absolute discretion as the PP to initiate, conduct, or discontinue criminal prosecutions.

Critics argue this dual role weakens prosecutorial independence, especially in cases involving the executive or politically sensitive figures, as the AG is appointed by the prime minister.

The Prime Minister's term limit bill, scheduled for second reading on March 3 and to be tabled by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, would restrict any individual to a cumulative maximum of 10 years in office, whether served consecutively or otherwise. Once the limit is reached, the Cabinet would be automatically

dissolved, with the administration serving only in a caretaker's capacity until a new prime minister is appointed. Both bills have received Cabinet approval, and the government is seeking bipartisan backing to strengthen national legal framework and democratic governance. [Malay Mail]

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the government's proposed two-term, 10-year limit on the premiership would apply to him as the current office holder. He stated that leaders who intend to serve sincerely should find a decade sufficient to fulfil their responsibilities, stressing that the law must first apply to him and is not being made solely for others. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Opposition coalition reshuffles leadership

(tl) The opposition coalition Perikatan Nasional (PN) has reshuffled its top leadership, marking a new phase after a change at the helm.

Former prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin has been named deputy chairman of PN following his earlier decision to step down as chairman, a position he had held since the coalition's formation in 2020. The new chairman is Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, a vice-president of the Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS). According to PN's deputy secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan, other deputy leadership roles remain unchanged.

In a further adjustment, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang has opted not to sit on PN's supreme council, choosing instead to remain solely within the coalition's presidential council.

The leadership realignment suggests an effort to consolidate PAS's influence within PN while retaining Muhyiddin in a senior, though no longer top, role. This may signal a recalibration of power between the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia; Bersatu) and PAS inside the opposition bloc, with potential implications for Malaysia's opposition strategy ahead of future electoral contests and coalition negotiations. [Malay Mail 1]

In addition, the opposition bloc faces a potential shift in parliamentary leadership as PAS moves closer to taking over the Opposition Leader post from its coalition partner.

PAS is poised to assume the Opposition Leader role within PN after the expulsion of senior Bersatu figure Hamzah Zainudin from his own party earlier this month. PN deputy secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan confirmed that internal discussions are ongoing but said no final decision has been made on which PAS lawmaker would fill the post.

The leadership vacuum emerged after Hamzah, MP for Larut, was removed from Bersatu over alleged criticism of party president Muhyiddin. Sixteen additional members were also expelled, deepening internal tensions within Bersatu and raising questions about stability inside PN (see AiR No.7, February 2026, 3). [Malay Mail 2]

Bersatu leadership rejects division dissolution claims as resignations mount

Amidst these developments, Bersatu general Azmin Ali has rejected claims that several party divisions—including those in the parliamentary constituencies Larut, Lembah Pantai, Kepala Batas and Tanjong—have been dissolved. He stressed that only the party's Supreme Council has the authority to dissolve divisions.

The dispute follows reports of mass resignations in several branches, with members citing a loss of confidence in party president Muhyiddin after the removal of former deputy president Hamzah Zainudin and 16 other leaders (see AiR No.7, February 2026, 3). Some local leaders have since voiced support for Hamzah's potential new political platform.

Separately, 11 division heads in Johor have announced the dissolution of their branches, blaming deepening internal strife and dissatisfaction with the central leadership. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Democratic Action Party to hold special congress on Unity Government role

(tl) The Democratic Action Party (DAP) will convene a special congress on July 12 to decide whether its leaders should step down from government posts while continuing to support the Unity Government in Parliament.

Secretary-general Loke Siew Fook said around 4,000 delegates will vote on whether party representatives should resign from positions including ministers,

deputy ministers, state executive councilors and government-linked company appointments.

He described the congress as an internal "referendum," noting that it would be the first time such a major decision is directly placed on party delegates rather than decided by the Central Executive Committee (CEC).He stressed that DAP's 40 MPs would maintain their backing for Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and would not support any attempt to form an alternative administration.

The move follows DAP's poor performance in the recent Sabah state election, where it failed to win any of the eight seats it contested. While party leaders have pledged to push ahead with reforms, analysts caution that without concrete progress, such efforts may be perceived as symbolic rather than substantive. [Free Malaysia Today]

DAP is a key component of the Pakatan Harapan coalition and is currently part of Malaysia's Unity Government.

Malaysia: Prosecution finalizes key witness statement in former Prime Minister Muhyiddin corruption trial

(dql) Prosecutors are completing the witness statement of former finance minister Tengku Zafrul Aziz in the corruption and money laundering trial of former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

Deputy public prosecutor Wan Shaharuddin Wan Ladin told High Court judge Noor Ruwena Nurdin that nearly all witness statements have been submitted to the defence, with Tengku Zafrul's to be delivered two weeks before his testimony. Defense counsel Amer Hamzah Arshad sought clarification over whether businessman Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary would be called, as his name was not listed for the Jana Wibawa proceedings. The prosecution said he appears on the witness list for the separate money laundering charges and may testify orally.

Muhyiddin faces four abuse-of-power charges involving MYR 232.5 million (USD 50 million) in alleged bribes and three money laundering charges tied to MYR 200 million (approximately USD 43 million) purportedly transferred into the account of the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia; Bersatu). Muhyiddin is the party's president. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Government pushes ahead with deal with UK firm to boost chip design amid corruption probe

(tl) The government is pressing ahead with its strategic partnership with UK-based chip designer Arm Holdings as part of a broader push to upgrade its semiconductor industry from assembly and packaging to higher-value chip design.

Economy Minister Akmal Nasrullah Mohd Nasir said the Cabinet-mandated agreement is central to enabling local firms to access Arm's intellectual property (IP), a prerequisite for developing "Made in Malaysia" chips. Although Malaysia ranks sixth globally in the semiconductor sector, its strength lies largely in back-end activities.

The collaboration with Arm is intended to shift the country toward front-end design capabilities, in line with targets under the 13th Malaysia Plan — the country's five-year national development blueprint covering 2026–2030. Two domestic firms have already obtained IP access, and the program also includes plans to train 10,000 skilled workers for the chip design ecosystem.

The initiative, however, faces scrutiny from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, which is reviewing complaints from civil society groups over alleged mismanagement of MYR 1.11 billion (USD 235 million) linked to a former senior minister. Deputy chief commissioner Ahmad Khusairi Yahaya confirmed that a preliminary assessment is under way before any formal probe is launched.

Despite the investigation, the Economy Ministry insists implementation will proceed and that Malaysia will cooperate fully with authorities. Officials argue that maintaining momentum is critical not only for domestic industrial upgrading but also for safeguarding investor confidence and strengthening Malaysia's position in the intensifying regional competition for semiconductor and AI-related investments. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Online crime cases double within a year

(dql) Malaysia is experiencing a sharp surge in online financial crime, with reported cases rising to more than

66,000 in 2025, nearly double the 35,000 recorded the previous year.

According to the Commercial Crime Investigation Department, total losses have climbed to almost MYR 3 billion (USD 640 million), compared with around MYR 700 million (USD 150 million) five years ago.

Currently, about 90 percent of commercial crime investigations involve online elements, reflecting a structural shift in the country's crime landscape.

Fraudulent investment schemes represent the largest source of losses, accounting for roughly MYR 1.5 billion (USD 320 million). Authorities have also intensified action against so-called "mule account" holders—individuals who allow their bank accounts to be used for illicit transactions. [Free Malaysia Today]

Myanmar: Restoration Council of Shan State re-elects Genenral Yawd Sit as chairman

(su/dql) The Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) has re-elected General Yawd Sit as chairman during its fourth council congress held on February 18, following the organization's 26th annual meeting on February 16–17. The RCSS is an ethnic armed organization and the political wing of the Shan State Army–South (SSA-S). It signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and participates in the government's peace process.

According to a press release issued on February 20, the annual meeting reviewed departmental activities over the past year and discussed political and military developments, while the congress assessed the organization's performance over the past four years and approved a new four-year work plan.

Delegates unanimously re-elected Yawd Sit and endorsed the appointment of advisory members, the Policy Supervision Committee, the Central Executive Committee, and heads of departments. The RCSS stated it would continue to support the peace process and pursue political dialogue with other organizations and stakeholders. It also reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the 33 principles and 38 fundamental rights outlined in the Shan State Federal Constitution adopted at the First Shan State National Conference.

The group further pledged to assist war-affected civilians by building houses and to continue anti-drug efforts in line with its policies. [Eleven Myanmar]

Yawd Sit is one of Myanmar's most influential ethnic armed leaders and a central figure in the country's formal peace process. Chairing RCSS and commanding its armed wing, the Shan State Army–South (SSA-S) makes him both the political and military head of one of the largest Shan armed organizations. This dual authority gives him decisive control over the group's strategic direction.

Yawd Sitgained national prominence in 2015 when the RCSS became a signatory to the NCA under the then-civilian government. Since then, he has been a key ethnic stakeholder in negotiations with both the previous elected administration and, after the 2021 coup, the military authorities.

Myanmar: NUG permanent secretary resigns amid corruption controversy

(anl) Daw Kyi Pyar, Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office of Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government (NUG), resigned on February 21 following mounting criticism over alleged corruption, nepotism and workplace abuse.

The controversy began in November 2025 when 12 former staff members, including Civil Disobedience Movement participants, accused her and her husband, U Nyi Nyi Min, of misusing funds and fostering an abusive work environment.

A three-month internal inquiry found no conclusive legal evidence of corruption but acknowledged inappropriate conduct and ethical lapses, issuing only a "severe warning" rather than dismissal. Her husband and two relatives were suspended, while several complainants received formal warnings.

The limited disciplinary action provoked sharp backlash from key pro-democracy networks. The CDM Medical Network suspended cooperation with the NUG, Telekyanmar signaled it might withdraw from the NUG health framework, and the University Admissions Guidance Committee halted admission procedures under NUG authority. A subsequent press conference by the investigation team failed to quell criticism. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta bans political and religious teaching in medical schools

(su) Myanmar's military administration has amended the Private Health Service Law to prohibit the teaching of political and religious subjects in private medical training schools. The amendment, signed into law on February 17, requires that private medical training institutions refrain from teaching party political subjects unrelated to the approved curriculum, religious content, or topics deemed "incompatible with Myanmar culture."

The changes follow earlier education-sector restrictions enacted after the February 2021 military takeover, including a 2023 private education law barring private schools from teaching or promoting party politics. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Crackdown on private mini cinemas ordered

(anl) Military authorities have ordered an immediate crackdown on private "mini-cinemas," revoking previously issued screening permits and threatening legal action against operators accused of showing films without proper authorization.

In a 20 February notice carried by newspapers under the control of the country's ruling military commission, regional and state inspection bodies were instructed to cancel all permits granted to such venues and to proceed against unlicensed screenings under the Television and Video Law.

The statement claimed that some businesses had set up small projection rooms resembling hotel-style compartments and were exhibiting films without censorship approval, raising what it described as concerns over potential social harm.

Under current law, running a commercial video business without authorization carries prison terms of six months to three years. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Civil society groups urge UNHRC to reject junta's election

(su) A coalition of 235 Myanmar, regional, and international civil society organizations issued an open letter on February 18 calling on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to reject what they described as the junta's "sham" election and to adopt stronger, time-bound measures in its 2026 resolution on Myanmar. The appeal comes as the UNHRC

prepares to deliberate on its annual resolution on Myanmar.

The groups urged the Council to refuse recognition of any outcomes or governance structures arising from the military-organized electoral process conducted under the 2008 Constitution, and to take steps to curb the junta's capacity to carry out airstrikes and other alleged atrocity crimes, including by restricting access to aviation fuel, arms, and dual-use technologies.

The letter detailed alleged widespread violations since the February 2021 military takeover, including mass arrests, extrajudicial killings, aerial bombardments, destruction of civilian homes, and attacks on healthcare facilities.

It cited documentation of thousands of political detainees, hundreds of reported massacres, and millions of internally displaced persons, arguing that the situation amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The signatories also called for stronger action against transnational criminal networks, including cyber scam centers and trafficking operations, which they said generate revenue streams benefiting the military and allied groups.

The coalition further urged the UNHRC to support international accountability mechanisms, including referral to the International Criminal Court or the establishment of an ad hoc tribunal, and to move beyond reliance on ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Junta holds public hearing to push Myitsone dam revival

(anl) On February 20, the military regime held a public hearing at Myitkyina University in Kachin State to promote the restoration of the suspended Myitsone hydropower project. Regime officials claimed over 1,400 people attended, though local sources said many were forced to participate.

At public hearing, Tin Aung San, head of the Electricity and Energy Development Commission, claimed that the dam would meet national energy needs, create jobs, and prioritize domestic electricity use.

However, local groups reportedly continue to oppose the project, despite pressure from junta-appointed authorities. Kachin environmentalist Zung Ting

dismissed the promises as propaganda. At the same time, Colonel Naw Bu of the Kachin Independence Army reported that the Kachin people reject the dam's revival, and the KIA represents the will of the people.

The event was the third since December as the regime seeks support for restarting the project, suspended in 2011 over environmental and humanitarian concerns. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Burma National Revolutionary Army leader surrenders

(su) Naing Lin, also known as Bo Nagar, leader of the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA), entered the "legal fold" on February 18 along with his family members, according to official reports. He reportedly contacted and reported to a Tatmadaw security outpost conducting regional operations in Pale Township, Sagaing Region, carrying six assorted weapons and related equipment.

In a statement, the National Defence and Security Council alleged that People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and related groups have carried out attacks against government forces and civilians and claimed that internal disputes over territory and resources had emerged within such groups (see article below).

The statement said Nagar became disillusioned with ongoing violence and decided to join the state's peace process, leading to his surrender. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Infighting erupts among anti-junta forces in Sagaing's Pale Township

(su) Heavy fighting broke out on February 17 in Pale Township, northwestern Sagaing Region, between the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA), led by Bo Nagar, and forces aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG).

Local witnesses reported the use of heavy weapons, machine guns, and drone attacks near Chinpyit and Poppa villages, where BNRA troops are based. Residents from Chinpyit, Kyarsi, Poppa, and Maungtong villages fled as gunfire and explosions spread across the area.

The clashes followed a previous skirmish on February 12 between Yinmabin District Battalion 4 which belongs to the NUG-aligned forces, and BNRA Battalion

3, in which one Battalion 4 member was killed. Bo Nagar said on social media that NUG Ministry of Defence battalions launched artillery and drone attacks on BNRA checkpoints on February 17.

In response, the NUG told local media that the Ministries of Home Affairs and Defence were cooperating to investigate and arrest BNRA members over alleged crimes. [Mizzima]

Tensions around Chinpyit village have built up over control and closure of local toll gates set up by the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) in Pale Township. NUG-aligned forces argue that these checkpoints involved unauthorized fee collection from traders and civilians, undermining local administration and security, while the BNRA viewed them as a legitimate means of funding and area control.

Attempts earlier this year to resolve the issue through negotiations reportedly failed, deepening mistrust. The dispute over toll gates has since become a symbol of broader friction between the BNRA and the National Unity Government (NUG), including disagreements over authority, discipline, and alleged criminal conduct, ultimately contributing to the escalation into armed clashes. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Chin resistance vows to seize last junta-held towns in Chin State

(dql) At a ceremony marking the 78th Chin National Day, the chairman of the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC), Salai Than Chun Pe, pledged to step up military operations to capture the last two towns in western Chin State still held by the junta—Hakha and Tedim. He said resistance forces would continue town-seizure campaigns while consolidating control in already “liberated” areas to prevent a military return.

Of Chin State’s nine townships, seven are now under revolutionary administration, according to the ICNCC. Salai Than Chun Pe framed the push as part of the Chin people’s right to self-determination and called for unity, stability, and greater youth participation in building a self-governed future. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Regime forces advance to within 32 km of last resistance-held town in Mandalay Region

(anl) Junta troops have advanced to within 32 km of Tagaung, the last resistance-held town in central Mandalay Region, after capturing Shwe Kyun Pin village along the Mandalay–Bhamo road on the Ayeyarwady River's eastern bank. Forces from Training School No. 13 in Twin Nge have reportedly pushed north with extensive drone support, prompting resistance fighters to withdraw after intense clashes.

While pro-military channels predict Tagaung's imminent fall, resistance sources say progress has been slow due to landmines and defensive traps. A former army captain aligned with the Civil Disobedience Movement noted the troops have advanced only about 10 km since early February.

Tagaung is strategically positioned as a gateway to Sagaing Region and Kachin State. Its loss would weaken resistance control in Mandalay Region and bolster the military's northern corridor. Resistance forces captured the town in August 2024, along with a nearby sugar mill and a Chinese-backed nickel plant in Tigyaing Township.

Analysts warn that retaking Tagaung would allow the junta to secure the nickel facility—reportedly a priority for Beijing—reopen supply routes toward the towns of Tigyaing and Shwegu, and increase pressure on resistance-held areas such as Indaw and Pinlebu, though an advance toward Bhamo — a major town (often referred to as a city) in Kachin State near the Chinese border — would remain challenging. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta troops torch 34 houses in Yesagyo Township

(su) Military troops operating in the southern part of Yesagyo Township in central Magway Region, set fire to Thamantapo village on February 15, destroying 34 houses, according to local residents. A column of around 100 soldiers from Yesagyo-based Battalion 258 reportedly entered the village after firing heavy artillery and subsequently began burning homes.

The reported arson followed earlier military operations on February 12 and 13, when jet fighters and motorized paragliders allegedly bombed Mon Nyin and Chin Yar Kone villages, killing three civilians.

Local accounts describe a pattern of intensified operations in the area. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Drone strike damages passenger aircraft at Myitkyina Airport

(su) A passenger aircraft operated by Myanmar National Airlines (MNA) was damaged in a reported drone attack at Myitkyina Airport in Kachin State on February 20. The incident occurred as the aircraft was preparing for departure, with a drone allegedly striking the tail section of the plane.

Myitkyina Airport is a key transport hub in Kachin State, linking the region to major cities such as Yangon and Mandalay and facilitating civilian travel and goods movement. Earlier, on February 12, the airport was reportedly targeted in a separate attack involving first-person-view (FPV) suicide drones allegedly launched by a joint force of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and People's Defence Force (PDF).

Authorities said air defense systems detected the drones, which subsequently crashed near the runway and were safely neutralized.

Official reports further alleged that joint KIA and PDF groups have carried out attacks on infrastructure in the region, including roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, using landmines, rockets, and drone-delivered explosives, describing such operations as attempts to disrupt administration and regional stability. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Junta intensifies airstrikes across Kachin State

(anl) The military regime has escalated aerial attacks across Kachin State since February 18, targeting Laiza —the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA)—as well as Waingmaw, Hpakant, Mansi and Momauk townships, according to local sources.

The escalation follows a February 20 drone strike on an ATR 72-600 aircraft operated by Myanmar National Airlines at Myitkyina Airport (see above). The junta blamed the KIA and vowed an "intensive" response, while KIA spokesperson Col. Naw Bu denied targeting civilians.

Subsequent airstrikes reportedly killed at least three civilians and injured several others, including in Waingmaw and Momauk townships. Artillery fire also struck Myitkyina's 4th Ward, damaging homes and injuring two residents. Locals said fear is growing as attacks expand across the state. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Minister survives drone attack

(anl) On February 20, Minister for Border and Ethnic Affairs, Yar Pyae, reportedly narrowly escaped a suicide drone attack in Hakha, the capital of western Chin State, while attending a Chin National Day ceremony.

The resistance group Chinland Defense Force–Hakha (CDF-Hakha) released video footage claiming it targeted a ceremony at the General Administration Office attended by Yar Pyae and 17 other junta officials. The video shows a drone striking a marquee where people had gathered, as well as a separate attack on a hilltop regime base. On days earlier, CDF-Hakha had warned the public not to attend the regime's National Day celebrations.

State media reported that an air defense unit thwarted an attempted attack on a ceremony by downing suicide drones allegedly launched by the Chinland Defense Force (CDF-Hakha) and allied People's Defense Forces. Authorities claimed the drones were intercepted before reaching their target and said there were no casualties or material damage. Officials stated the ceremony proceeded as planned, with Yar Pyae delivering a message from junta chief Min Aung Hlaing before departing for Kale in Sagaing Region.

Local media later reported that regime forces raided an electricity supply office following the attack, suspecting it was linked to the drone operation. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Research report records more than 200 military operations, rising civilian casualties in one week

(anl) A new report by Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica (NLTA) — a Myanmar-based research and advocacy organization established after the 2021 military coup — recorded at least 209 military operations and attacks targeting civilians across Myanmar between 13 and 19 February 2026.

The group documented 76 armed clashes and 133 civilian-targeted incidents nationwide, noting a rise in casualties and arrests compared to the previous week. At least 38 civilians were killed, 88 injured, and 102 arrested during the reporting period.

Northwestern Sagaing Region reported the highest number of armed clashes, with 11 engagements. Central Magway Region recorded 11 civilian deaths and 22 injuries, while western Rakhine State was the deadliest for civilians, with 15 killed and 13 injured. Kachin State reported three civilian deaths and 20 injuries.

NLTA also documented 26 airstrikes across 17 townships, killing 14 civilians and injuring 29. On February 17, a YAK-130 jet bombed a dispensary in Khin-U Township, Sagaing Region, killing three civilians and injuring eight others. [Mizzima]

Philippines: Vice-President Sara Duterte formalizes expected 2028 presidential bid, cites recruited running mate

(ms) Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte has confirmed she will run for president in the 2028 national elections, a move widely anticipated in the country's political circles given her family's enduring influence and her own national profile.

Duterte said she has already recruited a potential running mate for the race, adding that discussions with the unnamed candidate began last year. While declining to reveal the person's identity, she indicated the future vice president would play a central role in strengthening government accountability and addressing corruption, a theme she signaled would feature prominently in her platform.

Her declaration comes as she faces renewed impeachment complaints in the House of Representatives related to the alleged use of confidential funds and other governance issues. Duterte has denied wrongdoing and dismissed the complaints as politically motivated. She also rejected suggestions that she might resign, saying she would confront any impeachment process directly.

The presidential bid has not come as a surprise to analysts or political observers. Duterte remains one of the country's most prominent political figures, having secured more than 32 million votes in the 2022 vice-presidential election. As the daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte and a former mayor of Davao City, she has long been viewed as a likely contender for the presidency.

Her announcement also underscores the shifting political landscape since 2022, when she ran alongside President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. under a unity ticket.

That alliance has weakened over time, with policy differences and political tensions fueling expectations of realignments ahead of 2028.

With the official campaign period still years away, Duterte's early confirmation effectively opens a prolonged phase of political maneuvering. The interaction between ongoing legal challenges, economic concerns, and coalition-building efforts is expected to shape the trajectory of the next presidential contest. [Deutsche Welle] [PhilStar]

Philippines: President Marcos and former Vice-President Robredo meeting fuels early 2028 speculation after Duterte presidential bid

(ms) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s meeting with former Vice President Leni Robredo in Naga City on Febraury 21, has intensified political speculation, taking place just days after Vice President Sara Duterte confirmed her intention to run for president in 2028.

The encounter was officially presented by Malacañang as part of the government's flood mitigation initiative, "Oplan Kontra Baha," with Palace officials emphasizing infrastructure and disaster management rather than politics. Nonetheless, the timing of the meeting drew nationwide attention, as Duterte's early presidential declaration has already begun reshaping the country's political landscape.

Robredo, Marcos' principal rival in the 2022 presidential election, remains one of the Philippines' most recognizable political figures. A lawyer and economist, she first rose to national prominence after winning the vice presidency in 2016. Her tenure focused heavily on anti-poverty programs, transparency, and community-driven governance, helping her cultivate a loyal reform-oriented support base.

Although Robredo lost the presidency to Marcos in 2022, she retained considerable public support. In 2025, she was elected mayor of Naga City, becoming the first woman to hold the position. Her return to local politics was widely seen as a strategic decision that allowed her to remain politically relevant while shifting away from national-level confrontation.

Duterte's confirmation of her 2028 presidential bid, along with her statement that she had recruited a

potential running mate, has heightened expectations of an early and competitive race. Against this backdrop, Marcos' decision to meet Robredo carried symbolic weight, given their long history of electoral rivalry.

Palace representatives rejected suggestions that the meeting signaled political realignment, describing talk of endorsements or alliances as untimely. Still, political observers noted that Philippine politics has often been defined by fluid coalitions and pragmatic partnerships, particularly ahead of major elections. [ABS-News] [Asian News Network] [PhilStar]

Philippines: House moves forward on Vice President Duterte impeachment complaints

(ms) Impeachment complaints against Vice President Sara Duterte are advancing in the House of Representatives, with lawmakers divided over whether enough votes exist to send the case to the Senate for trial.

Rep. Benny Abante Jr. has expressed confidence that the House can secure the required one-third vote to transmit the articles of impeachment, while Senior Deputy Majority Leader Lorenz Defensor has cautioned that reaching that threshold remains uncertain. House leaders have indicated that the complaints will be referred to the Committee on Justice, which will first determine whether the petitions meet constitutional requirements on sufficiency in form and substance.

Under the Constitution, impeachment proceedings can move to the Senate if at least one-third of all House members vote to approve the articles. The Senate would then convene as an impeachment court, where a two-thirds vote of all senators is required for conviction.

If transmitted, the Senate assumes a quasi-judicial role. Senators take an oath as judges, the House prosecutors present evidence, and the impeached official is given full opportunity to mount a defense. The process can take months, depending on procedural motions, evidentiary disputes, and the political dynamics within the chamber.

Conviction would result in removal from office and permanent disqualification from holding public office. Acquittal would allow Duterte to remain vice president.

Historically, Senate convictions in Philippine impeachment cases are rare, reflecting the difficulty of securing a two-thirds majority. Therefore, even if the House approves transmittal, conviction is widely seen as a high bar. A two-thirds Senate vote demands broad cross-party support, which can be challenging in a politically fragmented environment. Analysts note that senators may weigh legal merits alongside electoral considerations, particularly with the 2028 election cycle approaching.

An ongoing Senate trial would not automatically prevent Duterte from running for president. However, it could reshape the political landscape. A conviction would constitutionally bar her from future office, effectively ending a presidential bid. An acquittal could politically strengthen her by allowing her to claim vindication.

Even without a verdict, impeachment proceedings can carry reputational risks. Extended hearings and media scrutiny may influence public perception, donor confidence, and potential alliances. Conversely, Duterte's supporters could frame the process as political persecution, potentially consolidating her base. [Philippine News Agency] [PhilStar 1] [PhilStar 2]

Philippines: ICC allows Duterte to skip confirmation of charges hearing

(ab/ms) The International Criminal Court (ICC) Pre-Trial Chamber has granted former President Rodrigo Duterte's request to waive his appearance at the upcoming confirmation of charges hearing linked to his anti-drug campaign.

The hearing, scheduled for February 23–27, 2026, will assess whether prosecutors have presented sufficient evidence to proceed to trial on allegations of crimes against humanity, including murder and attempted murder. Duterte will not attend either in person or by video after his defense team formally invoked his right to be absent.

Defense counsel Nicholas Kaufman argued that Duterte rejects the court's jurisdiction and therefore sees no legal basis to participate. The filing characterized Duterte's transfer to The Hague as politically motivated and disputed the legitimacy of the proceedings.

Under the Rome Statute, judges may allow hearings to proceed without a suspect if the individual explicitly waives the right to appear. By approving the request,

the chamber confirmed that all sessions of the confirmation hearing may continue in Duterte's absence.

The confirmation of charges stage is a key procedural step at the ICC. Prosecutors, defense lawyers, and victims' representatives present arguments and supporting material, after which judges decide whether the case advances to a full trial.

The proceedings have triggered demonstrations by opposing groups. In Manila, activists and civil society organizations gathered near the Department of Justice to call for accountability and justice for victims of the drug war, while Duterte supporters assembled near the Supreme Court demanding his return to the Philippines.

Authorities placed the Philippine National Police on heightened alert ahead of the hearings. In The Hague, separate rallies were also registered by pro-Duterte groups and by advocates representing victims, underscoring the case's continuing political and social resonance.[Aljazeera] [Manila Times] [PhilStar]

Philippine: Crackdown on illegal cigarettes raises concerns over involvement of officials

(ms) Philippine authorities have stepped up raids on illegal cigarette facilities, with officials warning that the operations may be supported by protection networks involving government insiders.

Recent enforcement actions led by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), in coordination with the Bureau of Customs and the Philippine National Police, uncovered warehouses allegedly used for illicit cigarette production. Several sites, initially presented as legitimate storage facilities, were found to contain manufacturing equipment, generators, and tobacco-related materials. Authorities noted that many of the seized machines originated from Mainland China, consistent with patterns seen in earlier seizures.

DILG Secretary Jonvic Remulla said the repeated discoveries indicate organized activity rather than isolated smuggling. He argued that the scale of the operations suggests the presence of "protectors," pointing to possible involvement of individuals within government. Financial investigations are expected to run alongside criminal cases, with regulators seeking to trace funding sources and operational links.

Law enforcement agencies have also examined potential connections to local officials. While no formal accusations have been announced, officials acknowledged that the investigations include individuals who may have facilitated permits, logistics, or regulatory gaps. Analysts say this aspect of the probe is particularly sensitive, given the influence of local political networks.

The focus on possible official protection adds political weight to the crackdown. Observers note that confirmed findings could trigger wider accountability measures beyond factory operators, potentially extending into local administrative structures. Investigations remain ongoing. [DZRH] [PhilStar]

Philippines: Central Bank aims to cut rates again

(ab) The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) announced to lower the Targeted Reverse Repurchase Rate by 25 basis points to 4.25 percent for the third consecutive time. This rate cut move is widely anticipated after recent GDP data revealed that the economy expanded by only three percent in 2025, the slowest annual growth since 2011, excluding the peak of COVID-19 pandemic years. The economy has also been affected by the ongoing corruption scandal involving numbers of government officials and contractors, which has significantly dampened investors' confidence.

The BSP's decision to continue its easing cycle and further loosen monetary policy is aimed at supporting the country's economic growth. Philippine Central Bank Governor Eli Remolona cited slower growth and persistent weakness in business and consumer confidence as key reasons for further monetary easing. "The pace of economic recovery will depend on how quickly confidence returns," he said, adding that investor sentiment remains the "single biggest factor" that could shape the BSP's decisions on future rate cuts. The easing cycle, which began in August 2024, has now shaved a total of 225 basis points from policy rates as the central bank balances support for growth with its inflation mandate. [ABS-CBN]

Philippines: Push for UNCLOS-based South China Sea Code of Conduct

(ms) The Philippines will accept only a South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC) explicitly anchored on the

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro said, underscoring Manila's priorities as ASEAN chair for 2026.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, Lazaro said ASEAN members aim to conclude long-running negotiations with China on a legally binding COC, stressing that any final document must reference UNCLOS. Talks on the framework have stretched for more than a decade, reflecting persistent differences over maritime rights and regional security rules.

"Our main objective is to have a COC that is UNCLOS-based. We will not accept any other regimes," Lazaro said, adding that China had agreed to monthly face-to-face meetings with ASEAN to accelerate discussions.

The statement comes amid renewed debate in the Philippines over the West Philippine Sea (WPS), the term used domestically for parts of the South China Sea within Manila's exclusive economic zone. Retired Supreme Court Justice Antonio Carpio said the country's maritime claims do not depend on submitting maps with precise coordinates, describing such filings as administrative requirements under UNCLOS rather than conditions for retaining sovereign rights.

Carpio also pushed back against claims questioning the validity of the WPS designation and the Philippines' jurisdiction over features in the Kalayaan Island Group. He cited domestic laws and the 2016 Arbitral Award, which invalidated China's expansive nine-dash line claim, as legal foundations for Manila's position.

Chinese Ambassador Jing Quan acknowledged the slow pace of COC negotiations, calling for compromise. Philippine officials maintain that concluding the framework remains a regional priority as tensions persist across disputed waters. [Deutsche Welle] [PhilStar]

Philippine: Navy commissions two new patrol vessels

(ms) The Philippine Navy formally commissioned two new vessels at Naval Operating Base-Subic on February 24, marking another step in Manila's ongoing military modernization program amid persistent regional security challenges.

The newly inducted ships — offshore patrol vessel BRP Rajah Sulayman (PS-20) and fast attack interdiction craft BRP Audrey Bañares (PG-910) — expand the Navy's patrol and coastal defense capabilities. Defense officials said the additions are intended to strengthen maritime presence, domain awareness, and rapid response operations across the country's vast territorial waters.

BRP Rajah Sulayman is the first of six offshore patrol vessels ordered from South Korean shipbuilder HD Hyundai Heavy Industries under a contract valued at approximately USD 540 million (PHP 30 billion) signed in 2022. Designed for extended missions, the vessel is expected to support patrol duties, exclusive economic zone monitoring, and multi-role operations. The ship arrived in the Philippines in January following its launch in Ulsan, South Korea.

Meanwhile, BRP Audrey Bañares completes a nine-ship acquisition program for Acero-class fast attack interdiction craft built by Israel Shipyards. The project, worth about USD 180 million (PHP 10 billion), aims to enhance littoral defense, interdiction missions, and high-speed coastal operations. The Acero-class vessels are designed for quick maneuverability and are expected to replace aging patrol craft.

The commissioning ceremony comes as the Philippines continues to upgrade its naval forces against the backdrop of growing maritime tensions in the South China Sea. Philippine defense planners have prioritized naval and air assets in recent procurement cycles, reflecting concerns over territorial disputes, illegal fishing, and freedom of navigation. [Philippine News Agency] [PhilStar]

Singapore: Government warns citizens against fighting in overseas conflicts

Singapore authorities have reiterated that citizens are prohibited from participating in foreign conflicts, amid public discussion triggered by reports alleging that Singapore passport holders may have served in the Israeli military.

Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs K Shanmugam said the government would take action against any Singaporean found engaging in violence abroad, regardless of the cause or country involved. Speaking at a community event, he emphasized that joining overseas conflicts would violate Singapore law and

could result in detention by the Internal Security Department (ISD).

The remarks followed foreign media reports citing data released through an Israeli non-governmental organization, which suggested that individuals holding Singapore passports were listed among dual or multiple nationals in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The reports did not identify the individuals or confirm their legal status under Singapore law.

Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said it had no substantiated information confirming that any Singaporean had fought for the IDF. Officials noted that online claims and foreign datasets require careful verification before conclusions can be drawn.

Under Singapore's Constitution, dual citizenship is generally not permitted for adults, and unauthorized involvement in foreign armed violence may carry legal consequences. Shanmugam stressed that Singapore distinguishes between humanitarian assistance and participation in combat.

Authorities also framed the issue within broader concerns about social stability, warning that overseas conflicts can inflame domestic tensions if imported into Singapore's multiracial and multireligious society. [South China Morning Post] [The Online Citizen 1] [The Online Citizen 2]

Singapore: High Court increases opposition politician's jail sentence for unauthorised legal practice

(ms) Singapore's High Court has extended the jail term of lawyer and opposition politician Lim Tean to three months and one week after dismissing his appeal and allowing the prosecution's cross-appeal for a heavier sentence.

Justice Kannan Ramesh ruled that Lim's original punishment of six weeks' imprisonment and a S$1,000 fine was "manifestly inadequate." Lim was convicted of practising law without a valid certificate between April and June 2021, when he continued handling court matters despite lacking authorisation under the Legal Profession Act.

The court found that Lim failed to demonstrate reasonable care or misunderstanding of regulatory requirements. Prosecutors argued that, as a veteran lawyer, Lim was fully aware of the certification rules

and that deterrence was necessary to protect public confidence in the legal profession.

Lim has been granted a deferment and ordered to surrender at the State Courts on April 24. His revised sentence does not meet the constitutional threshold that would disqualify him from standing for election.

Separately, Lim faces other pending criminal charges and disciplinary proceedings before the Law Society. [Channel News Asia] [The Online Citizen]

Singapore: More than a third more visitors turned away in 2025 under tighter border screenings

(ms) Singapore's Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) refused entry to about 45,700 foreign visitors in 2025, up 38.3 percent from roughly 33,100 in 2024, according to its annual report released on Feb. 23.

ICA said the increase reflected stronger targeting and screening at checkpoints, with more travellers assessed as immigration risks—such as potential overstayers or illegal workers—or as security risks. The agency's Integrated Targeting Centre used advance information and data analytics to flag high-risk travellers, vehicles and cargo for additional checks. Passport-free clearance at major checkpoints also allowed officers to shift from manual processing to profiling and interviews. [The Online Citizen]

Singapore: Light distillate stocks hit record high as gasoline contango deepens

(st) Singapore's light distillate inventories climbed to a record 19.474 million barrels in the week to Feb 18, up 1.496 million barrels from the previous week, according to data from Enterprise Singapore, as a steep contango in gasoline markets encouraged storage. In a contango structure, near-term fuel prices trade below future-dated contracts, creating incentives for traders to store products and sell later at higher prices. Market participants said the price gap between prompt and next-month gasoline contracts in Singapore was the widest since June 2020, prompting traders to roll positions forward rather than sell into a weak spot market.

Inventories of light distillates, which include gasoline and naphtha, have risen steadily through February in the Singapore Strait, reflecting ample regional supply and soft demand. Singapore is Asia's main oil trading and refining hub, and stock movements there are closely watched as a barometer of regional fuel market conditions. [Business Recorder]

Thailand: Election commission under pressure over barcodes, recounts and certification timeline

(msz/lm) The Election Commission (EC) remains under sustained legal and political pressure following the February 8 general election and constitutional referendum, as disputes over ballot barcodes, recount procedures and certification deadlines continue.

Last week, the EC published what it describes as the official results, while acknowledging that recounts and fresh voting remain necessary at selected polling stations. Unofficial figures remain at approximately 94 percent of ballots counted. Under Thai law, at least 95 percent of members of parliament must be endorsed before the House can convene, and the EC has up to 60 days from polling day — until April 8 — to complete certification. [Bangkok Post 1]

Recounts have been ordered at at least eight polling stations across multiple provinces, and fresh voting has been scheduled at several units where irregularities or procedural disruptions occurred. Nationwide, the election involved 99,487 polling stations. [Bangkok Post 2]

The principal controversy concerns the use of unique barcodes and QR codes printed on ballot papers. Critics argue that serial numbering could allow ballots to be traced back to individual voters, potentially conflicting with the constitutional guarantee of secret voting under Section 85. Petitions have been filed with the Office of the Ombudsman and the Administrative Court seeking judicial review and possible referral to the Constitutional Court. The Ombudsman has confirmed receipt of 29 petitions and granted the EC until February 27 to submit clarifications and supporting evidence. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

The EC maintains that the codes were introduced as anti-counterfeiting safeguards and that ballot secrecy is protected because ballots, stubs and voter lists are stored separately under regulated procedures. It has stated that while traceability may be technically

conceivable, identification of voters would require unlawful access to confidential records. The Commission has ceased live press conferences and is issuing written statements only. It has also shut down its unofficial Ectreport69 reporting site, directing the public to official tally sheets. [Bangkok Post 5] [Bangkok Post 6]

Additional complaints concern discrepancies between ballots cast and voter records, handling of ballot boxes, inconsistencies in vote totals and online reporting, and alleged misconduct by officials. Based on figures published by the EC, critics have pointed to a difference of more than 66,000 ballots between nationwide constituency and party-list totals, despite voters receiving both ballots simultaneously. The EC has not characterized this difference as evidence of systemic irregularities.

The issue gained additional weight after comments by Wissanu Krea-ngam, a former deputy prime minister widely regarded as a senior legal authority on constitutional and electoral matters who has played a key role in drafting and interpreting Thai constitutional frameworks under multiple administrations. Speaking at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), he stated that if there is any possibility of identifying how an individual voted, the constitutional standard of secrecy could be considered compromised. He referred to the 2006 Constitutional Court ruling that annulled that year's general election over violations of ballot secrecy and warned that, if tested before the Constitutional Court, the barcode system could be scrutinized for potential traceability. He noted that if secrecy were found to be breached in principle, the consequence could extend to a nationwide re-run, given the uniform design of ballot papers. [Bangkok Post 7]

Political responses remain divided. The Bhumjaithai Party rejects claims that barcodes undermine secrecy and describes the system as an administrative safeguard. The People's Party has called for greater transparency in polling-station data and has accused election officials of misconduct. Civil society groups, including We Watch and the Asian Network for Free Elections, have raised concerns about potential traceability and have called for polling-station-level disclosure and independent technical review. [Prachatai English]

Public opinion surveys conducted between February 13 and February 18 reflect mixed sentiment. A NIDA poll of 1,310 respondents found that 67 percent were satisfied with results in their own constituencies but 57 percent were dissatisfied with nationwide results; 69

percent reported no concern about ballot secrecy or coding. A King Prajadhipok's Institute survey of 2,000 respondents found that 53.6 percent were aware of vote-buying in their constituencies, most citing payments between THB 500 (USD 14.5) and THB 1,000 (USD 29), and 40.8 percent were dissatisfied with the EC's anti-fraud efforts. [Bangkok Post 8] [Bangkok Post 9]

Thailand: Coalition negotiations coalesce around 300 seats as parties deny finalized deal

(lm/bk) Coalition negotiations following the February 8 general election have consolidated numerically around a 300-seat majority in the 500-member House of Representatives, although party leaders insist that no formal agreement has been concluded and that arrangements must await official certification of results by the Election Commission (EC).

Prime Minister and Bhumjaithai Party leader Anutin Charnvirakul rejected reports that a finalized 300-seat coalition deal is already in place, stating that constitutional procedures require certification before formal votes for prime minister and House Speaker. Bhumjaithai, which secured 193 seats, is aligning with the Pheu Thai Party (74 seats) and smaller parties contributing 33 seats, producing a working majority of 300 seats. The configuration is widely seen as designed to ensure numerical stability while limiting cabinet expansion and preserving Bhumjaithai's leverage in portfolio allocation. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Cabinet distribution follows Thailand's informal allocation practice of approximately one ministerial post per ten members of parliament. Under this logic, Bhumjaithai would control around 19 portfolios and Pheu Thai approximately seven. Five senior posts are reportedly reserved for non-elected technocratic figures, including Sihasak Phuangketkeow (foreign affairs), Suphajee Suthumpun (commerce), Ekniti Nitithanprapas (finance), Bowornsak Uwanno (legal affairs oversight), and Predee Daochai (energy). Pheu Thai is expected to oversee ministries including Agriculture and Cooperatives; Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation; Education; Labour; and Social Development and Human Security. [Khaosod English] [The Nation]

Against this backdrop, within Pheu Thai, internal unease has surfaced over both portfolio allocation and reputational exposure. While senior figures have publicly signaled support for an Anutin-led

government, insiders describe the decision as strategically costly given the party's reduced bargaining position. Concerns have been raised that if Pheu Thai prime ministerial candidate Yodchanan Wongsawat were to receive only a minor cabinet role, it could weaken his viability as a future prime ministerial contender.

Pheu Thai's negotiating leverage is further shaped by legal and reputational vulnerabilities surrounding several of its senior figures who are potential cabinet appointees. Suriya Jungrungruangkit faces scrutiny over procurement of a private jet valued at approximately THB 862 million (USD 25 million), including questions regarding asset declaration, although the party maintains the aircraft was legally imported and properly declared. Somsak Thepsutin remains politically exposed over controversy related to the hospital detention of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, an episode that continues to attract judicial and public scrutiny. Prasert Jantararuangtong has faced criticism over a memorandum of understanding connected to an iris-scanning cryptocurrency initiative allegedly involving personal data from more than 1.2 million Thai citizens. [Bangkok Post 3]

Against this backdrop, Pheu Thai leader Julapun Amornvivat recently denied reports that his party had scheduled new cabinet quota negotiations with Bhumjaithai, stating that no further talks have occurred since preliminary discussions and that parties are awaiting EC certification before resuming formal negotiations. He rejected speculation about specific ministry allocations and dismissed rumors of an alternative alliance between Pheu Thai, Klatham, and the People's Party aimed at pushing Bhumjaithai into opposition. [Bangkok Post 4]

On top of that, the most significant unresolved issue during negotiations concerned the 58-seat Klatham Party, whose chief adviser and de facto power center, Thamanat Prompow, previously served as agriculture minister in the caretaker administration. Despite informal contacts between senior figures from both sides, Klatham was ultimately excluded from the coalition. Reported reasons include reputational concerns linked to campaign-period allegations involving so-called "grey capital," fears that appointing certain Klatham figures could trigger Constitutional Court challenges on ethical grounds, disputes over control of key ministries such as Agriculture and Tourism, and direct electoral competition between the two parties in overlapping constituencies.

Thamanat has publicly stated that Klatham is prepared to serve in opposition and emphasized that substantive negotiations should await formal certification of the election results by the Election Commission. [Bangkok Post 5] [Bangkok Post 6] [Bangkok Post 7]

With Klatham excluded, the opposition bloc stands at 200 seats, consisting of the People's Party (118), Klatham (58), the Democrat Party (22), and United Thai Nation (2). Former prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the Democrat Party, has not joined the coalition and has emphasized that any cooperation must avoid association with "grey capital" and external interference. The party has also established an internal panel to examine alleged irregularities in the EC's administration of the poll. [Bangkok Post 8] [Bangkok Post 9]

Thailand: Senate motion seeks delay in EC nominee approvals over conflict of interest concerns

(msz) A group of senators has called for postponing the Senate's approval of two nominees to the Election Commission (EC), citing potential conflicts of interest and concerns about public confidence in independent oversight bodies.

The motion, submitted ahead of an extraordinary Senate session scheduled for February 26, seeks to delay endorsement of two candidates nominated to replace outgoing commissioners. The session was convened by royal command following a petition by the Senate Speaker. Although the House of Representatives has been dissolved, the Senate remains constitutionally empowered to perform its duties.

The senators argue that many members of the current Senate are under investigation by the EC for alleged collusion in the Senate election process. The controversy centers on allegations that organized political networks influenced the outcome of the 2024 Senate vote, which was conducted through a multi-tiered, indirect selection system. Complaints filed with the EC alleged coordinated voting across candidate groups and pre-arranged voting blocs at district, provincial, and national levels.

Particular scrutiny has fallen on figures allegedly linked to the Bhumjaithai Party of Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. Critics and petitioners have alleged that individuals with ties to Bhumjaithai benefited

disproportionately from the selection process, raising concerns that informal political backing may have shaped the composition of the Senate despite formal rules requiring candidate independence from party control. Bhumjaithai has denied orchestrating or directing the Senate selection.

The EC has opened investigations into alleged collusion and vote-fixing under the Organic Act on the Selection of Senators. Public reporting indicates that more than 100 senators—frequently cited as around 130–140—are subject to scrutiny in connection with the probe.

Against this backdrop, the group of senators behind the motion contend that approving new EC commissioners while such investigations are ongoing could create a perceived conflict of interest, as senators would be appointing members of the body examining them. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Dissolution petition, rape conviction, and data dispute intensify scrutiny of reformist party

(msz/lm) Thailand's reformist People's Party, which came in second in the recent national election and is expected to serve as the main opposition in the new Parliament, is facing escalating regulatory and political scrutiny across multiple fronts.

Serial petitioner Srisuwan Janya has asked the Election Commission to examine whether the party should be dissolved over alleged links to Spectre C Co., a private media and IT services company registered in 2020 with capital of THB 1.4 million (USD 40,600). The company operates from the same building as the party's headquarters. The petition argues that any prohibited connection between a political party and a media business could breach constitutional restrictions, the Political Parties Act, and the Organic Act on Elections. Additional concerns were raised regarding the party's requirement that membership applicants provide the "Laser ID" number printed on the back of Thai national ID cards, with allegations that this could violate personal data protection laws.

The People's Party denies any unlawful connection to Spectre C, stating that the company provides media production services and operates independently. It also defended its use of Laser ID numbers, saying the data are used solely for identity verification through the Department of Provincial Administration and are not stored in the party's database. The party stated that during a transitional period it is not collecting or

transferring Laser ID data and is using alternative verification tools. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Separately, the Supreme Court sentenced a People's Party parliamentary candidate to two years and eight months' imprisonment without suspension in connection with a rape case in Laos. The ruling followed more than six years of proceedings. The offense was reported to have occurred on January 18, 2020, in Vientiane prefecture, where the victim alleged she was drugged and sexually assaulted. [The Thaiger]

In response, the party issued a public apology and acknowledged weaknesses in its candidate vetting procedures. A lawyer for the complainant and a former Move Forward Party member involved in candidate selection stated he had previously raised concerns about the case before the election; the party has maintained that no final judgment existed at the time of nomination and relied on earlier lower-court rulings. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Following the ruling, Srisuwan filed an additional complaint arguing that the party may have breached Section 45 of the Political Parties Act, which prohibits parties from supporting conduct deemed harmful to public order or good morals. He has urged the Election Commission to consider referring the matter to the Constitutional Court under Section 92(3) to assess whether dissolution proceedings are warranted. [Bangkok Post 5]

All of this comes after the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) recently voted to forward a case involving 44 former members of the dissolved Move Forward Party – the Pople's Party's predecessor - to the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Political Office Holders. The NACC concluded that their joint sponsorship of legislation seeking to amend Section 112 of the Criminal Code, Thailand's lèse-majesté provision, constituted a serious ethical breach. If the Supreme Court accepts the case and issues indictments, any of the 44 who currently hold parliamentary office would be required to suspend their duties pending trial. Several of those implicated are now serving under the People's Party following Move Forward's dissolution by the Constitutional Court in 2024.

Against this backdrop, Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, leader of the People's Party and current leader of the opposition, stated he is prepared to step aside if a court orders him to suspend his duties. The party's legal team has petitioned the Supreme Court on behalf of 10 members — eight party-list and two constituency representatives — requesting that they not be

suspended while proceedings advance. A ruling is expected around April. Any change in party leadership would require a resolution by the party's general assembly and would also affect the constitutionally recognized position of leader of the opposition. [Bangkok Post 6]

Thailand: Court convicts protest leaders in Section 112 case

(lm) The Criminal Court in Bangkok has sentenced human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa to two years and eight months' imprisonment under Section 112 of the Criminal Code, Thailand's lèse-majesté provision, in connection with a November 2020 protest outside the 11th Infantry Regiment in Bangkok. The ruling forms part of a broader case involving seven defendants and brings his cumulative prison term across multiple convictions to 31 years and nine months.

In the same verdict, the court found three other defendants guilty under Section 112 and the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations for organizing and speaking at the rally, which prosecutors said drew approximately 2,000 participants. The court ruled that certain speeches led listeners to misunderstand the King and the monarchy. Each of the four convicted defendants received two years and eight months' imprisonment under Section 112. They were also fined THB 10,000 (USD 290) under the Emergency Decree and THB 200 (USD 6) under the Sound Amplifier Advertising Control Act, for a total fine of THB 10,200 (USD 296) each.

The court ordered that the sentence in this case run consecutively to earlier convictions. One co-defendant's case was severed after he fled. Actress Intira "Sai" Charoenpura was acquitted, with the court finding insufficient evidence that she had organized the rally or delivered offending remarks.

These rulings follow broader enforcement trends. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights reports that at least 291 individuals have been charged under Section 112 since 2020. [Bangkok Post 1] [The Nation]

Earlier last week, Thailand's Supreme Court upheld a sentence of three years and four months' imprisonment against a defendant for violating Section 112 of the Criminal Code in connection with a 2020 Facebook post referring to the 1946 death of King Rama VIII and making negative references to King Rama IX.

The ruling affirms a prior judgment of the Region 1 Court of Appeal and overturns an earlier acquittal by the Samut Prakan Provincial Court. The lower court had ruled in 2022 that Section 112 protects only four currently serving positions — the King, Queen, heir-apparent, and Regent — and therefore did not apply to a deceased monarch. It instead convicted the defendant under Section 14(1) of the Computer Crime Act, which criminalizes importing false information into a computer system in a manner likely to cause public harm.

In its final judgment, the Supreme Court held that defaming a former monarch, even after death, can affect national security. The Court stated that this interpretation aligns with the intent of Section 112 and does not constitute an overly broad reading of the law. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Malaysia withdraws criminal defamation case against Australian journalist

(lm) Malaysia has withdrawn a criminal defamation complaint filed in Thailand against Australian journalist Murray Hunter after he agreed to issue an apology and remove articles deemed defamatory.

The case stemmed from four articles published in April 2024 on Hunter's Substack blog, which criticized Malaysia's communications regulator, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), alleging abuse of power and unlawful website blocking. The MCMC filed the complaint in Thailand, where Hunter resides.

Thai authorities arrested Hunter in September 2025 at Suvarnabhumi Airport at Malaysia's request. He was released on bail of THB 20,000 (USD 580), with his passport confiscated and a travel ban imposed pending legal proceedings. Criminal defamation in Thailand carries a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment and a fine of up to THB 200,000 (USD 5,800). [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Incoming government rules out VAT hike as finance ministry advances excise tax restructuring

(msz/lm) The incoming Bhumjaithai-led administration has stated it has no plans to raise Thailand's value-

added tax (VAT) rate from the current 7 percent to 10 percent in the next two to three years, emphasizing economic recovery as its immediate priority despite mounting fiscal pressures.

Siripong Angkasakulkiat, deputy leader of the Bhumjaithai Party, rejected speculation triggered by a Senate sub-committee proposal recommending gradual tax restructuring, including a phased VAT increase to 10 percent. He stated that revenue-raising measures would only be reconsidered once the economy shows clear improvement.

The VAT discussion emerged from a Senate-hosted seminar on tax restructuring attended by representatives from the Revenue Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission. Kampol Supaphaeng, chair of the Senate sub-committee on economic, monetary and fiscal affairs, argued that Thailand's tax structure requires review in light of global economic shifts, technological change, and demographic transition toward a super-ageing society.

Former deputy finance minister Pisit Lee-artham proposed raising VAT to 10 percent, estimating that such an increase could generate approximately THB 400 billion (USD 11.6 billion) annually to support elderly welfare programs or economic stimulus. Fiscal officials have warned that the incoming administration will face persistent budget deficits, rising household and public debt, and transition costs linked to green economic policies. The fiscal deficit is projected at 4.4 percent, with public debt expected to approach nearly 70 percent of gross domestic product by 2028. [Bangkok Post 1]

In parallel, the Ministry of Finance is preparing to submit a proposal to restructure the excise tax system, targeting a 7.6 percent increase in excise revenue in fiscal year 2026 to THB 578 billion (USD 16.8 billion), up from more than THB 537 billion (USD 15.6 billion) in fiscal year 2025. Planned measures include introduction of a unified excise rate for cigarettes, adjustments to fuel and alcohol taxes, and new levies addressing health and environmental externalities, including a proposed salt tax and carbon tax. Tighter taxation of high-pollution products such as batteries, further revisions to alcoholic beverage taxation, and potential changes to luxury goods taxation are also under review.

In the first four months of fiscal year 2026, excise revenue reached THB 191.3 billion (USD 5.5 billion), exceeding targets by 4.55 percent. Vehicle-related excise contributed THB 21.3 billion (USD 0.62 billion), surpassing projections by THB 1.16 billion (USD 0.03

billion), partly due to accelerated production ahead of the introduction of emissions-based vehicle excise rates in January 2026. The revised vehicle tax structure has shifted demand toward electric and hybrid vehicles. Electric vehicles under the EV 3.5 incentive program continue to receive tax reductions, while hybrid vehicles face modest rate increases. [The Nation]

Thailand: Growth upgraded to roughly 2 percent, but structural risks remain

(lm) Thai bank-affiliated research centers have upgraded their 2026 economic growth forecasts to around 2 percent following stronger-than-expected fourth-quarter performance in 2025 and increased confidence in a Bhumjaithai-led government, though business leaders continue to warn that structural weaknesses remain unresolved.

Thailand's economy expanded by 2.5 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2025, rebounding from 1.2 percent in the previous quarter. Full-year growth reached 2.4 percent, exceeding earlier projections. [Bangkok Post 1]

Exports surged 24.4 percent year-on-year in January to USD 31.5 billion — the strongest growth in four years — supported by global demand for electronics linked to artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure. Imports rose to USD 34.8 billion, producing a USD 3.3 billion trade deficit. [Bangkok Post 2]

But despite improved near-term indicators, business leaders describe Thailand's economy as structurally weak relative to regional peers. In the fourth quarter, Taiwan grew by more than 12 percent, Singapore by 6.9 percent, Vietnam by 8 percent, and Malaysia by 6.3 percent. Representatives from the Federation of Thai Industries and the Thai National Shippers' Council warned that frequent cabinet reshuffles and quota-driven ministerial allocations could undermine policy continuity. They called for regulatory reform, improved competitiveness, reduction of business costs, enhanced workforce skills, broader tax reform, stronger governance, and sustained infrastructure and logistics development.

Capital market and investment leaders reported rising foreign direct investment commitments, particularly in data centers, and emphasized the need to convert Board of Investment approvals into operational projects. Tourism operators also called for coordinated policy execution and stronger enforcement against

illegal businesses to protect sector revenues. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Pressure mounts over pension reform and governance of USD 87 billion social security fund

(lm) Thailand's national social security system is facing escalating scrutiny across pension policy and fund governance, as senators press for transparency in regulatory changes and economists renew warnings about long-term sustainability of the Social Security Fund, valued at approximately THB 3 trillion (USD 87 billion).

A Senate committee has demanded that the Social Security Office (SSO) release raw data from a public hearing held January 15 to February 14 on proposed amendments to election rules for the Social Security Board (SSB), the tripartite body overseeing the fund. The most debated proposal would replace the current system — under which each insured worker may vote for up to seven candidates — with a one-person, one-vote model. Additional candidate qualification requirements related to integrity and ethical standards are also under consideration. [Bangkok Post 1]

Governance of the fund has become contentious in parallel with the voting rule debate. Critics argue that reducing each insured worker's vote from seven candidates to one would concentrate influence, weaken representative diversity on the board, and reduce transparency in oversight of the fund. The Social Security Office maintains that the reform would simplify voting procedures and address low participation rates observed in the previous board election. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

At the policy level, pressure is also mounting over pension calculation methods. An economist and former pension reform committee chair has urged the Labour Ministry to adopt a revised formula calculating retirement benefits based on inflation-adjusted lifetime earnings rather than wages earned during the final five years before retirement. The proposed change is intended to address inequities affecting workers whose salaries decline late in their careers and could increase pensions for approximately 570,000 retirees.

At the same time, long-term sustainability concerns are resurfacing. International projections suggest that without structural reform, the old-age component of the fund could face insolvency around 2054. One

academic has warned that, under current trends, the broader fund could face serious depletion risks within 15 years. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Renewal of work permits for 100,000 Cambodian workers suspended pending security review

(msz) The government has placed the renewal of work permits for approximately 100,000 Cambodian workers on hold pending a security assessment related to the ongoing tensions along the Thai-Cambodia border. Labour Minister Treenuch Thienthong stated that the Cabinet will consider any extension only after security agencies complete a review of concerns linked to the rehiring of Cambodian workers. She said the broader bilateral context and associated security conditions must be evaluated before a decision is taken.

The affected workers are currently in Thailand but are unable to return due to border-related constraints, leaving their status in a legally uncertain position. The minister acknowledged that the delay affects businesses, particularly in the agricultural sector, but emphasized that national security considerations must be balanced against economic needs. [The Nation]

Thailand: Updates on conscript oversight as Senate probes death and authorities move on abuse reforms

(lm/msz) A Senate committee has opened an inquiry into the November 11, 2025, death of a conscript attached to the 2nd Artillery Regiment, King's Guard, at Fort Phrom Yothee in Prachin Buri province, after the Royal Thai Army stated that heart failure was the cause of death. The soldier reportedly lost consciousness while detained at the 12th Military Circle prison and had been held for more than 10 days in a unit confinement facility for unauthorized absence from duty.

The Senate Committee on Political Development, Public Participation, Human Rights, Liberties and Consumer Protection is summoning relevant officials and reviewing the circumstances. Army representatives stated that medical examination found no evidence of assault or internal injury. According to the committee chair, more than 20 conscript deaths have been recorded over the past 15 years, and

concerns were raised about limited surveillance infrastructure in some military facilities. [Bangkok Post 1]

Separately, Thailand's National Human Rights Commission is working with the army and navy to draft new "Do's & Don'ts" guidelines for conscript training. The draft framework emphasizes respect for human dignity, bans violence as a training method, prohibits forced nudity and degrading treatment, requires proportional disciplinary measures, and mandates confidential complaint channels and mental health support. The initiative is framed as consistent with Thailand's Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act and related international commitments. [Bangkok Post 2]

In a further development in Prachin Buri province, the Royal Thai Army confirmed that a sergeant at the 2nd Infantry Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment will face both criminal prosecution and military disciplinary proceedings after a video showed him forcing a conscript to crawl into a septic pit and striking him with a stick as punishment for returning late to camp. The army acknowledged the authenticity of the footage and stated that the conduct exceeded authorized disciplinary measures. The conscript has filed a formal complaint with local police. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Cabinet expands controlled border zones to tighten goods oversight

(lm) The cabinet has approved draft ministerial regulations designating expanded border areas as "controlled zones" for goods under the 1981 executive decree on border goods control, enabling tighter oversight of exports and transit in areas deemed sensitive to national security.

The measure covers parts of four provinces along the Myanmar border — Kanchanaburi, Chiang Rai, Tak, and Mae Hong Son — and seven provinces along the Cambodian border — Chanthaburi, Trat, Buri Ram, Si Sa Ket, Sa Kaeo, Surin, and Ubon Ratchathani — as well as Thailand's internal waters and territorial seas. In total, 57 sub-districts (tambon) are designated within the eastern frontier zone.

The regulation empowers authorities to declare specific land or maritime areas as controlled when necessary to prevent threats to national security or public order. The policy follows an April 2025 National Security Council resolution calling for stricter monitoring of goods movement along frontier areas,

particularly in response to concerns about transnational criminal networks operating across borders. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government tightens nationwide gun licensing enforcement

(lm) The government has ordered stricter nationwide enforcement of firearm regulations, directing registrars to intensify scrutiny of license applications and maintaining the suspension of public carry permits. Under the revised enforcement approach, registrars must conduct more rigorous background checks on purchase applicants, including verification of legal disqualifications and examination of personal conduct and possible links to unlawful activity. The suspension of carry permits for the general public, in effect since December 20, 2023, remains unchanged. [Bangkok Post]

Vietnam: Proposal to upgrade Vietnam Railways into national railway group to drive high-speed rail development

(hn) The Ministry of Finance has proposed transforming Vietnam Railways (VNR) into the Vietnam National Railway Group to strengthen the domestic railway industry and implement major projects, particularly the North–South high-speed railway.

The proposal, part of VNR's 2026–30 restructuring plan with a vision to 2050, would convert the current State-owned corporation into a group model with a 100 percent State-owned parent company operating as a single-member limited liability company. The restructuring would occur in phases, including the creation of specialized subsidiaries: a Vietnam Railway Industry Corporation by 2027, a Vietnam Railway Electrification One-Member Limited Liability Company by 2029, and a Vietnam Railway Infrastructure Corporation by 2031.

The overhaul is driven by new mandates from the National Assembly and Government, including investment resolutions for the North–South high-speed railway and the Lào Cai–Hà Nội–Hải Phòng line, requiring urgent reforms in capital mobilisation, human resources, and organisational structure.

Financially, the new group would receive additional charter capital and public assets, including the Đà Lạt–

Trại Mát railway line and major stations such as Hải Phòng, Thanh Hóa, Vinh, Huế, and Sài Gòn. The added assets would raise projected charter capital to nearly VND 32.41 trillion (approximately USD 1.3 billion) in 2026–30 and over VND 49.78 trillion (approximately USD 2 billion) in 2031–35. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: State Bank of Vietnam proposes stricter AI disclosure and consumer protection rules for banks

(hn) The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) has proposed new rules to strengthen oversight of artificial intelligence (AI) in banking, requiring banks and e-wallet providers to inform customers in advance when AI systems are used to interact with them.

Under a draft circular on AI safety and risk management, financial institutions must disclose the use of AI tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and automated hotlines. They must also notify customers if AI is used for emotion recognition or biometric classification, and clearly label any AI-generated content (images, audio or video) to avoid confusion.

The draft bans the use of AI to exploit vulnerable customers—such as the elderly, people with disabilities or those facing financial hardship—by promoting high-risk or unsuitable products. Customers will be allowed to challenge AI-based decisions, with banks required to assign human staff to review complaints.

The regulations, expected to take effect in March, will give existing AI systems until September 2027 to comply. SBV said the tighter framework aims to manage risks from rapid AI adoption in banking, ensure fair treatment and protect sensitive customer data, as AI use expands in areas like eKYC, credit scoring, loan approval, fraud detection and generative AI-powered customer service. [Vietnamnews]

Vietnam: Starlink installs four ground gateway stations for satellite internet rollout

(hn) Starlink, the satellite internet service developed by SpaceX and owned by Elon Musk, has installed four ground gateway stations in Vietnam—one in Phú Thọ, one in Đà Nẵng, and two in Ho Chi Minh City.

Under a license issued by the Ministry of Science and Technology, Starlink Services Vietnam is authorized to use radio frequencies and operate satellite-based fixed services at these locations. Gateway stations connect satellites with terrestrial network infrastructure and route user data. Globally, Starlink operates about 150 gateways, with additional stations under construction or awaiting approval.

The license was formally handed over in Washington, D.C., as part of broader Vietnam–US cooperation agreements in science, technology, digital transformation, aviation, and healthcare. Vietnamese authorities said the approval reflects a controlled approach to managing new radio technologies while supporting modern and sustainable digital infrastructure development.

Low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite internet is expected to complement existing telecom networks, particularly in remote or hard-to-reach areas. Starlink satellites orbit at around 550 km above Earth—much lower than traditional geostationary satellites—reducing latency and improving connection speeds.

Starlink was granted a pilot license in 2025, becoming the first foreign company allowed to test satellite internet services in Vietnam, with approval to deploy four gateway stations and up to 600,000 user terminals.[Vietnamnews] [Vnexpress, in Vietnamese]

Vietnam encourages Amazon to scale its investments in the country

(ln) On February 19, Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security General Lương Tam Quang called on Amazon to continue its investments in Vietnam, highlighting the efforts of the Ministry of Public Security in supporting foreign investors and businesses. Specifically, he encouraged Amazon to expand its investments, set up training programs and the transfer of technology to improve in sectors of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, cybersecurity and digital infrastructure management.

He also expressed the Ministry's continued determination in listening to the opinions and suggestions of businesses to create a sustainable cooperative environment for foreign investors and businesses. Amazon's Vice President of Public Policy, Shannon Kellogg, expressed Amazon's intentions to accompany Vietnam in its implementation of strategic development goals. Additionally, Kellogg communicated Vietnam's importance as one of the key

markets in the Asia-Pacific region and how Amazon is committed to continuing its long-term investment and service provision in Vietnam. (VietnamPlus)

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Chinese drone exports to Russia find new path through Thailand

(ms) Chinese-made drones, since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression, are increasingly reaching Russia through Thailand.

Trade data reviewed by Bloomberg show Russia imported USD 125 million worth of drones from Thailand in the 11 months through November 2025, representing 88 percent of Thailand's total unmanned aerial vehicle exports and about eight times the level recorded the year before. Over the same period, Thailand imported USD 186 million worth of drones from China, accounting for almost all drone shipments into the country. In 2022, Thailand exported less than USD 1 million in drones and none went to Russia, the data show.

Bloomberg identified Bangkok-based Skyhub Technologies Ltd. as a key node in the trade. Shipment-level records compiled by trade intelligence provider Big Trade Data showed Skyhub imported about USD 25 million in drones in 2025, sourced from Autel Robotics, one of China's major drone manufacturers.

Those documents included shipments of 976 drones bearing a model code matching Autel's EVO Max 4T,

which Bloomberg said costs about USD 9,000 per unit. Bloomberg also reported that Russian company Aero HIT previously sought financing from Russia's defense ministry to localize production of the EVO Max 4T, describing it as effective in combat despite being marketed for civilian use. Autel told Bloomberg its drones are designed for civilian purposes and that it maintains a sanctions compliance system, while also citing geofencing features intended to restrict use in certain conflict areas.

Another Bangkok-area firm, China Thai Corp., appears to play an even bigger role. Bloomberg reported it imported USD 144 million in drones from China in the first 11 months of 2025, and that the company was sanctioned by the United Kingdom in October 2025 for supplying technology to Russia's military.

Thai customs officials stated the trade falls within Thailand's legal framework and that end-use declarations are not required for drone imports. [Bloomberg] [Kyiv Post]

Chinese investment bank surpasses USD 289 billion in outstanding BRI loans

(ms) China's Export-Import Bank has surpassed CNY 2 trillion (USD 289 billion) in outstanding loans tied to the Belt and Road Initiative, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

The figure reflects credit extended to more than 130 countries and regions participating in the global infrastructure and connectivity program launched in 2013. CCTV said the loans support a broad range of sectors, including trade and export-import activities, infrastructure construction, advanced manufacturing, green development projects, overseas investment, and programs aimed at improving livelihoods.

China EXIM Bank remains a central instrument of Beijing's external economic policy, providing state-backed financing for projects aligned with the Belt and Road framework. Chinese authorities have consistently described the Belt and Road Initiative as a platform for economic cooperation and shared growth. Supporters argue that Chinese funding has accelerated infrastructure development across emerging markets. Critics, however, continue to raise concerns about debt burdens, transparency, and long-term financial risks for borrower countries.

While Chinese authorities continue to describe the initiative as a driver of development and connectivity,

the financial flows linked to earlier lending cycles are shifting. Recent research by independent organizations has shown that some African borrowers — including Kenya, Ethiopia, and Zambia — are now directing larger portions of public revenue toward repaying existing Chinese loans than they receive in fresh financing. Analysts attribute this to the repayment schedules of major infrastructure projects agreed during the initiative's peak lending years, combined with slower new credit issuance by Chinese policy banks.

This transition has intensified debate over debt sustainability and the long-term financial implications of large-scale infrastructure borrowing. Supporters of the Belt and Road framework argue that Chinese financing has enabled critical transport and energy projects, while critics warn that repayment burdens may constrain fiscal flexibility in some developing countries.

While CCTV did not disclose country-level details, the reported loan balance illustrates both the global reach of China's policy banking system and the evolving economic relationships shaped by Belt and Road financing. [China News in Chinese] [Reuters]

China's Russian oil imports set for record high as imports from India pull back

(mis) China's imports of Russian crude are on track to reach a new record in February, as independent refiners capitalize on steep discounts following India's decision to scale back purchases under US pressure. Ship-tracking data from Vortexa and Kpler indicate that Russian deliveries to China will rise to around 2.07 to 2.08 million barrels per day (bpd), up from roughly 1.7 million bpd in January, marking the third consecutive monthly increase.

The shift comes after India reduced its intake of Russian oil to a two-year low in December 2025 and is expected to cut further to about 1.16 million bpd in February (see AiR No. 51, December/2025, 4). Western sanctions over the war in Ukraine and US pressure linked to trade negotiations have prompted New Delhi to curb spot purchases, allowing China to replace India as Moscow's largest seaborne buyer since November last year.

The reallocation of cargoes has widened price discounts for Russian grades. Urals crude for January and February deliveries to China has traded at USD 9 to 11 a barrel below ICE Brent, while ESPO blend from

Russia's Far East has been assessed at USD 8 to 9 per barrel below the benchmark. By contrast, comparable Iranian grades have been priced at USD 10 to 11 per barrel, making Russian barrels relatively more attractive for Chinese buyers.

Independent Chinese refiners have been central to this surge. They are among the world's largest consumers of sanctioned oil from Russia, Iran and Venezuela. Analysts note that uncertainty over potential US military action against Iran has dampened demand for Iranian cargoes, further strengthening Russia's position in China's import mix. Vortexa estimates Iranian shipments to China fell to around 1.03 million bpd in February from 1.25 million bpd in January.

The current data underscores a broader realignment in Asian energy flows. As India trims purchases, China's refiners have stepped in to absorb discounted Russian supply, reinforcing Beijing's role as Moscow's most important oil customer. [Reuters] [OilPrice]

Australian warship transits Taiwan Strait as China claims monitoring

(may/ms) An Australian naval vessel has sailed through the Taiwan Strait, drawing attention from Beijing. The Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS Toowoomba conducted a routine transit of the strait on February 20–21 as part of a regional presence deployment. With the Australian Navy claiming the passage was carried out in accordance with international law and added that all interactions with foreign military assets were safe and professional.

China's state-backed Global Times, citing an unnamed military source, said the People's Liberation Army conducted full-process tracking, monitoring, and alert operations throughout the transit. Beijing claims sovereignty over Taiwan and considers the Taiwan Strait part of its territorial waters, a position disputed by Taiwan and many Western governments, which regard the route as an international waterway.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said it closely monitors military activity around the island but did not provide details on the Australian vessel's movements. Taiwan's government maintains that freedom of navigation applies in the strait under international law.

Transits by US allies through the Taiwan Strait frequently prompt responses from China, which has increased military operations near Taiwan in recent years. The United States conducts naval passages

through the strait several times a year, while partners including Australia, Britain, France, and Canada have undertaken occasional voyages.

The latest transit recalls earlier friction between Australian and Chinese forces. In late 2023, Australia said one of its warships encountered Chinese sonar activity during a Taiwan Strait passage, an episode that triggered diplomatic protests. The waterway remains a focal point of regional security tensions as disagreements persist over its legal status and military activity. [DimSum Daily] [Reuters]

Japan rallies Pacific partners to bolster maritime security amid China concerns

(dql) Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi called for closer security cooperation with Pacific island nations to safeguard “free and open” seas, in remarks widely seen as a response to China’s expanding regional footprint. [Ministry of Defense, Japan]

Speaking at the third Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue in Tokyo, Koizumi warned against unilateral attempts to alter the status quo by force and reaffirmed a shared commitment to peace. Defense leaders from Pacific island states and partner countries discussed maritime security, including freedom of navigation, protection of sea lanes, and responses to climate-related disasters.

For the first time, some ASEAN members such as Indonesia and Philippines joined as observers, signaling Tokyo’s effort to broaden regional alignment. Japan also announced plans to host junior and mid-level Pacific defense officials to deepen policy exchanges and institutional ties.

On the sidelines, Koizumi met Crown Prince Tupouto'a Ulukalala of Tonga, as well as counterparts from Fiji and Papua New Guinea, agreeing to pursue memorandums to strengthen defense cooperation. [Kyodo News]

Japan to host informal talks on plastic pollution ahead of treaty negotiations

(lr) Japan will convene an informal international meeting in Tokyo from March 1–3 aimed at advancing consensus toward a legally binding treaty to curb plastic pollution. Fifteen countries and regions —

including the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the European Union — are expected to participate.

The initiative follows stalled negotiations in 2024 over draft treaty language, particularly disagreements concerning potential limits on plastic production. The Tokyo meeting is intended to explore possible compromise formulas ahead of formal negotiations involving approximately 180 countries.

Diplomatic coordination has grown more complex amid shifting U.S. climate policy under President Donald Trump, adding to the challenges facing Japan as host and facilitator. [Japan Today]

South Korea calls for closer cooperation in MIKTA grouping

(co) Foreign Minister Cho Hyun presided over a virtual meeting with his MIKTA counterparts from Mexico, Indonesia, Türkiye and Australia, emphasizing the need for closer coordination amid a shifting international order.

During the talks, the ministers discussed practical cooperation in areas such as renewable energy, supply chains, critical minerals and vaccines, as South Korea formally handed over the group's chairmanship to Australia. [Yonhap News Agency]

MIKTA is an informal grouping established in 2013 and named after the initials of the five member countries, aiming to support effective global governance.

India positions itself as AI convenor for the Global South 2006 AI Impact Summit

(dql) Last week New Delhi became the focal point of global AI diplomacy as India hosted the fourth international AI summit—following meetings at Bletchley Park, Seoul, and Paris—and the first held in the Global South. The gathering brought together heads of state, tech executives, and policymakers to debate control, risk distribution, and equitable access in an industry largely dominated by the United States and China.

In this opening address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India's AI approach is anchored in the summit's theme, *"Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya"*—advancing welfare and well-being for all. He stressed that this principle defines India's benchmark for AI

development, warning against reducing people to mere data sources. To that end, he argued that AI must be democratized and designed as a tool for inclusion and empowerment, with particular relevance for addressing development gaps in the Global South, positioning India as voice of the Global South. [Prime Minister, India]

The summit's principal diplomatic outcome was the adoption of the nonbinding New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact by 88 countries and international organizations, including both Washington and Beijing. The declaration promotes inclusive, human-centric AI and broader access in areas such as health and education but avoids concrete measures to address the concentration of computing power and frontier-model expertise in a small number of corporations and economies. [Ministry of External Affairs, India]

Complementing this, voluntary "Frontier AI Impact Commitments" encouraged companies to improve transparency on real-world AI usage and strengthen testing across underrepresented languages and regions. While some experts welcomed these as incremental progress, critics argued they fell short of tackling pressing safety and governance concerns.

Debates at the summit reflected rising unease—particularly in Europe—over dependence on U.S.- and China-based AI infrastructure and highlighted the importance of technological autonomy to prevent a bifurcated world dominated by two AI hegemons.

In a strategic move, India joined Pax Silica, a U.S.-led semiconductor and advanced manufacturing alliance that includes Japan, South Korea, the U.K., and Israel, signaling closer U.S.–India technology alignment despite past tensions. [The Indian Express] [ORF] [Open Magazine]

Commercially, New Delhi secured sweeping investment pledges exceeding USD 200 billion over two years. Major domestic conglomerates including Reliance Industries (and its telecom arm Jio) and Adani Group committed massive funding for AI infrastructure and renewable-powered data centers, while Larsen & Toubro partnered with Nvidia on large-scale AI facilities. U.S. tech firms including Microsoft, Google, OpenAI, Anthropic, and AMD also expanded commitments, reinforcing India's emergence as a major AI investment destination. [Digitimes]

Overall, India is positioned itself at the summit as a pivotal hub in the global artificial intelligence and semiconductor landscape and demonstrated the country's strategic emphasis on AI infrastructure,

ethical AI adoption and equitable access, while aligning with global partners on supply chains and governance frameworks. Yet while investment momentum was strong, the event highlighted the persistent difficulty for middle powers to reshape global AI governance in a landscape still defined by U.S.–China technological dominance.

Amid intensifying U.S.–China competition over artificial intelligence, India is positioning itself as a convening power for countries that lack the technological and industrial muscle of the two superpowers. At the summit Prime Minister Modi framed AI as a transformative but potentially dangerous force—comparable to nuclear energy—and argued that governance and public welfare should be central to its development. Rather than competing head-on with firms like OpenAI or China's state-backed AI champions, India has sought to promote itself as a "third-way" advocate for the Global South, emphasizing equitable access, responsible deployment and development-focused applications. [The New York Times] [Fortune]

India advances Global South tech leadership with AI partnership with Italy and Kenya

India has joined with Italy and Kenya to launch a trilateral artificial intelligence initiative aimed at accelerating Africa's digital development through scalable, locally adapted AI solutions. [Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy, Italy]

Involving India's Electronics and IT Ministry, Italy's Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy, and Kenya's Digital Economy Ministry, the partnership was signed on the margins of the AI Impact Summit and prioritizes practical applications in sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education and public administration, with an emphasis on affordability, multilingual systems, and public-interest use cases. [Decode 39]

For India, the initiative builds on its experience in deploying large-scale digital public infrastructure and reflects its ambition to export governance-ready, inclusive technology models to the Global South. By supporting African countries in developing AI capacity tailored to local languages and data sovereignty, New Delhi positions itself as a provider of alternatives to Western and Chinese technology ecosystems. [Indian Journal of African Studies]

Separately, India and Kenya have signed an Implementation Framework Agreement to launch a DigiLocker pilot project in Kenya, marking a concrete advance in bilateral digital cooperation.

The platform will be co-developed by India's National e-Governance Division and Kenya's Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, and tailored to Kenyan requirements under India's Development Cooperation Programme.

The initiative aims to enable secure digital storage and real-time verification of official documents, reduce administrative burdens, and improve access to public services for citizens, students and businesses. [The Tribune]

Amnesty criticizes summit for sidelining human rights amid investment push

Amnesty International sharply criticized the gathering, arguing that its emphasis on innovation, sovereignty and growth masked mounting human rights concerns linked to AI deployment in India. It warned that the summit's rhetoric contrasted with what it described as expanding state surveillance, shrinking civic space, and the discriminatory impact of technologies such as facial recognition and automated welfare systems on marginalized communities.

Amnesty contended that global AI forums, including the Delhi meeting, have repeatedly failed to deliver binding safeguards, instead favoring voluntary commitments and industry-government cooperation. The organization warned that framing AI development as a geopolitical race risks concentrating power while neglecting rights protections. It called on governments to adopt enforceable regulations, prohibit technologies incompatible with human rights, and ensure meaningful public participation in shaping AI governance. [Amnesty International] [POLITICO]

India's uses AI summit for bilateral talks to advance tech and trade ties

(dql) Prime Minister Narendra Modi engaged in a series of high-level bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the India AI Impact Summit 2026 (see above), underscoring India's proactive diplomacy linking technology, trade, and strategic cooperation. These talks, which included leaders from Europe, Central Asia, South Asia, and the neighborhood, focused on artificial intelligence, emerging technologies, energy security, and the push to finalize the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement.

With Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić, Modi reviewed broad areas of cooperation including defense, digital infrastructure and investment,

exploring ways to expand cooperation in defense, manufacturing, digital public infrastructure, fertilizers, and infrastructure development. The two leaders also discussed long-standing ties dating back to the Non-Aligned Movement era, with Serbia continuing to position itself as a strategic entry point to the Balkans for Indian companies. Recent collaboration has expanded in pharmaceuticals, information technology, and agriculture, while advanced technologies and manufacturing are expected to underpin the next stage of bilateral engagement. [The Statesman] [DD News]

Engagements with Croatia and Finland emphasized innovation, ICT, clean energy and early implementation of the EU trade pact to boost economic ties, with Finland setting a target to double bilateral trade and exploring collaboration in areas like 6G and biofuels. [Devdiscourse] [Helsinki Times]

Modi's talks with Spain's President Pedro Sánchez touched on defense, security and technology links, framed by the declaration of 2026 as the India-Spain Year of Culture, Tourism and AI. [TRT World]

Discussions with Estonia highlighted digital governance and AI cooperation, and with Bhutan and Kazakhstan the focus ranged from sustainable AI use to energy, connectivity, critical minerals and space. [The Tribune 1] [NDTV] [The Print]

At the summit, which aims to position India as a global AI hub, Modi also discussed collaboration with global tech leaders, reflecting a broader strategy to integrate AI diplomacy with economic and strategic partnerships across regions. [The Tribune 2]

BRI-linked industrial park near India border dropped from Nepal poll pledge by key candidate

(lm) A Chinese-backed industrial park in eastern Nepal has become an issue in the Jhapa-5 parliamentary race after former Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah excluded the project from his election manifesto while his opponent, former prime minister KP Oli, pledged to complete it.

The project, officially titled the Nepal–China Friendship Industrial Park, is included under the December 2024 Nepal–China Framework for Belt and Road Cooperation. It was first launched in 2021 in Kamal Rural Municipality, Jhapa district.

The planned site lies near the Nepal–India border, close to India's Siliguri Corridor, a narrow land strip linking mainland India to its northeastern states. Nepali officials have acknowledged that India has shown sensitivities regarding infrastructure projects in this area, though no formal objection has been publicly issued.

The Investment Board Nepal has approved foreign investment of NPR 64 billion (USD 467.2 million) under a Public-Private Partnership model. The designated developer is a Lhasa-based Chinese company, and negotiations over the Project Development Agreement are ongoing. [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: Jailed ex-prime minister's health dispute intensifies political standoff; party rejects any 'deal'

(lm) A dispute over jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's eye condition has escalated into a broader political confrontation between his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and the federal government. Earlier this month, a court-appointed lawyer reported that Khan had suffered severe vision loss in his right eye due to central retinal vein occlusion, while a government medical board stated his condition had improved following treatment in custody. A medical document circulated publicly indicated partial restoration of vision with corrective lenses, though PTI has rejected the report as lacking independent verification.

PTI demands that Khan's family and personal physician be granted access and that he be examined at a private hospital. The interior minister has accused the party of politicizing health concerns and spreading exaggerated claims, asserting that treatment decisions rest with medical professionals and the courts. Opposition lawmakers were reportedly briefed on the examination findings. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Health concerns have triggered protests, including sit-ins in Islamabad and demonstrations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where PTI governs. The opposition alliance has since called off its week-long protests, but PTI announced the formation of an "Imran Khan Release Force" to organize a nationwide, "peaceful" mobilization campaign demanding his release. [Arab News 3]

Separately, Khan's sister publicly ruled out any negotiated arrangement with authorities for his release, stating he would not accept a political

compromise. Fourteen former international cricket captains have called for humane detention conditions and transparent legal access. Khan, in jail since August 2023 following multiple convictions he describes as politically motivated, remains at the center of Pakistan's ongoing civil–political confrontation. [Arab News 4]

Pakistan: Sindh assembly rejects proposal to separate Karachi, cites constitutional safeguards

(lm) A constitutional dispute has emerged in Sindh after the Sindh Provincial Assembly, dominated by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), adopted a resolution rejecting any move to create new provinces or separate Karachi from Sindh.

The resolution was introduced by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, a senior PPP leader, and reaffirmed that Karachi would remain an integral part of Sindh. It cited Article 239 of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, which requires approval by at least a two-thirds majority of a provincial assembly to alter provincial boundaries. The motion was forwarded to the president, prime minister, and parliamentary leadership for record.

The development follows renewed demands by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement–Pakistan (MQM-P), a political party with its core support base in urban Sindh, particularly Karachi, to consider establishing a separate administrative unit for the city. The party has called for a referendum in urban areas of Sindh and argues that the Constitution provides a legal pathway for creating new provinces. MQM-P leaders described the provincial resolution as "illegal" and "unconstitutional," asserting that a provincial assembly cannot pre-empt constitutional debate at the national level.

The debate intensified after governance concerns in Karachi, including criticism following a mall fire earlier this year that killed 80 people. Karachi, with a population exceeding 20 million, is Pakistan's largest city and principal commercial hub, generating a substantial share of national revenue.

At present, no formal proposal to redraw provincial boundaries has been introduced at the federal level. Given the PPP's two-thirds majority in the Sindh Assembly, constitutional change at the provincial level is politically unlikely. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Punjab's planned provincial airline draws scrutiny over executive jet purchase

(lm) Punjab's provincial government faces criticism over its planned airline, Air Punjab (Private) Limited, after confirming the acquisition of a 17-seat luxury executive aircraft while the carrier still lacks regulatory approval to begin commercial operations.

Air Punjab was incorporated with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) in July 2025 following an announcement by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. However, aviation officials confirm the airline has not yet secured the required operating license and remains at a preliminary stage.

The aircraft in question, a Gulfstream G500, arrived in Lahore in December 2025 and has conducted short domestic flights in February 2026. Provincial authorities describe it as part of the future fleet. Aviation experts dispute its commercial suitability, noting that scheduled regional airlines typically operate 48–70 seat aircraft. A 17-seat executive jet is generally configured for VIP or charter use and is unlikely to be economically viable for regular passenger routes.

The timing is notable. In late 2025, the federal government privatized Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) after losses exceeded PKR 800 billion (USD 2.8 billion). [Arab News]

Pakistan: Balochistan establishes court-supervised detention centers to address enforced disappearance allegations

(lm) The Government of Balochistan has introduced court-reviewed "de-radicalization centers" as a new legal framework for detaining and interrogating individuals suspected of involvement in militancy, in an effort to address long-standing allegations of enforced disappearances in the province. The initiative follows sustained criticism by families of missing persons and human rights groups, who have accused security agencies of detaining suspects without due process during counterinsurgency operations. The state has consistently denied systematic enforced disappearances, arguing that many missing individuals have either joined militant groups or left the country.

Under the new system, suspects will be held in designated facilities where interrogation may be

conducted by police and intelligence agencies, including the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence (MI), and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). Detainees will not be transferred to undisclosed locations. The provincial government states that family access, medical care, and judicial oversight will be guaranteed. After three months, the Chief Justice of the Balochistan High Court will review each case in chambers and determine whether detention should be extended or the suspect released. Authorities indicate that continued detention must move toward formal prosecution.

The provincial administration also announced the establishment of "faceless courts" for terrorism-related trials and a strengthened witness protection regime, including identity shielding. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Man who filmed girl cricketer in North Waziristan released after brief abduction

(lm) A man who recorded a viral video of a 10-year-old girl playing cricket in North Waziristan, a former militant stronghold in northwestern Pakistan, has been released following a brief abduction, according to local sources.

The video showed the girl bowling in Tehsil Shewa, a remote area of North Waziristan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The footage circulated widely on social media, drawing national attention and public praise. A franchise in the Pakistan Super League — the country's premier professional Twenty20 cricket competition — publicly offered to support her participation in a forthcoming women's initiative.

Shortly after the video gained prominence, the individual who filmed it was abducted by unidentified persons. Local police confirmed the incident and stated that the area is geographically remote and difficult to access. He was subsequently released following mediation through a jirga, a traditional tribal council mechanism used for dispute resolution in Pashtun areas. [Arab News]

Pakistan: IMF staff to begin program reviews on February 25 under USD 7 billion facility

(lm) An International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff mission will visit Pakistan starting February 25 to conduct the third review under the Extended Fund Facility valued at PKR 2 trillion (USD 7 billion) and the second review under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility, which focuses on climate resilience. The reviews will determine eligibility for further disbursements.

The Extended Fund Facility is a multi-year stabilization program designed to restore macroeconomic stability, rebuild foreign exchange reserves, and address structural fiscal weaknesses. The Resilience and Sustainability Facility supports climate-related reforms, particularly relevant for Pakistan following severe flood damage in recent years.

According to the IMF, Pakistan has achieved a primary fiscal surplus of 1.3 percent of gross domestic product in fiscal year 2025, in line with program targets. Headline inflation, which exceeded 38 percent in May 2023, has declined significantly following monetary tightening and subsidy reductions. Pakistan also recorded its first current account surplus in 14 years in fiscal year 2025. The central bank projects economic growth of approximately 4.75 percent for the fiscal year ending in June.

The upcoming review is expected to assess fiscal discipline, energy sector reforms, and governance measures. Reported areas of scrutiny include a revenue shortfall of approximately PKR 336 billion (USD 1.18 billion) relative to program targets and a reduction in electricity tariffs of roughly PKR 4 per unit for export-oriented industries, which carries fiscal implications.

Continued compliance would unlock the next tranche under the facility and is considered central to sustaining investor confidence and external financing stability. [Arab News]

Pakistan: ADB in advanced talks on USD 2.0 billion railway financing

(lm) Pakistan and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are in advanced discussions over a financing package of approximately PKR 571.4 billion (USD 2.0 billion) for Phase I of the Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway modernization project, covering the 480-kilometer Karachi–Rohri section on the country's primary north–south rail corridor. No formal commitment has been made; ADB states that any support remains subject to comprehensive due diligence under its internal policies.

ML-1, estimated at roughly PKR 2.0 trillion (USD 7.0 billion), is the largest planned rail upgrade in Pakistan and a central but long-delayed component of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a portfolio of China-backed infrastructure projects. Earlier financing discussions with China, initially valued at about PKR 1.91 trillion (USD 6.67 billion) in 2016, stalled, prompting Islamabad to pursue a blended structure involving multilateral lenders, including ADB and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Phase I is expected to be executed through the National Logistics Corporation (NLC), a military-run logistics enterprise, underscoring the civil–military interface in strategic transport infrastructure. Parallel plans include rehabilitation of the approximately 1,000-kilometer ML-3 corridor from Rohri to Taftan near the Iran border, aimed at strengthening westbound freight connectivity. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Chinese firm signals potential USD 1.34 billion investment at country's second-largest port

(lm) A Chinese industrial group, Shandong Xinxu Group, has expressed interest in investing up to PKR 382.9 billion (USD 1.34 billion) in an Integrated Maritime Industrial Complex (IMIC) at Port Qasim in Karachi. The proposal remains at a preliminary stage, with authorities requesting a detailed feasibility study before formal consideration.

The reported plan allocates approximately PKR 228.6 billion (USD 800 million) for shipbuilding and PKR 154.3 billion (USD 540 million) for related infrastructure under a "sea-to-steel" model integrating ship recycling with domestic steel production. The investment is reportedly contingent on the establishment of a 300,000-ton furnace oil plant at the port. Port Qasim is Pakistan's second-largest port and a critical node for industrial imports, including iron ore and coal.

Strategically, the project is tied to the government's effort to revive Pakistan Steel Mills, dormant since 2015, and to reduce reliance on imported steel inputs by utilizing recycled scrap. It also aligns with broader plans under Pakistan's long-term maritime development framework, which envisions expanded shipbuilding capacity and upgraded port infrastructure.

The proposal emerges amid a decline in foreign direct investment, which fell 43 percent to PKR 230.9 billion (USD 808 million) in July–December FY26, and a 7

percent contraction in exports to PKR 5.2 trillion (USD 18.2 billion) during July–January FY26. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government advances Thar coal-to-urea project worth USD 1.12 billion

(lm) Pakistan has moved forward with a coal-to-fertilizer project in Tharparkar district, Sindh province, valued at approximately PKR 320 billion (USD 1.12 billion). The project is designed to convert domestic lignite coal into urea in order to reduce reliance on imported fertilizer and natural gas–based production.

Tharparkar, located in southern Sindh, contains one of the world's largest lignite coal deposits. The reserves have been central to Pakistan's coal-based power generation expansion over the past decade. The new initiative extends coal utilization beyond electricity into fertilizer manufacturing.

Under the Coal-to-Fertilizer plan, coal will be gasified to produce synthesis gas. Hydrogen extracted from this gas will be used to produce ammonia, which is then combined with carbon dioxide to manufacture urea. Pakistan traditionally uses natural gas as feedstock for urea production; declining domestic gas reserves and rising liquefied natural gas imports have increased production costs and foreign exchange pressure.

The plant is designed to produce approximately 717,000 metric tons of urea annually. About half is intended for domestic use and the remainder for export. Projected annual export revenues are estimated at up to PKR 74 billion (USD 260 million). [Arab News]

Pakistan: New oil and gas discovery reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

(lm) Pakistan has announced a new oil and gas discovery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen domestic energy production and reduce reliance on imported fuels.

According to state-owned exploration authorities, testing at the Baragzai X-01 exploratory well yielded 225 barrels of oil per day and 1.01 million standard cubic feet of gas per day. The discovery was made within a licensed exploration block in the province. The Oil and Gas Development Company holds a 65 percent working interest in the block, alongside Pakistan

Petroleum Limited (30 percent) and Government Holdings Private Limited (5 percent).

Pakistan continues to face structural energy shortfalls due to rising demand and limited domestic supply. Between July 2025 and January 2026, petroleum, oil and lubricants imports totaled USD 9.046 billion. While the newly reported volumes are modest, authorities indicate that cumulative discoveries could incrementally reduce import dependence and support energy security. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government preserves old net-metering rates for 5,165 pending rooftop solar applications

(lm) Pakistan's power ministry has directed all electricity distribution companies, including K-Electric (the privatized utility serving Karachi), to process rooftop solar net-metering applications submitted on or before February 8 under the previous tariff regime. The decision partially reverses a recent regulatory shift that reduced buyback rates for surplus solar electricity under a new net-billing framework.

The order covers 5,165 pending applications, representing approximately 250.822 megawatts of additional capacity. Applicants meeting the cutoff date will retain the earlier arrangement under which exported electricity was credited at the same tariff consumers paid for grid power. New applications filed after February 8 will be subject to the revised system, which separates purchase and sale prices and pays a lower, market-linked rate for exported electricity.

Net-metering was introduced in 2015 to address chronic power shortages and incentivize distributed renewable generation. Rapid rooftop solar uptake in recent years—driven by rising tariffs and grid instability—has reduced utility revenues, exacerbating Pakistan's "circular debt" problem, a structural accumulation of unpaid obligations across the power supply chain. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Security escalation in Balochistan intersects with strategic mining push and investment expansion

(lm) Pakistan's security situation in Balochistan province remains volatile as weekend kidnappings of laborers coincide with intensified counterinsurgency

operations and increased state investment in the strategically important Reko Diq copper–gold project.

On the night of February 21, unidentified gunmen abducted nine laborers from two construction sites in Khuzdar and Barkhan districts. Six workers were seized from a water channel project in the mountainous Mola area of Khuzdar, while three were taken from a camp near the Dola river outside Barkhan city. Security forces have launched search operations. No group has claimed responsibility, but suspicion centers on the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist militant organization that has repeatedly targeted laborers, infrastructure projects, and security personnel in the province. [Arab News 1]

The abductions follow coordinated militant attacks on January 30–31 across multiple districts in Balochistan that killed 36 civilians and 22 security personnel. Authorities attributed those assaults to separatist groups, including the BLA. In subsequent operations, security forces report killing 216 militants, including 14 in two recent engagements, indicating a sustained counterinsurgency campaign. [Arab News 2]

At the same time, Pakistan has increased its equity exposure in the Reko Diq copper–gold project, one of the world's largest undeveloped copper and gold deposits, after state-owned Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) injected an additional PKR 14.0 billion (USD 50.2 million) into Pakistan Minerals Private Limited (PMPL). PMPL is the special purpose vehicle managing the federal government's 25 percent stake. PPL's cumulative investment in the vehicle has now reached PKR 68.1 billion (USD 243.6 million).

The project is operated by Barrick Mining Corporation, a Canadian mining company holding a 50 percent share. The remaining ownership is split between Pakistani federal state-owned enterprises (25 percent) and the Government of Balochistan (25 percent). The mine is central to Islamabad's strategy to expand mineral exports, generate foreign exchange earnings, and attract long-term foreign direct investment. Initial production is targeted for 2028.

The Canadian operator recently ordered a comprehensive review of the project's security arrangements, development timetable, and capital budget following the January 30–31 attacks. The chief minister of Balochistan has publicly reassured foreign investors that the state has the capacity to secure strategic projects and is restructuring protection arrangements, including raising dedicated security forces in mineral zones. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

Pakistan balances Muslim bloc alignment and U.S. engagement amid renewed Israel tensions

(lm) On February 22, Pakistan joined 13 Muslim-majority states in issuing a joint statement condemning remarks by the United States ambassador to Israel suggesting that Israel could claim land across parts of the Middle East on biblical grounds. The signatories — including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Turkiye, Indonesia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, alongside the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council — described the comments as inflammatory and inconsistent with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The statement reaffirmed rejection of Israeli sovereignty over the Occupied Palestinian Territory and opposition to annexation of the West Bank or expansion of settlements. [Arab News 1]

The February 22 declaration follows earlier diplomatic steps by Islamabad. In preceding days, Pakistan joined Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Indonesia, Egypt and Turkiye in condemning Israel's decision to initiate land registration and designate additional areas in the occupied West Bank as "state land." The measures focus largely on Area C, which constitutes approximately 60 percent of the West Bank and remains under Israeli administrative and security control under the Oslo framework. Pakistan characterized the move as facilitating settlement expansion and undermining the viability of a two-state solution. At the United Nations Security Council, Islamabad reiterated support for a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

At the same time, Pakistan continues to reject diplomatic recognition of Israel, maintaining that normalization is contingent upon the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. This position remains consistent across civilian and military leadership and aligns with long-standing domestic political consensus.

At the same time, Islamabad is participating in the US-backed "Board of Peace," a UN-endorsed diplomatic framework established after the October 2025 Gaza ceasefire to oversee stabilization and reconstruction. [Arab News 5]

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif attended the inaugural Board of Peace meeting in Washington and called for

strict adherence to the ceasefire and a reconstruction process aligned with Palestinian self-determination. Pakistan has signaled willingness to contribute troops to a proposed International Stabilization Force in Gaza but has set explicit conditions: participation would be limited to a peacekeeping mandate and would exclude any role in disarming Hamas. Officials have stated that no deployment decision will be taken until the force's legal authority, chain of command and operational mandate are clarified. [Arab News 6] [Arab News 7]

Islamabad frames its engagement as a diplomatic balancing effort: coordinating with a bloc of Muslim-majority states while maintaining strategic dialogue with Washington, without altering its longstanding non-recognition policy toward Israel.

Turkmenistan signals push to diversify gas exports toward South Asia and Europe

(lm) Turkmenistan is seeking to diversify export routes for its vast natural gas reserves, according to former President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, who remains influential as the country's "National Leader."

Turkmenistan holds the world's fourth-largest gas reserves, but export capacity remains constrained by limited pipeline infrastructure. Currently, the majority of its gas exports are directed to China.

Berdymukhamedov stated that international companies are welcome to participate in the long-delayed TAPI pipeline project, which is designed to transport Turkmen gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Turkmen authorities say the first segment of the pipeline, extending to Herat in western Afghanistan, is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. No detailed timeline has been announced for extending the route further south.

The TAPI project faces significant geopolitical and security challenges, including tensions and periodic violence among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

In parallel, Turkmenistan continues to support the proposed Trans-Caspian Pipeline, which would link its gas fields to European markets via the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. However, progress depends on resolving outstanding issues with Azerbaijan regarding maritime boundary delimitation in the Caspian Sea.

The remarks were made during a visit to the United States, which has recently intensified diplomatic

engagement with Central Asian states, a region traditionally influenced by Russia and China. [Arab News]

Indonesia assumes presidency of UN Human Rights Council, to chair 61st session in Geneva

(jn) Indonesia will chair a regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) for the first time during its 61st session in Geneva, following its assumption of the Council's presidency on January 8, 2026. The presidency is currently held by Indonesia's Permanent Representative in Geneva, Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, who will oversee the Council's proceedings and internal processes throughout the year.

Foreign Ministry official Indah Nuria Savitri described the session as a significant moment for Indonesia, marking its first leadership of a regular Council meeting as president. The 61st session, part of the Council's biannual regular meetings, includes a high-level segment attended by ministerial-level representatives and senior officials.

Discussions are expected to address current global human rights concerns amid evolving international dynamics. Indonesian officials stated that negotiations will reflect pressing issues related to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

Jakarta has emphasized the importance of maintaining the Council's credibility and effectiveness as the UN's principal human rights forum. The government also views its presidency as an opportunity to strengthen multilateral engagement and promote a more inclusive and dialogue-based approach to global human rights governance. [Tempo]

National Unity Consultative Council urges ASEAN to uphold non-recognition of Myanmar elections

(su) The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) issued a statement on February 19 in response to the February 18 meeting between Myanmar's Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Than Swe and Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow in Phuket (see artice in this edition), welcoming humanitarian engagement but urging ASEAN to maintain its non-

recognition policy toward the recent election outcomes and related institutions.

As a frontline neighbor, Thailand faces humanitarian and security consequences of Myanmar's crisis, the NUCC noted, adding that initiatives aimed at easing suffering and engaging ethnic communities are important. However, the NUCC stressed that the electoral process conducted between December 2025 and January 2026 was neither free nor inclusive and said ASEAN had already taken a principled position of not recognizing the results.

It called on ASEAN to extend this stance to all institutions arising from the process, including the Hluttaws — Myanmar's legislatures (parliaments) at different levels of government — and Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)-affiliated parliamentarians.

The NUCC emphasized that regional engagement with Myanmar should remain strictly humanitarian and security-focused, arguing that political legitimacy must be reserved for inclusive dialogue involving all stakeholders. [Mizzima]

The NUCC is a broad-based political coordination platform of Myanmar's anti-junta movement, formed after the February 2021 military coup. It brings together the National Unity Government (NUG), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH, an opposition parliamentary body formed by elected lawmakers after the February 2021 military coup), ethnic armed organizations, political parties, civil society groups, and representatives of protest movements.

Vietnam holds talks with UAE, Egypt and Türkiye on trade, technology and investment cooperation

(ms) Vietnam's Foreign Minister Le Hoai Trung held a series of bilateral meetings with the foreign ministers of the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Türkiye on February 19–20 during a visit to Washington, where he accompanied a high-level delegation led by Communist Party General Secretary Tô Lâm.

In talks with UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Trung highlighted progress under the Vietnam–UAE Comprehensive Partnership, drawing attention to a hyperscale data center project in Ho Chi Minh City valued at more than USD 1 billion. The facility is being

developed by UAE-based technology firm G42 in partnership with a Vietnamese investment consortium. The UAE side also signaled interest in expanding the recruitment of Vietnamese workers across multiple sectors. Both parties agreed to deepen cooperation in trade, tourism, and science and technology, while coordinating on Gaza reconstruction initiatives.

During discussions with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, the two sides emphasized strengthening the bilateral Comprehensive Partnership and set a goal of doubling trade volumes. Priority areas for expanded cooperation include defense, agriculture, information technology, artificial intelligence, and semiconductors. The ministers also expressed support for accelerating studies toward a potential bilateral free trade agreement.

Trung's meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan focused on enhancing economic and strategic ties. Türkiye described Vietnam as its second-largest trading partner in ASEAN. Both sides discussed increasing high-level exchanges and exploring the launch of bilateral FTA negotiations, alongside cooperation in defense, aviation, and maritime connectivity. [Anadolu Ajansi] [Vietnam Net]

Vietnam becomes an International Energy Agency (IEA) association country

(ln) After the IEA's Ministerial Meeting on February 18-19, Vietnam confirmed its status as an association country within the agency. Vietnam's ambassador to France, Trịnh Đức Hải, reiterates Vietnam's consistent efforts in its energy transition journey and its contributions to global climate action.

The ambassador states that becoming an IEA association country demonstrates that the country is entering a new stage of development, remaining committed to its goals of carbon neutrality and green energy transition. Becoming an association country in the IEA permits Vietnam to have access to more resources and international experience within the global energy integration.

IEA Executive Director, Dr Fatih Birol, expressed that the agency's members are enjoying greater cooperation with Vietnam and emphasized Vietnam, a country with great potential in solar power, hydropower and nuclear energy, would be an important association country in the IEA. (Vietnamnews)

China signals readiness to advance Teesta river project under new Bangladeshi government

(lm) Against the backdrop of Bangladesh's recent parliamentary election and the swearing-in of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen signaled renewed momentum on the long-pending Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project during a meeting with Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman. He expressed hope that work on the project would begin soon.

The Teesta River is a major transboundary river that originates in India and flows into northern Bangladesh, where it is critical for irrigation and dry-season water management. The proposed project includes river dredging, embankments, land reclamation, and flood-control measures. China has previously indicated readiness to finance and implement the initiative. The project has geopolitical sensitivity because India has not finalized a bilateral Teesta water-sharing agreement with Bangladesh and has been cautious regarding Chinese involvement in the basin.

Ambassador Yao described Bangladesh's recent election as smooth and orderly and characterized it as a victory for democracy. Chinese Premier Li Qiang also sent a congratulatory message to Prime Minister Rahman, reaffirming support for the new government and emphasizing continued Belt and Road cooperation under the existing Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership. [Dhaka Tribune]

Cambodia, Japan deepen environmental partnership with focus on waste reform and green growth

(dql) Cambodia and Japan have expanded environmental cooperation following a three-day visit to Tokyo by Environment Minister Eang Sophalleth, resulting in a new agreement on green growth and climate action.

The memorandum signed with Japan's environment minister outlines cooperation in six areas, including carbon credit mechanisms, climate adaptation, waste management, biodegradable products and national park management.

A central outcome is Cambodia's plan to modernize waste treatment through Japanese low-emission incineration technology, with four units initially ordered and potential nationwide rollout. The initiative supports Cambodia's targets of cutting emissions by 55 percent by 2035 and reaching carbon neutrality by 2050.

The visit also advanced collaboration on environmental governance, eco-tourism and plastic pollution, with both sides agreeing to form a joint working group to oversee implementation.

The move strengthens institutional ties and positions Japan as a key partner in Cambodia's low-carbon transition. [Khmer Times]

Separately, Japan has pledged USD 1 million to support the reintegration of Cambodian migrant workers returning from Thailand following border tensions, with funds channeled through the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The two-year project will focus on vocational training, skills upgrading and job-matching services for returnees, particularly in Preah Vihear, Oddar Meanchey and Pursat provinces. Facilities will be built or upgraded to provide employment support, with outreach targeting labour-intensive sectors such as garments, construction and manufacturing. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia, Türkiye pledge to expand bilateral cooperation

(dql) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan have reaffirmed their intention to deepen bilateral relations and broaden cooperation during a meeting in Washington, D.C., held on the sidelines of the inaugural Board of Peace gathering.

The two sides explored opportunities to intensify cooperation in trade, investment, security and defence, and education, while exchanging views on regional and global developments, including within the ASEAN framework. [Khmer Times 1]

In addition, Cambodia and Türkiye are seeking to deepen cooperation in water management and climate resilience following talks between Water Resources and Meteorology Minister Thor Chetha and Turkish Ambassador Ülkü Kocaefe.

The minister encouraged Türkiye to step up technical engagement, particularly through technology transfer, expertise in transboundary water governance, and digital integration of irrigation systems. He also called for expanded training programs to strengthen the skills of Cambodian technical officials. [Khmer Times 2]

Brazil, Cambodia deepen health cooperation

(dql) Cambodia and Brazil are stepping up cooperation in the health sector, with a focus on technical exchange and workforce development.

Health Minister Chheang Ra met Brazilian Ambassador Vivian Loss Sanmartin in Phnom Penh to chart closer collaboration, particularly in support of Cambodia's push toward universal health coverage. The talks centered on sharing policy experience and technical know-how, especially in communicable disease research and health system management—areas critical to strengthening the country's healthcare capacity.

Both sides also explored prospects for longer-term cooperation in pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, signaling interest in a more structured partnership. [Khmer Times]

China expands export controls on Japanese firms as bilateral tensions deepen

(ms) China has added 20 Japanese companies to its export control list and placed another 20 on a dual-use goods watchlist, a move that underscores the continuing deterioration in China-Japan relations.

Beijing's Ministry of Commerce announced the measures on February 24, stating that Chinese exporters are now barred from shipping goods with potential military applications to the blacklisted firms. The restrictions also prohibit foreign companies from re-exporting China-origin dual-use products to those entities. Companies named include subsidiaries of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Kawasaki Heavy Industries, and IHI Corporation. [Bloomberg] [South China Morning Post]

The decision marks a clear escalation in economic statecraft between the two regional powers, coming

after China earlier expanded controls on dual-use exports to Japan as a whole — measures Tokyo called “absolutely unacceptable” — following remarks by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi about defense and Taiwan. China has defended the controls as lawful and tied to national security concerns, saying they target only items that could enhance Japan’s military capabilities.

The export curbs are part of a broader China–Japan diplomatic crisis triggered when Takaichi described a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan as an “existential crisis” for Japan, implying Tokyo could invoke collective self-defense under its national security law. Beijing responded with protests, cancelled cultural exchanges, trade restrictions, and the January dual-use export ban aimed at Japan, intensifying strains in bilateral relations.

Relations had already been fraught in recent years over island disputes, historical grievances, and competition in advanced industries, but tensions escalated sharply after Takaichi’s post-election rhetoric in late 2025. In her first parliamentary policy speech, she warned of China’s “coercion” in regional waters and pledged a major defense strategy overhaul, loosening Japan’s military export curbs and strengthening supply chains to counter Beijing’s influence.

SAIC’s India venture JSW MG to invest up to USD 440 million in EV expansion

(mis) JSW MG Motor India, the Indian joint venture of China’s SAIC Motor Corp., plans to invest between INR 30 billion and 40 billion rupees (up to about USD 440 million) over the next few years to expand its focus on and production capacity of hybrid and electric vehicles. The expansion will raise annual output at its Halol plant in Gujarat to 300,000 units from roughly 110,000 to 120,000 currently, with upgrades to paint and body shops and support for a new model pipeline starting between 2026 and 2027.

The investment marks one of the most significant capital moves since India’s JSW Group acquired a majority stake in 2024, after New Delhi tightened scrutiny of Chinese investments in 2020. Although sales rose to 70,500 units in 2025 and the company’s EV market share climbed to around 30 percent, the venture remains loss-making, with losses doubling to USD 121 million in the financial year which ended in March 2025. The initial phase of expansion will be funded through internal accruals, with debt and equity

options under consideration as spending ramps up. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Beijing rejects US accusations of alleged Chinese nuclear tests

(mis) The United States has released new details to support its claim that China conducted a covert underground nuclear test on June 22, 2020. Christopher Yeaw, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, said seismic data from a monitoring station in Kazakhstan detected an event of roughly magnitude 2.75 near China's Lop Nur test site in Xinjiang. According to Yeaw, the signal was consistent with a single explosion and not with mining activity or a natural earthquake, arguing it matched what would be expected from a nuclear explosive test.

However, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), which operates a global monitoring network, said its station recorded "two very small seismic events" 12 seconds apart but that the data were insufficient to determine the cause with confidence. The organization noted that the signals were well below the threshold typically associated with detectable nuclear test explosions.

Beijing rejected the allegations as "entirely unfounded," accusing Washington of political manipulation and of seeking justification to resume US nuclear testing. China has signed but not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and maintains that it adheres to a nuclear testing moratorium. Yeaw suggested China may have attempted to conceal the event through "decoupling," a method of detonating devices in large underground cavities to dampen seismic shockwaves and evade detection.

Russia also dismissed the claims. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said neither Russia nor China had conducted secret nuclear tests and pointed to China's categorical denial of the US accusations. [Reuters 1]

The dispute unfolds against a fragile arms control backdrop. The last US-Russia strategic nuclear arms limitation treaty, New START, expired on February 5, heightening concerns about a renewed arms race. President Donald Trump has pushed for a new agreement that would include China, which has so far declined to participate, arguing its nuclear arsenal remains far smaller than those of Washington and Moscow. In regard to this, US officials estimate that China currently possesses more than 600 operational

warheads and is expanding its stockpile, a trend that analysts say has intensified scrutiny of activity at sites such as Lop Nur. [Reuters 2] [The Telegraph] [Washington Post]

China publishes satellite images of US military build-up around Iran

(mis) Chinese military channels and a commercial satellite firm have released high-resolution imagery showing a significant US military build-up around Iran, as reports suggest Washington could be preparing a limited strike against Tehran in the coming days. The unusual publication of such detailed images highlights both China's expanding space-based surveillance capabilities as well as the geopolitical sensitivity of the moment.

Images shared by Chinese company MizarVision show US deployments at bases in Qatar, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, including F-35 stealth fighters and EA-18G electronic warfare aircraft at Jordan's Muwaffaq Salti Air Base. Additional satellite imagery indicates the presence of C-130 and C-17 transport aircrafts, KC-135 refueling tankers and E-3C airborne early warning planes across regional bases, with some assets transiting through Germany.

Moreover, the imagery release comes amid heightened tensions following US President Donald Trump's warning that "bad things" would happen if Tehran failed to reach a deal on its nuclear program, coupled with a 10- to 15-day deadline for progress, which was set on February 19. Iran has threatened retaliation and temporarily closed the Strait of Hormuz for military drills earlier this week.

In broader terms, Beijing has demonstrated a growing reach in the Middle East, with AI-enabled satellite networks capable of tracking US military movements far beyond East Asia. The public disclosure of satellite imagery marks a notable shift in information signaling, as it underscores China's capacity to monitor US deployments in real time. This positions Beijing as both a technological observer and a diplomatic stakeholder. [South China Morning Post] [Modern Diplomacy]

Brief aerial standoff between Chinese and US fighter jets over the Yellow Sea alerted the Spring Festival

(may) Over a dozen F-16 fighter jets from the US Forces Korea (USFK) reportedly flew over the Yellow Sea as part of a rare military exercise near China's air defense identification zone (ADIZ). Chinese military experts questioned how "rare" the exercise truly was and commended the timely response of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which monitored the entire operation despite the ongoing New Year festivities across the country. [South China Morning Post]

A brief aerial standoff between US fighter jets and their Chinese counterparts occurred over the western waters of the Korean Peninsula, in the Yellow Sea, where both China and South Korea have established ADIZs. [Global Times]

Europe tightens technology and security restrictions against China

(ms) European governments have introduced new restrictions affecting Chinese participation in sensitive technology and security domains, reflecting growing concerns over data protection, research security and potential strategic vulnerabilities.

The European Union has moved to exclude most China-based organizations from Horizon Europe funding in what it defines as "critical areas," including artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, semiconductors and biotechnology. The EUR 93 billion (USD 110 billion) research program, one of the world's largest multinational science and innovation initiatives, now applies stricter eligibility rules citing risks linked to dual-use technologies and research security.

Under the revised framework, institutions outside China seeking funding in these fields must also demonstrate that cooperating partners are not owned or controlled by Chinese entities. The measures form part of the EU's broader policy shift emphasizing technological sovereignty and tighter safeguards around advanced research with potential military or strategic applications.

Separately, Poland has imposed security restrictions targeting Chinese-manufactured vehicles at military facilities. The Polish Army said the decision was driven by concerns that onboard sensors and connected systems could collect sensitive data. Chinese-made vehicles may only enter secured military sites if specified functions are disabled and additional safeguards are implemented.

Poland has also banned personnel from connecting official mobile devices to infotainment systems in vehicles produced in China, while clarifying that the rules do not apply to publicly accessible military-related locations such as hospitals or administrative offices.

Officials described the actions as precautionary and consistent with practices adopted by NATO members and allied states. Analysts view the developments as part of a wider European trend toward risk-reduction policies involving critical technologies, digital infrastructure and data security. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Nexperia secures USD 60 million Dutch state loan

(mis) Dutch state-backed lender Invest International will provide semiconductor manufacturer Nexperia with a USD 60 million loan to support global investments in its production facilities, the company announced on February 16. The financing is intended to expand output, modernize manufacturing lines and improve operational efficiency across its site.

The funding comes at a sensitive moment for the Netherlands-based chipmaker, which is owned by China's Wingtech. Nexperia became the focus of a high-profile corporate standoff in October last year after a Dutch state intervention installed a European management team, triggering tensions between Europe and China and disrupting supplies of basic semiconductors used in the automotive sector (see AiR No. 41, October/2025, 2).

According to Dutch newspaper FD, additional financing talks are also underway. A company spokesperson said Nexperia was not in financial distress but welcomed external funding to preserve internal reserves for other ongoing activities. The loan therefore appears less as an emergency measure and more as a liquidity buffer at a time of operational and political uncertainty. The announcement follows a Dutch court decision last week ordering an investigation into alleged mismanagement at Nexperia, while allowing the current European management team to remain in place.

As chips remain critical to sectors from automotive manufacturing to industrial electronics, governments are increasingly intervening to safeguard production capacity. In Nexperia's case, the USD 60 million facility signals continued Dutch support for maintaining

domestic semiconductor output, even as ownership structures and governance remain under review. [Reuters] [Global Economics]

China supports Iran's air defense and surveillance

(ms) China has provided Iran with advanced radar and surveillance technology aimed at strengthening Tehran's ability to monitor stealth aircraft and secure sensitive networks, according to recent media reports citing security and defense analysts. The assistance is described as part of broader cooperation focused on electronic warfare resilience, air defense modernization, and digital infrastructure protection.

Among the systems referenced is the YLC-8B, a Chinese-developed ultra-high-frequency radar designed for long-range detection. Defense observers say radars operating in lower frequency bands are theoretically better suited for identifying low-observable aircraft characteristics, though performance details and operational deployment remain unconfirmed by Chinese or Iranian authorities. Open-source defense publications have previously identified the YLC-8B as a platform intended for early warning and wide-area surveillance roles.

The reports also suggest Beijing has encouraged Iran to reduce reliance on foreign software platforms and adopt domestically controlled or Chinese-supplied alternatives. This shift is framed as an effort to limit vulnerabilities associated with cyber intrusions and electronic intelligence gathering. References were made to China's BeiDou satellite navigation system as a potential complement or alternative to GPS-based services, reflecting a pattern seen in other Chinese technology partnerships.

Neither Beijing nor Tehran has publicly detailed the scope of any new agreements. China has consistently stated it does not provide military assistance that would directly alter active conflicts, while emphasizing economic and diplomatic ties with Iran. Analysts note that China maintains significant trade relations across the Middle East, as well as with the United States and Israel, shaping a cautious policy approach. [Modern Diplomacy] [The Cradle]

India relaxes curbs on Chinese equipment imports amid infrastructure bottlenecks

(dql) India is easing long-standing restrictions on imports of Chinese equipment for its power and coal sectors in response to mounting project delays and shortages of key components. The move marks the first major relaxation since curbs were imposed after a deadly border clash with China in 2020, measures that had effectively shut Chinese firms out of India's government contract market.

Under the new approach, state-run power utilities can procure certain Chinese power-transmission components without prior government approval, and similar, time-limited exemptions for coal-sector equipment are under consideration.

The relaxations were approved by a top bureaucratic panel to help address critical gaps, including a projected shortfall of up to 40 per cent in transformers and reactors over the next three years. Officials say India may continue to allow case-by-case imports to avoid wider infrastructure slowdowns. [Reuters]

The five-year-old curbs on Chinese equipment and bidders followed heightened India-China border tensions and broader efforts to protect domestic manufacturing and safeguard critical infrastructure procurement. The current relaxation reflects a pragmatic response to infrastructure bottlenecks as India strives to expand both fossil-fuel and renewable capacity, including adding 500 GW of non-fossil energy by 2030.

At the same time, officials and analysts suggest the calibrated easing aims to balance national security concerns with the practical need to prevent further delays and bridge supply shortages, without fully reopening procurement to Chinese bidders. [India's World]

India accelerates trade talks with Canada

(dql) India is intensifying efforts to expand its trade partnerships with Canada. In a virtual meeting, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Canada's International Trade Minister Maninder Sidhu reviewed progress on reviving negotiations for the long-delayed India–Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). [The Tribune]

The talks come ahead of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's planned visit to India this week, where he is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to broaden cooperation in trade, energy, technology, AI, talent mobility and defence. Carney trip to India is

part of his three-nation tour from February 26 to March 7, which also includes visit to Australia and Japan aimed at reducing reliance on the U.S. [The Times of India] [BBC]

Originally launched in 2010 but repeatedly stalled, CEPA discussions were formally relaunched in November following a meeting between Modi and Carney on the margins of the G20 Summit. The proposed agreement aims to double bilateral trade to USD 50 billion by 2030 and would span goods, services, investment, agriculture, and digital trade. [The Economic Times]

India-U.S. trade talks deferred

(dql) India and the United States have postponed planned trade negotiations originally scheduled for this week after the Supreme Court of the United States struck down a key tariff program used by the Donald Trump administration to impose broad duties on imports, generating fresh uncertainty over the shape of bilateral trade relations. The Indian commerce ministry said officials will delay the Washington visit to "study the implications" of the ruling and how subsequent U.S. tariff announcements affect existing and prospective agreements.

Earlier this month, New Delhi and Washington had reached a preliminary understanding under which the U.S. would reduce its punitive tariffs on Indian products to 18 percent from levels that had reached 50 percent, while India agreed to lower duties on a range of U.S. goods and to pursue expanded purchases of American products.

However, the Supreme Court decision that found the legal basis for the Trump-era tariffs excessive has upended that process, as the administration swiftly replaced the scrapped duties with a temporary uniform tariff of up to 15 percent under another statutory authority, complicating the framework around which the interim pact was being formalized.

The delay follows months of volatility for Indian exporters, who have faced sharply fluctuating U.S. tariff rates tied to broader trade tensions, including punitive levies linked to India's energy imports. Delhi has sought clarity on the implications for both its export competitiveness and the implementation timetable of the interim deal, which had been anticipated to take effect by April. Opposition politicians in India have criticized the government's

handling of the negotiations, given the evolving legal and policy landscape in Washington. [BBC] [Reuters]

US negotiates Venezuelan oil sale to India

(dql) The United States is actively negotiating with India on a potential sale of Venezuelan crude oil as part of efforts to diversify New Delhi's energy imports away from Russia. The discussions are taking place between Washington's Department of Energy and India's Ministry of Energy, with updates expected soon, U.S. Ambassador Sergio Gor said on the sidelines of an event in New Delhi.

Indian refiners, including state-owned and private firms, have already begun buying Venezuelan crude, though shipments remain modest compared with other sources. Separately, recent reports show India's Bharat Petroleum and HPCL Mittal Energy have purchased Venezuelan crude, reflecting New Delhi's broader strategy of diversifying sources beyond Russia. [Reuters] [Business World]

At the same, in January, Russian crude accounted for just over 21 percent of India's total oil imports — the smallest proportion in more than three years — with volumes falling by around a third compared with a year earlier. To make up the shortfall, Indian refiners boosted purchases from the Middle East, which together supplied roughly 55 percent of imports, and from other regions such as Latin America. Saudi Arabia in particular regained its position as one of India's top suppliers.

Analysts link the shift to market and geopolitical factors, including Western sanctions on Russia and pressures associated with ongoing trade talks with the United States. Chinese refiners have absorbed much of the diverted Russian crude, overtaking India as Russia's largest crude buyer. [The Times of India] [The Caspian Post] [Channel News Asia]

India has been a major purchaser of discounted Russian oil since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, drawing concern from the U.S. and its allies. Washington's push to offer Venezuelan crude is tied to an interim trade agreement that would slash U.S. tariffs on Indian imports—strengthening economic ties while reducing Russia's energy leverage (see AiR No. 6, February/2026, 2).

India–France defense partnership deepens in upgraded strategic partnership

(dql) India and France have significantly upgraded their defense and strategic relationship, underscoring New Delhi's effort to reduce reliance on foreign arms imports while positioning Paris as a key long-term security partner in the Indo-Pacific.

During bilateral talks on February 17, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron's renewed a 10-year defense cooperation pact and elevated bilateral ties to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership," unveiling more than 20 areas of collaboration spanning defense production, advanced technologies, trade, and taxation. The meeting was part of Macron's visit to India to attend the Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit 2026. [Prime Minister, India]

Defense remains the core pillar of the partnership, with agreements covering naval, air, and land systems, including India's acquisition of 26 French Rafale Marine fighter jets and deeper industrial cooperation under the "Make in India" framework. India will locally produce key munitions—such as HAMMER precision-guided weapons—through a joint venture between Bharat Electronics and major French aerospace, defense, and propulsion company Safran, strengthening supply-chain resilience and export potential. The leaders also inaugurated a Tata–Airbus helicopter assembly line in Karnataka, highlighting the growing role of India's private sector in defense manufacturing.

The two sides also agreed to expand collaboration on critical and emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, space, cybersecurity, and digital innovation, positioning the partnership as forward-looking rather than solely security-driven.

In parallel, Paris and New Delhi committed to strengthening cooperation on nuclear energy, including large reactors and small modular reactors, as well as on critical minerals essential for clean energy transitions and high-tech manufacturing.

On the diplomatic front, France reiterated its support for India's bid for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and backed a stronger Indian role in global decision-making, while both countries committed to closer coordination on international crises and Indo-Pacific stability. [South China Morning Post] [NDTV]

The upgraded partnership comes as India and France have long maintained a strong and enduring defense partnership, with France consistently emerging as one of New Delhi's top arms suppliers. Between 2020 and 2024, France accounted for about one-third of India's total arms imports, making it the second-largest source of Indian defense equipment after Russia and highlighting Paris's pivotal role in New Delhi's military modernization efforts. During this period, 28 percent of all French arms exports went to India, nearly double the share sent to all other European recipients combined. [Conflits]

Most recently, India's Defence Acquisition Council approved a major acquisition of 114 Rafale fighter jets from French manufacturer Dassault Aviation, in the latest move deepening ties in high-end military hardware and the ongoing shift of India's procurement Western partners (see AiR No. 6, February/2026, 2). [Blue News]

India moves toward Russia's Su-57 as preferred fifth-generation fighter amid China concerns

(dql) India is preparing to move ahead with plans to acquire a fifth-generation stealth fighter, with Russia's Sukhoi Su-57 emerging as the preferred interim option after the Rafale deal with France (see AiR No. 7, February/2026, 3). Defense ministry and Indian Air Force officials have reportedly discussed the urgency of inducting such aircraft amid China's expanding fleet of advanced jets, including the Chengdu J-20 and the J-35, and Beijing's pledge to support Pakistan with similar capabilities.

The Su-57 is being viewed as a stopgap solution until India's indigenous Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) becomes operational, a process expected to take around a decade. The US-made F-35 Lightning II is reportedly not under consideration due to concerns over operational restrictions, including limits on integrating Indian weapons systems. Officials have cited US oversight conditions attached to Pakistan's F-16 fleet as a cautionary example.

Russia has presented an offer and assessed production facilities at Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's Nashik unit, though formal negotiations have yet to begin. India had previously partnered with Moscow in 2007 on a joint fifth-generation fighter project but withdrew in 2018 over cost, workshare and capability concerns. [The Tribune]

India–UK trade pact poised to boost USD 32 billion in annual trade and deepen tech investment ties

(dql) India is moving to capitalize on its newly signed trade agreement with the United Kingdom to expand market access, stimulate investment flows, and anchor broader technology cooperation.

Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal met Richard Heald, chair of the UK-India Business Council, and Tavish Scott to discuss opportunities arising from the India–UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

The pact, signed in July 2025 during Modi's UK visit, is projected to increase annual bilateral trade by USD 32 billion through sweeping tariff reductions on products including textiles, whisky and automobiles. The UK is set to eliminate duties on nearly all tariff lines, giving Indian exporters broad market access.

During the AI Impact Summit in Delhi last week (see article in this edition), UK Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy described the trade agreement as a platform for deeper technology collaboration and said it could unlock USD 31 billion in bilateral investment flows. [The Economic Times]

India, Israel advance defense industry cooperation ahead of Modi visit

(dql) India and Israel have taken a further step to strengthen their defense partnership ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel later this month, signing a memorandum of understanding aimed at deepening industrial ties and sustaining structured cooperation between their defense sectors.

The agreement seeks to expand joint activities, including industry seminars, business-to-business engagement, and future collaborative initiatives.

The MoU followed a focused seminar and B2B meetings organized by Israel's International Defence Cooperation Directorate (SIBAT) together with the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers and India's Ministry of Defence, bringing together leading defense firms from both countries.

The initiative builds on momentum from a Joint Working Group meeting held in November, which established a framework for enhanced defense, industrial, and technological cooperation, including advanced technology sharing. [The Tribune]

India and Brazil agree to deepen economic and strategic ties

(dql) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva have pledged to raise bilateral trade to over USD 20 billion within five years, signalling a renewed push to deepen economic and strategic ties. The commitment was made during Lula's state visit to New Delhi, where he also attended an AI summit.

Talks focused on expanding cooperation in technology, innovation, digital public infrastructure, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and critical minerals. Both sides finalized 10 agreements spanning digital collaboration and resource development, reflecting efforts to diversify trade and strengthen supply chains. Bilateral trade stood at USD 12.54 billion in 2024.

Beyond commerce, the two leaders reiterated support for a more inclusive and multipolar global order and called for reform of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. As members of BRICS, the two countries framed their partnership as amplifying the voice of the Global South, underlining broader geopolitical coordination among emerging powers. [Anadolu Ajansı]

Mining pact signed

The two leaders also witnessed the signing of an agreement to deepen cooperation in mining and minerals, aiming to strengthen economic ties and support India's growing demand for raw materials, especially iron ore needed for steel production. Brazil is one of the world's top iron ore producers and holds significant mineral reserves, making it a key supplier for India's industrial expansion.

The cooperation will focus on attracting investment in exploration, mining and infrastructure related to the steel sector, with both leaders committing to push annual bilateral trade well beyond $20 billion over the next five years from current levels of about USD 15 billion. The partnership also aims to expand collaboration in areas like technology, innovation, digital infrastructure, and semiconductors.

The pact signals a strategic deepening of ties between two major emerging economies and BRICS members, enhancing India's access to critical raw materials amid global competition for resources. It also underscores broader efforts by both nations to diversify trade partnerships and reduce dependency on traditional suppliers, while strengthening South-South economic cooperation. [Reuters 1]

Brazil, India explore poultry tariff relief

Separately During a visit to India last week, a Brazilian trade delegation pressed for reduced import duties on Brazilian chicken products, proposing a zero-duty or special quota to enable larger exports to India's market. Currently, high Indian tariffs—100 percent on chicken cuts and 30 percent on whole chicken—have kept Brazilian poultry shipments negligible, despite Brazil being the world's top poultry exporter. In return, Brazil has offered expanded access for Indian agricultural products.

The talks come as bilateral trade already reached about USD 15 billion in 2025, with both sides aiming to push that toward USD 20 billion by 2030. For India, managing sensitive agricultural tariffs is political and economic balancing—opening up could help diversify supplies and strengthen food value chains, but also raises domestic industry concerns. For Brazil, securing tariff relief in a major Asian market would reduce dependence on existing destinations and support its agribusiness sector. [Reuters 2] [Firstpost]

US and Indonesia finalize reciprocal trade agreement with 19 percent tariff

(ms) The United States and Indonesia have finalized a reciprocal trade agreement establishing a 19 percent tariff rate on most Indonesian exports to the U.S., concluding months of negotiations between President Donald Trump and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto. The deal is designed to reduce trade barriers, expand market access, and increase bilateral investment flows between the two countries.

Under the agreement, the threatened 32 percent U.S. tariff will be replaced by a 19 percent rate covering the majority of Indonesian goods. Elevated duties on several Indonesian exports — including palm oil, spices, and pharmaceuticals — will be removed. The framework also introduces a mechanism allowing certain Indonesian textile and apparel products to qualify for a 0 percent tariff rate, subject to volume

conditions tied to the use of U.S.-sourced raw materials such as cotton and manufactured fibers.

In exchange, Indonesia committed to eliminating tariffs on more than 99 percent of U.S. goods entering its market and removing a range of non-tariff barriers. The measures will apply across sectors including agriculture, health products, chemicals, information and communication technology, automotive goods, and seafood. Indonesia also agreed to abolish tariffs and fees affecting digital services and support a permanent moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions under World Trade Organization principles.

The agreement is accompanied by substantial trade and investment commitments. Indonesian entities are expected to purchase approximately USD 15 billion in U.S. energy commodities, including liquefied petroleum gas, crude oil, and refined fuels. Additional procurement plans include roughly USD 13.5 billion in commercial aircraft and related aviation services, a development likely to benefit U.S. aerospace manufacturers. Indonesia also signaled imports exceeding USD 4.5 billion in American agricultural products such as soybeans, wheat, beef, rice, corn, and cotton.

Beyond goods trade, Jakarta stated it would endeavor to facilitate outbound direct investment valued at around USD 10 billion into the United States. These investments are expected to target engineering, construction, and energy-related projects, including initiatives linked to blue ammonia development.

Critical minerals form another component of the arrangement. Indonesia indicated it would allow U.S. companies to participate in mineral extraction under terms comparable to those granted to domestic investors. U.S. authorities, in turn, said they would consider providing financial support through federal export and development finance institutions. The provisions reflect broader U.S. efforts to diversify supply chains for materials essential to electric vehicle production, defense technologies, and advanced manufacturing.

Annual trade between the United States and Indonesia exceeds USD 40 billion. Indonesia has maintained a trade surplus with the U.S. estimated at roughly USD 16 billion, a gap the new purchasing commitments aim to narrow.

The agreement was formalized during President Prabowo’s visit to Washington, coinciding with multilateral meetings connected to the Board of Peace

initiative. Further implementation details, including sector-specific tariff quotas and compliance mechanisms, are expected to be clarified by trade authorities in the coming months. [Antara 1] [Antara 2] [Bloomberg] [The Diplomat]

Indonesia requests list of Iranian inmates for possible repatriation

(jn) Indonesia has asked Iran to submit a list of its citizens currently imprisoned in the country for potential repatriation, following a meeting in Jakarta between Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture Yusril Ihza Mahendra and Iranian officials.

Yusril said Jakarta is open to discussing transfers that would allow Iranian nationals to serve their sentences at home, adding that each case would be reviewed individually. According to Indonesian authorities, 54 Iranian citizens are facing legal proceedings or serving sentences in Indonesia, including 12 on death row and others serving life terms. He noted that while death sentences remain in place, the current government does not carry out executions and is open to repatriation arrangements.

The talks also addressed broader legal cooperation, including extradition and mutual legal assistance, as well as coordination in international human rights forums. Yusril stated that Indonesia will exercise its role as president of the UN Human Rights Council independently and without external pressure.

Iran's Deputy Chief Justice Nasser Seraj welcomed continued legal dialogue and proposed expanding cooperation, including in civil law and academic exchanges. Both sides agreed to maintain bilateral engagement while respecting the sovereignty of each country's legal system. [Voice of Indonesia]

Japan urges US to uphold trade deal amid renewed tariff push

(dql) Japan's trade minister Ryosei Akazawa has urged Washington not to disadvantage Japan under U.S. President Donald Trump's newly announced 10 percent blanket tariff, as Tokyo moves to safeguard the terms of last year's bilateral trade accord.

In a call with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Akazawa reaffirmed Japan's commitment to a USD 550

billion investment package in the United States in exchange for reduced U.S. duties on Japanese exports. The two sides agreed to accelerate implementation of an initial tranche of projects and to coordinate closely on execution details (see below).

The July agreement had set U.S. “reciprocal” tariffs on Japanese goods — including automobiles — at 15 percent in return for Japan’s large-scale investment pledge.

However, trade policy uncertainty has resurfaced after the Supreme Court of the United States invalidated Trump’s earlier tariffs on most trading partners and fentanyl-linked duties on China, Canada and Mexico. Trump has since unveiled a new across-the-board 10 percent tariff under a different legal basis, while signaling a possible increase to 15 percent and additional levies. [Kyodo News] [Reuters]

US–Japan first major trade deal investment tranche targets energy and critical minerals amid China tensions

(lr/dql) Japan has outlined around USD 36 billion in initial investments in U.S. oil, gas and critical-minerals projects, marking the first tranche of a much larger USD 550 billion investment pledge under a trade agreement with the United States.

The announcement was made by Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, and includes three flagship projects. In addition to a 9.2-gigawatt gas-fired power plant in Ohio, described by Washington as the largest of its kind, a deep-water crude oil export terminal off Texas and a synthetic industrial diamond manufacturing facility in the southeastern U.S. have been agreed upon. [NHK]

Most of the funding is set to flow to the Ohio plant. The diamond project, valued at roughly USD 600 million, is intended to secure domestic U.S. supply of a material vital for advanced manufacturing and semiconductors. U.S. officials stressed that Japanese capital would finance assets built on American soil, delivering returns to investors while expanding U.S. industrial and energy capacity. [The Guardian]

Project selection followed deliberations by a joint panel and an investment committee set up by Trump, with final decisions resting with the president. The mechanism is a cornerstone of the tariff deal, fixing most U.S. levies on Japanese goods at 15 percent and easing duties on cars, a key pillar of Japan’s economy.

Talks on implementation are expected to dominate the upcoming Trump–Takaichi meeting in March. [South China Morning Post]

U.S. commerce secretary Howard Lutnick and Japanese trade minister Ryosei Akazawa finalized details of the first tranche in Washington. Akazawa signalled Japan would prioritise low-risk, stable-return projects, with most funding provided through loans and guarantees rather than direct equity. Major Japanese institutions, including Japan Bank for International Cooperation and Nippon Export and Investment Insurance, are expected to play central financing roles. [Kyodo News]

The investment push is closely tied to supply-chain security and strategic rivalry with China, which dominates global critical-minerals processing and has used export restrictions as leverage in recent disputes. With tensions rising over Taiwan and Beijing reportedly curbing some rare-earth exports to Japan, Tokyo framed the projects as strengthening U.S.–Japan economic security without explicitly naming China.

US reaffirms full-spectrum deterrence commitment to Japan

(dql) The United States Department of State has reiterated Washington's pledge to defend Japan with the full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear forces, during the Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD) held on February 18 in Washington. [Department of State, USA]

The talks, co-chaired by U.S. officials and joined by representatives from Japan's foreign and defense ministries, as well as the U.S. Strategic Command and United States Indo-Pacific Command, focused on regional security challenges. Both sides raised concerns over China's rapid and opaque nuclear expansion and Russia's noncompliance with arms control commitments. They also addressed the advancing nuclear and missile programs of the North Korea, reaffirming their shared objective of its complete denuclearization.

Japan welcomed U.S. interest in pursuing a renewed nuclear arms limitation framework and stressed that any future agreement should include not only Russia but also China. The delegations underscored that U.S. nuclear posture and deployments, combined with Japan's increasing investment in conventional defense capabilities, are central to maintaining credible deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. [Militarnyi]

The meeting comes amid reports that Washington is urging NATO members to limit participation by Indo-Pacific partners — including Japan — at the alliance's July summit in Ankara. [POLITICO]

U.S. Marines reaffirm Japan base return plan

(dql) The U.S. Marine Corps confirmed that the planned return of the Futenma air base site in Okinawa Prefecture remains on schedule under existing Japan–U.S. agreements, pushing back against suggestions that the handover depends on securing a longer runway at the replacement facility.

Okinawa Prefecture is located in the far southwest of Japan, stretching across the Ryukyu island chain between the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea. Lying roughly midway between Japan's main islands and Taiwan, it is part of what is commonly referred to as the first island chain, giving it significant strategic importance.

Responding to a newspaper report, the Marines said they continue to implement the agreed "conditions" for the return, including arrangements for contingency use of civilian facilities for operations requiring longer runways. [The JapanTimes]

The replacement base, planned for the Henoko coastal area of Nago, will have two 1,800-meter runways — shorter than Futenma's roughly 2,700-meter runway. Concerns about possible capability gaps have persisted, with the Government Accountability Office — the independent audit and oversight body of the U.S. Congress — previously urging the U.S. Defense Department to address limitations linked to the shorter runways. It later emerged that Washington told the watchdog it would continue using Futenma unless a sufficiently long alternative runway is found.

Japan's Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi downplayed the issue, saying it was longstanding and that both governments see no obstacles to meeting the agreed conditions. Tokyo continues to argue that relocating the base within Okinawa is the only viable way to eliminate safety risks at Futenma while preserving the deterrence of the bilateral alliance. [Kyodo News]

The relocation plan dates back to efforts to defuse local anger after a 1995 crime involving U.S. servicemen and aims to move the base from densely populated Ginowan to a less populated coastal area. However, strong opposition persists in Okinawa, where

residents argue the prefecture already bears a disproportionate share of U.S. military facilities and want the base moved outside the region.

Malaysia to review new U.S. tariffs

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who also serves as finance minister, announced the government will await a comprehensive assessment from the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry before formulating a response to newly imposed U.S. tariffs on Malaysian exports.

The move follows a decision by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump to introduce a temporary 10 percent tariff on certain imports, subsequently raised to 15 percent after a Supreme Court ruling concerning the use of emergency trade powers.

Anwar noted that the trade ministry has submitted an initial briefing and that the matter will be deliberated at an upcoming Cabinet meeting. Authorities are currently evaluating the potential economic impact while engaging counterparts in Washington and consulting regional partners within ASEAN.

The United States remains Malaysia's third-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching approximately MYR 367 billion (USD 79 billion) in 2025. The ministry is also assessing possible implications for the recently signed Agreement on Reciprocal Trade, which has yet to enter into force. [Malay Mail]

Maldives signals closer ties after Bangladesh leadership change

(lm) Maldivian President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu met newly sworn-in Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in Dhaka and expressed confidence that bilateral relations will deepen under the new government.

Rahman, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and son of former President Ziaur Rahman and former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, was sworn in last week, becoming the first man to lead Bangladesh in 35 years. His BNP-led coalition secured a two-thirds majority in the 300-seat parliament, winning 208 seats.

President Muizzu traveled to Bangladesh at the invitation of interim leader Mohamed Yunus to attend

the swearing-in ceremony and held talks with the new prime minister afterward. [The Sun]

Indonesia, Mongolia discuss expanding bilateral cooperation

(fs) Ambassador of Mongolia to Indonesia Enkhtaivan Dashnyam met with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Arrmanatha Christiawan Nasir to discuss strengthening bilateral relations and advancing upcoming joint initiatives.

Dashnyam described Indonesia as a reliable partner and an important neighbor in Southeast Asia. The two sides reviewed preparations for meetings and activities to follow up on the official visit of Mongolia's Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh to Indonesia in May 2025 (see AiR No. 21, May/2025, 4).

Nasir highlighted the significant potential for expanding bilateral cooperation. He expressed Indonesia's continued support for advancing preparatory efforts and deepening practical cooperation between the two countries. [Montsame]

Mongolia signs agreement with French group to modernize air traffic management

(fs) Mongolia has signed a EUR 23 million (approximately USD 27.1 million) contract with French technology group Thales to comprehensively modernize its air traffic management system.

A delegation led by Transport Minister of Mongolia Delgersaikhan Borhuu concluded the agreement during an official visit to France. The project involves the installation of key systems and equipment to establish regional air traffic control centers in Ulaanbaatar and Sainshand, alongside measures to strengthen cybersecurity and enhance staff qualifications. Of the total funding, 85 percent will be financed through an export credit from Bpifrance, France's state-backed investment bank.

The financing agreement was signed with the participation of representatives from the Trade Development Bank, the National Civil Aviation Center, Bpifrance, and Thales. During the visit, Borhuu also met with Shems Shkiua, Director General of the French

Civil Aviation Authority, to discuss aviation safety, air navigation services, and expert exchanges.

He later held talks with Thales on cybersecurity and international standards, emphasizing the project's importance for improving Mongolia's civil aviation safety and long-term technological capacity. [Open.kg]

India and Nepal formalize mutual legal assistance framework after prolonged delay

(lm) Nepal and India have signed an updated Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, creating a formal legal basis for cooperation in cross-border criminal investigations. The pact covers evidence exchange, information sharing, coordinated investigations, and judicial cooperation in cases involving trafficking, terrorism, cybercrime, financial crimes, organized crime, and anti-money laundering.

The agreement replaces years of informal arrangements that followed the effective lapse of the 1953 extradition treaty. Although both sides signed legal cooperation instruments in 2005, a revised extradition treaty remains unresolved, with disagreements — particularly over third-country nationals — still blocking finalization.

The timing is significant. Nepal has been on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list since February 2025. The FATF grey list is a monitoring category for countries with strategic deficiencies in anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing frameworks that are under increased international scrutiny and required to implement corrective action plans. Enhanced cross-border legal cooperation directly supports Nepal's compliance commitments under this framework.

Nepal signed a similar legal assistance agreement with China in 2019, indicating a dual-track institutionalization of transnational enforcement cooperation with both neighbors. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal's foreign minister attends Bangladesh prime minister's swearing-in, discusses bilateral cooperation

(lm) Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma traveled to Dhaka to represent Nepal at the swearing-in ceremony of Bangladesh's newly elected Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which secured a decisive parliamentary majority in the February 12 elections.

During the visit, Sharma held talks with Rahman, delivering a congratulatory message from Prime Minister Karki expressing Nepal's readiness to deepen bilateral cooperation. The two sides discussed expanding collaboration in trade, investment, energy, connectivity, tourism, education, and broader people-to-people engagement.

The visit follows Sharma's earlier trip to Dhaka in December, when he attended the state funeral of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and met both Rahman and interim government chief adviser Muhammad Yunus. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

U.S. sentences Ukrainian national to five years for aiding North Korean IT identity fraud scheme

(dql) A Ukrainian national has been sentenced in the United States to five years in prison for running a scheme that helped North Korean IT workers covertly secure jobs with American companies using stolen identities. [Department of Justice, USA]

The 29-year-old man from Kyiv pleaded guilty in November 2025 to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. Prosecutors said he operated a domain which enabled foreign IT workers to purchase or lease the personal data of US citizens. Using these identities, the workers created profiles on online freelance platforms and successfully obtained contracts with firms in states including California and Pennsylvania.

Court filings indicate that Didenko also coordinated so-called "laptop farms" in Virginia, Tennessee, and California by paying US-based individuals to host computers that made it appear as though the remote workers were operating from within the United States. Authorities estimate that the workers generated several hundred thousand dollars from projects at around 40 US companies.

The domain was seized in May 2024, and Didenko was arrested in Poland before being extradited to the US at the end of that year. [Security Week]

Bangladesh and Pakistan institutionalize reset in bilateral relations following Dhaka's national polls

(lm) Pakistan and Bangladesh have moved to formalize a strategic reset in relations following the inauguration of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, signaling a recalibration of South Asian alignment dynamics.

Immediately after the new government in Dhaka took office, Pakistan initiated high-level outreach. Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal attended Rahman's oath-taking ceremony and conveyed a formal invitation for an official visit to Islamabad. Subsequently, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation with Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Dr Khalil-ur-Rahman, during which both sides committed to a "forward-looking partnership" and closer coordination in multilateral forums.

Substantively, both governments discussed expanding bilateral trade, reviving direct air connectivity, and strengthening government-to-government commercial mechanisms. Sea trade resumed in late 2024, and regular direct flights between the two countries restarted recently after a suspension dating back to 2012. Islamabad also announced 500 scholarships for Bangladeshi students and proposed a "Pakistan–Bangladesh Knowledge Corridor" aimed at structured cooperation in education, research, digital governance, and small and medium-sized industries. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2] [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

The rapprochement follows Bangladesh's 2024 political upheaval, which removed former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and triggered a recalibration of Dhaka's regional positioning, including strains in its relationship with India.

Pakistan's airspace ban on Indian aircraft extended until March 23

(lm) Pakistan has extended its prohibition on Indian-registered civil and military aircraft using Pakistani airspace until March 23. The measure marks the ninth extension of a restriction first imposed on April 23, 2025.

The ban followed heightened bilateral tensions after an attack in Indian-administered Kashmir that resulted

in 26 fatalities. India attributed the attack to Pakistan, which denied involvement. The incident was followed by cross-border missile, drone and artillery exchanges lasting four days before a United States-brokered ceasefire took effect on May 10, 2025.

The continued airspace closure has required Indian airlines to reroute international flights, particularly to Europe and North America. These detours have increased flight times, fuel consumption and operating costs. Reports indicate that at least one major Indian carrier has sought alternative routing options, including access to airspace over western China, to mitigate the impact. [Arab News]

Sri Lanka to ease visa restrictions for Pakistani nationals after high-level talks in Colombo

(lm) Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake assured Pakistan that Colombo will ease visa restrictions affecting Pakistani citizens following discussions with Pakistan's interior minister in Colombo. Beyond consular matters, the two sides discussed cooperation in counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and joint training between security forces, indicating that the visit had a security dimension in addition to political signaling.

The meeting also took place in the context of cricket diplomacy linked to the T20 World Cup, after earlier tensions over Pakistan's temporary decision to boycott a match against India. That decision, framed domestically as an act of solidarity with Bangladesh following tournament-related disputes, was later reversed after negotiations with the International Cricket Council. [Arab News]

Pakistan-U.S. deepen economic engagement

(lm) Pakistan has intensified high-level economic engagement with the United States through ministerial meetings, a planned bilateral trade forum, and a new joint framework to assess redevelopment of a major state-owned asset in New York.

In Washington, Pakistan's finance minister met the United States commerce secretary and invited participation from the Department of Commerce in a United States–Pakistan Trade and Investment Forum

scheduled for March 31. The forum is expected to include ministerial representation and private sector companies from both countries. Both sides reaffirmed their intention to expand cooperation in trade and investment in the coming months. [Arab News 1]

Separately, the prime minister met the United States secretary of state and the chief executive of the International Development Finance Corporation on the sidelines of the inaugural Gaza Board of Peace meeting. Discussions covered cooperation in energy, critical minerals and counterterrorism, as well as potential financing for projects in energy, mining, agriculture and information technology. Pakistan also invited United States officials and development finance representatives to participate in an upcoming minerals conference in Islamabad. [Arab News 2]

In parallel, Pakistan and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly evaluate redevelopment options for the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan, a century-old property owned by the Pakistani state through Pakistan International Airlines. The agreement, concluded between Pakistan's finance minister and the administrator of the United States General Services Administration, establishes a structured and time-bound framework to assess operational, technical and commercial models. The hotel has been closed since 2020 due to sustained financial losses and is considered one of Pakistan's most valuable overseas assets. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan–Afghanistan cross-border strikes test fragile October 2025 ceasefire

(lm) Over the past week, with developments continuing at the time of writing, Pakistan has experienced a marked escalation in militant violence in its northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, followed by cross-border airstrikes inside Afghanistan and concurrent diplomatic and migration measures. The developments unfold against the backdrop of a ceasefire announced last October after deadly border clashes, mediated by Qatar. While that ceasefire has formally held, subsequent talks — including discussions in Istanbul — did not produce a comprehensive settlement, and current events now place that fragile de-escalation framework under severe strain.

The sequence began on February 16, when a vehicle-borne suicide bomber attacked a joint security checkpost in Bajaur district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killing 11 Pakistani security personnel and

one child. Authorities attributed the attack to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, an armed group active since 2007 that conducts attacks against the Pakistani state. Security forces reported killing 12 militants in the ensuing exchange. A Pakistani security official later stated that the suicide bomber was an Afghan national allegedly linked to networks operating from Afghan territory. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Subsequent attacks were reported in Lakki Marwat and Bannu districts, also in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which borders Afghanistan. In Bannu, another vehicle-borne suicide bomber targeted a security convoy during an intelligence-based operation, killing a lieutenant colonel and a soldier; five militants were killed in the same engagement. Security forces separately reported killing four militants in Lakki Marwat. In an additional operation in Bannu, two militants were killed during a gun battle after accomplices attempted to free a detained commander. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4] [Arab News 5]

Islamabad initially responded diplomatically by summoning Afghanistan's deputy head of mission and issuing a formal demarche, accusing Afghanistan's Taliban-led authorities of failing to act against militant leadership allegedly operating from Afghan soil. Kabul denied providing safe havens and urged Pakistan not to externalize its security challenges. [Arab News 6]

Pakistan has repeatedly referred to the 2020 Doha Agreement between the Taliban and the United States, under which the Taliban committed that Afghan territory would not be used to threaten the security of other states. Islamabad maintains that cross-border attacks violate that commitment, while Kabul denies allowing Afghan territory to be used for operations against Pakistan.

On February 21–22, Pakistan escalated further, announcing intelligence-based airstrikes against seven militant camps in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, Paktika and Khost provinces. Islamabad said the targets included TTP and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) facilities and claimed more than 80 militants were killed. [Arab News 7] [Arab News 8] [Arab News 9]

Casualty figures differ. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported at least 13 civilian deaths and seven injuries in Nangarhar province. Afghan authorities cited higher figures, reporting at least 17 fatalities and additional missing persons, while other officials referred to "dozens" of casualties, including women and children. These figures have not been independently verified. Kabul

summoned Pakistan's ambassador and described the strikes as a violation of sovereignty and international law. [Arab News 10] [Reuters]

Islamabad defended the operation at the political level. Pakistan's Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Danyal Chaudhry stated that "national security is non-negotiable," describing the strikes as selective targeting of militant infrastructure and asserting that precautions were taken to avoid civilian harm. [Arab News 11]

In the wake of the cross-border strikes, militant activity inside Pakistan continued in parallel. In Dera Ismail Khan district, security forces killed four militants during an intelligence-based operation. In Karak district, militants used an explosive-laden quadcopter to strike a Federal Constabulary camp. Seven personnel were injured in the drone attack; three were subsequently killed when gunmen targeted a Rescue 1122 ambulance transporting the wounded. [Arab News 12]

In parallel with the security escalation, Pakistan has continued expanding its repatriation drive targeting undocumented Afghan nationals. Since the launch of the campaign in late 2023, official figures indicate that more than 2 million Afghans have been sent back across the border, including over 150,000 from Punjab province alone. Punjab currently operates 37 holding centers, with additional removals ongoing. Authorities state that individuals without valid visas must leave, while those holding legal documentation may remain. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has raised concerns about reported arrests and expulsions of legally registered individuals. [Arab News 13]

Pakistan and Iran reaffirm target to raise bilateral trade to USD 10 billion

(lm) Pakistan and Iran agreed in Islamabad to intensify cooperation in agriculture and food security as part of efforts to expand bilateral trade from its current level of roughly PKR 857.1 billion (USD 3 billion) to PKR 2.86 trillion (USD 10 billion), a target set under a memorandum of understanding signed in February 2025. The discussions took place during a visit by Iran's agriculture minister and involved Pakistan's ministers for national food security and commerce.

The talks emphasized improved cross-border connectivity, streamlined customs and regulatory procedures, and operational-level coordination to reduce transaction frictions. Agriculture was framed as

a strategic pillar of bilateral economic relations, with proposed cooperation covering horticulture, livestock, crop management, water conservation, plant protection, and quarantine systems. Technical exchange, joint research, and institutional dialogue mechanisms were also highlighted. [Arab News]

Saudi Arabia signals forthcoming strategic economic pact with Pakistan following defense agreement

(lm) Saudi Arabia is preparing to conclude a strategic economic pact with Pakistan, according to the Saudi ambassador in Islamabad, following the signing in September 2025 of a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) under which both states committed to treat aggression against one as an attack on both. The economic framework, discussed during Pakistan's prime minister's visit to Riyadh in October 2025, is expected to prioritize energy, industry, mining, information technology, tourism, agriculture, and food security.

The proposed pact builds on an earlier bilateral economic cooperation framework and 34 memorandums of understanding signed in 2024 valued at approximately PKR 800 billion (USD 2.8 billion). The two sides have also agreed in principle on an electricity interconnection project. If formalized, the economic plan would deepen Saudi Arabia's role as a strategic investor in Pakistan's energy and extractive sectors, areas central to Islamabad's external financing strategy.

The announcement was made alongside the launch of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center's Ramadan food assistance program in Pakistan, which aims to distribute 27,000 food baskets to 192,500 beneficiaries across 30 districts. [Arab News]

Pakistani Prime Minister visits Qatar to expand trade, investment and energy cooperation

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Doha on February 23 for a two-day official visit aimed at expanding bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, energy, infrastructure development and manpower export. He was scheduled to hold talks with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, focusing on

economic partnership, energy collaboration and regional stability.

The visit comes against the backdrop of deepening financial and investment ties. In 2022, the Qatar Investment Authority announced plans to invest USD 3 billion in Pakistan, targeting transport, civil aviation, education, health, culture, media, communications, information technology and labor sectors. For Pakistan, which continues to operate under fiscal and balance-of-payments constraints, renewed investment commitments from Gulf partners remain strategically important.

Energy cooperation is expected to remain central to discussions, given Qatar's role as a major liquefied natural gas supplier to Pakistan. Expanded collaboration in infrastructure and labor mobility is also under consideration. Qatar hosts approximately 300,000 Pakistani nationals, employed across health, education, engineering, finance, construction and public services.

Both sides are also expected to exchange views on regional security dynamics, including Afghanistan, where Qatar previously facilitated dialogue between Islamabad and Kabul following border tensions in 2025. [Arab News]

Pakistan and Algeria explore investment cooperation in energy, mining and digital sectors

(lm) Pakistan and Algeria have agreed to pursue closer investment cooperation in energy, mining, digital development and industrial sectors, with plans to formalize collaboration through a memorandum of understanding between Algeria's Investment Promotion Agency and Pakistan's Special Investment Facilitation Council.

The Special Investment Facilitation Council, established in 2023, is a hybrid civil–military coordination body designed to fast-track foreign investment decisions and streamline regulatory approvals in priority sectors, including energy, mining, agriculture, tourism and infrastructure. It plays a central role in Pakistan's external investment strategy amid recurring balance-of-payments constraints.

Discussions reportedly focused on institutional cooperation, large-scale mining development, renewable energy expansion, electric vehicle manufacturing and digital governance. Pakistan

referenced Algeria's state energy company Sonatrach and its experience in resource management, as well as industrial localization partnerships with international firms.

The two sides also explored cooperation in smart agriculture and satellite-based climate and crop monitoring systems. No timeline was announced for the signing of the proposed memorandum. [Arab News]

Chinese national arrested for identity theft as Manila security concerns persist

(ms) Philippine immigration authorities have arrested a Chinese national in Parañaque City for alleged identity theft and visa violations, in a case that has drawn attention amid heightened sensitivities over foreign documentation and security risks.

The Bureau of Immigration (BI) said Fang Li, 36, was detained on February 16 during a raid on a condominium unit in Barangay Tambo conducted by the agency's Fugitive Search Unit in coordination with local police and the Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center. According to the BI, Fang had been assuming the identity of another Chinese citizen and had overstayed her visa after entering the Philippines in 2022 as a temporary visitor.

Two other Chinese nationals were arrested during the same operation. Authorities identified them as Chen Youliang, 38, described as an undocumented foreigner subject to a Blacklist Order, and Xu Yuxiang, 39, who was found to have overstayed her visa. All three individuals are being held at the BI Warden Facility pending deportation proceedings.

The arrests come against the backdrop of earlier high-profile cases that intensified public scrutiny of identity records and foreign nationals. Among the most widely discussed was Alice Guo, the former mayor of Bamban, whose citizenship and background became the subject of congressional investigations after questions emerged about her Chinese origins and identity documentation.

Separate controversies involving businessman Joseph Sy, also identified as being of Chinese descent, similarly fueled debate over identity verification and regulatory oversight.

Security agencies have also been on alert following unrelated developments. In mid-February, Philippine

authorities confirmed they had opened an investigation into a Mongolian citizen suspected of links to the Chinese military following reports of reconnaissance-related flight activities near sensitive areas (read more AiR No. 7, February/2026, 3). [Inquirer] [PhilStar]

Seychelles signals upgrade of Japan ties ahead of 50th anniversary

(lm) Seychelles President Patrick Herminie has indicated that the country wants to move its relationship with Japan into a more formalized and strategic phase, potentially using this year's 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in June to sign new agreements at the highest level.

The key substance lies in maritime security. Japan is financing the new Marine Police Headquarters at Perseverance through a grant of JPY 800 million (USD 5.1 million), with completion expected in June 2026. For a country with an Exclusive Economic Zone of 1.4 million square kilometers, the project directly strengthens enforcement capacity against maritime crime and drug trafficking.

Japan has also channeled more than USD 4 million over the past two years through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Maritime Crime Programme, reinforcing regional maritime security efforts in the western Indian Ocean. [Seychelles News Agency]

Singapore and Malaysia pledge closer ties, push to resolve longstanding issues

(st) Lawrence Wong and Anwar Ibrahim pledged to deepen bilateral cooperation and work toward resolving outstanding issues after meeting in Kuala Lumpur on Feb 20, underscoring the strategic importance of ties between the two neighboring economies. Anwar hosted Wong at the historic Seri Negara estate, where the leaders broke fast together during Ramadan before holding a nearly three-hour one-on-one discussion. Both sides described the talks as candid and constructive, covering efforts to strengthen friendship and enhance cooperation on longstanding matters between the two countries.

The meeting follows their December 2025 engagement at the annual Singapore–Malaysia Leaders' Retreat, the

highest-level bilateral platform, where issues such as airspace management, water agreements and maritime boundaries were discussed. As Singapore and Malaysia mark six decades of diplomatic relations, both leaders emphasized the need for practical collaboration and steady dialogue to manage sensitive issues while expanding economic and regional cooperation. [Channel NewsAsia]

South Korea protests Japan after foreign minister renews territorial claim over disputed

(dql) South Korea has lodged a formal protest against Japan after Japanese Minister Toshimitsu Motegi renewed Japan's sovereignty claim over the disputed islets, known as Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan and effectively controlled by Seoul through a permanent police presence since the 1950s. The protest followed parliamentary remarks by Toshimitsu Motegi, who referred to the islets by their Japanese name and reaffirmed Japan's territorial position. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Seoul rejected the claim as baseless and demanded its immediate withdrawal, stressing that South Korea's sovereignty over Dokdo is firmly established historically, geographically, and under international law. The foreign ministry warned it would respond firmly to what it described as repeated provocations that undermine bilateral relations. [Anadolu Ajansı]

Meanwhile, Japan has decided not to send any cabinet minister to its annual Takeshima Day event in Shimane Prefecture, a move widely seen as an attempt to limit friction following South Korea's protest. Jiro Akama, minister in charge of territorial affairs, announced that he would not attend the related ceremony, despite earlier remarks by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggesting ministerial participation.

Instead, Tokyo will send a parliamentary vice minister from the Cabinet Office, continuing a practice in place since 2013. [Japan Today]

In the latest related development, South Korea has declined a US proposal to hold a trilateral air drill with Japan this month, as the suggested timing coincided with Japan's annual "Takeshima Day," which marks Tokyo's claim over the disputed Dokdo islets.

Seoul instead suggested moving the trilateral drill to an earlier date and offered to conduct a bilateral air exercise with the US after the Japanese event. The US

rejected the revised proposal and opted to carry out separate exercises — conducting air drills near South Korea's west coast and joint operations with Japan over the East China Sea.

South Korea's defense ministry downplayed the significance of the US-Japan drills, stating they were unrelated to trilateral coordination and reaffirming commitment to stable three-way security cooperation. [Yonhap News Agency]

At the same time, South Korea and the U.S. have delayed announcing the schedule for their spring Freedom Shield military exercise — the annual large-scale combined drill after failing to agree on the scope of live field training.

Under the administration of Lee Jae Myung, Seoul has pushed to reduce on-the-ground drills as a conciliatory signal toward North Korea, which routinely denounces the exercises as invasion rehearsals. U.S. commanders, however, have resisted scaling back activities, citing the advance deployment of troops and equipment and concerns about readiness.

The allies say further coordination is underway, with an announcement expected later this month or in early March. [The Korea Times]

South Korea moves to reinstate border no-fly zones after civilian drone incursions into North Korea

(dql) South Korea plans to pursue a partial revival of the 2018 inter-Korean military agreement, including reinstating no-fly zones near the border, to prevent civilian drone incursions into North Korea, Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said. The Ministry of National Defense is reviewing the move in coordination with other agencies and the United States.

The announcement followed a warning from Kim Yo-jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un who urged Seoul to stop further drone flights after Pyongyang accused South Korean civilians of repeated incursions. A joint military–police investigation has confirmed four drone launches by civilian suspects since September 2025, two of which crashed inside North Korean territory, aligning with claims previously made by Pyongyang.

The agreement in question—the 2018 military pact signed by former President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-

un—was fully suspended in 2024 amid rising inter-Korean tensions. Seoul also plans to tighten penalties for unauthorized drone flights and cooperate with local governments to improve border-area safety. [The Korea Times]

After North Korea acknowledged the preventive steps in a statement by Kim Yo-jong, Seoul expressed hope for easing tensions and advancing peaceful coexistence on the Korean peninsula. [The Korea Herald]

India, South Korea reaffirm strategic partnership, expand economic and AI cooperation

(co) South Korea and India reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening economic security and cooperation in critical and emerging sectors during the sixth Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue co-chaired by First Vice Foreign Minister Park Yoon-joo and India's Secretary (East) P. Kumaran.

The two sides agreed to advance their Special Strategic Partnership through regular high-level exchanges, while also discussing collaboration in technology, defense and artificial intelligence governance. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea protests US Forces Korea over China jet standoff during Yellow Sea drill

(dql) South Korea formally protested to US Forces Korea after a US Air Force training exercise led to a brief and unusual aerial standoff with Chinese fighter jets over the Yellow Sea. During the drill, which involved multiple F-16s operating near overlapping air defense identification zones, China scrambled its own aircraft, though the encounter ended without incident.

Seoul's defense and military chiefs complained directly to the US commander, arguing that while South Korea had been notified in advance, key details of the exercise were not adequately shared, raising concerns about risk management and alliance coordination. [Yonhap News Agency] [The Korea Times]

The incident exposes South Korea's challenge of balancing its security alliance with Washington against the need to avoid unnecessary friction with Beijing.

Brazil, South Korea upgrade ties to strategic partnership, seek to revive Mercosur trade talks

(dql) South Korea and Brazil have upgraded their relationship to a strategic partnership, adopting a four-year action plan and signing 10 cooperation agreements during a summit between President Lee Jae Myung and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Seoul. [Reuters]

The 2026–2029 action plan provides a structured roadmap for collaboration across politics, trade and investment, defense, energy transition, science and technology, supply-chain resilience, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Both leaders highlighted expanding cooperation in future-oriented sectors such as space, biopharmaceuticals, semiconductors and artificial intelligence, while seeking to diversify bilateral trade, which has exceeded USD 10 billion annually in recent years.

A key focus was reviving negotiations for a trade agreement between South Korea and Mercosur, the South American customs bloc comprising Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Talks, launched in 2018, have been stalled since 2021. The two presidents agreed to push for renewed momentum, framing a deal as strategically important.

Beyond large conglomerates, the new agreements aim to expand opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and enhance regulatory cooperation, including in health and consumer goods. [The Korea Herald]

The upgrade of diplomatic ties reflects both countries' efforts to diversify economic partnerships amid shifting global supply chains and the energy transition, with Brazil being South Korea's largest trading partner in South America. For Seoul, closer ties with Brazil — Latin America's largest economy and a key player in critical minerals — support supply-chain security and market access. For Brasilia, deeper engagement with a leading Asian technology power strengthens its global economic positioning beyond traditional Western and regional partners.

Sri Lanka promotes Japan-backed export corridor targeting Indian market

(lm) Sri Lanka is seeking to revive Japanese manufacturing investment through a proposed Sri Lanka–Japan export-industrial corridor designed to position the island as a production and export hub for the Indian market and other regional destinations.

The initiative was discussed during a meeting between President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and a high-level Japanese delegation. Talks focused on advancing economic cooperation and operationalizing the corridor, which aims to attract export-oriented Japanese manufacturers and deepen bilateral trade ties.

The proposal follows President Dissanayake's official visit to Japan in September 2025, when the two sides signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on the corridor. Sri Lankan officials indicated that interest from Japanese government and business stakeholders has re-emerged after nearly a decade of subdued engagement, expressing expectations that the corridor could expand exports, stimulate industrial trade, and strengthen Sri Lanka's integration into regional supply chains. [Daily Mirror]

U.S. Pacific Fleet commander visits Sri Lanka as Washington expands maritime support

(lm) Admiral Steve "Web" Koehler, Commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, visited Sri Lanka from February 19 to 21, holding discussions with senior government and defense officials focused on maritime security cooperation and regional stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

During his visit, Admiral Koehler met Defence Secretary Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha (Retd) at the Ministry of Defence. Both sides reviewed the evolving security environment in the Indian Ocean Region and emphasized closer coordination on maritime domain awareness, information sharing, and joint responses to natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

The U.S. delegation reaffirmed continued support to Sri Lanka in addressing transnational threats such as illicit trafficking and other non-traditional security challenges. Discussions also covered ongoing military-to-military engagement, including training exchanges

and joint activities aimed at enhancing interoperability. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

The visit coincides with a significant expansion of US maritime support. The former United States Coast Guard Cutter *DECISIVE* has departed Baltimore for Sri Lanka under Washington's Excess Defense Articles program. The 64-meter Reliance-class patrol vessel, previously used for counter-narcotics and maritime enforcement, will enhance Sri Lanka Navy capabilities in offshore patrol, anti-smuggling operations, and protection of key Indian Ocean sea lanes once commissioned. With this transfer, Sri Lanka becomes the largest operator of US-transferred Coast Guard cutters under the program, now operating four such vessels. [Daily Mirror 3]

Taiwan seeks to safeguard US trade deals after Supreme Court ruling on Trump tariffs

(dql) Taiwan will work closely with the United States to preserve the favorable terms of two recently concluded trade agreements despite legal and political turbulence in Washington, Vice Premier Cheng Li-chiun said.

The comments follow a ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States striking down emergency tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump, who has warned of higher duties under alternative trade laws.

Taiwan previously secured a reduction in US tariffs on its exports to 15 percent from 20 percent under two agreements. In return, Taiwanese firms pledged USD 250 billion in investment in US semiconductor, energy and AI production, alongside an additional USD 250 billion in credit guarantees to support further investment. Taipei also committed to reducing or eliminating tariffs on nearly all US goods and increasing purchases of American products, including natural gas.

Cheng stressed that Taipei is not reopening negotiations but aims to ensure Taiwanese companies continue to benefit from agreed preferential treatment, particularly for semiconductor exports. She acknowledged that Taiwan's sizable trade surplus with the US could pose risks if Washington adopts new trade measures but expressed confidence that the existing agreements provide a relatively strong footing. [Taipei Times]

Lithuania reaffirms practical cooperation with Taiwan amid Vilnius' power struggle over foreign policy leadership

(dql) Lithuania will not accept unilateral demands from China as it seeks to stabilize bilateral relations and will continue developing substantive cooperation with Taiwan, Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys said.

Following a high-level foreign and security meeting convened by President Gitanas Nausėda, Budrys stressed that Lithuania's foreign policy is unified and based on clear principles, rejecting claims of internal division over China and Taiwan.

His remarks come amid domestic debate triggered by Prime Minister Inga Ruginienė's comments questioning the 2021 decision to allow a "Taiwan" representative office. While acknowledging past missteps, Budrys said the government is focused on forward-looking choices, including expanding economic and cultural cooperation with Taiwan.

At the same time, Vilnius aims to gradually restore diplomatic engagement and consular services with China, a process he described as complex and time-consuming.

In addition, Lithuania's defense policy toward China remains unchanged, with Beijing still treated as a security threat and excluded from sensitive supply chains such as drones, electronics, and defense-related technologies, Defense Minister Robertas Kaunas said.

While Vilnius is interested in gradually normalizing diplomatic relations with China, senior officials stressed that this will proceed alongside expanded economic and defense-related cooperation with Taiwan, particularly in high-technology sectors such as semiconductors relevant to the military industry. [Taiwan News] [The Baltic Times]

Budrys' remarks come as observers point to a quiet power struggle has emerged within Lithuania's leadership over control of foreign policy, pitting Ruginienė against Budrys, despite the constitution assigning the lead role to President Gitanas Nausėda and the foreign minister.

Analysts say tensions—backed politically by ruling party chairman Mindaugas Sinkevičius—have become visible in disputes over policy toward Taiwan and China, including Ruginienė's suggestion to rename Taiwan's representative office to ease pressure from Beijing, a move critics warn could undermine

Lithuania's credibility without guaranteeing improved ties. [LRT]

In 2021, Lithuania allowed the opening of a Taiwanese representative office under the name "Taiwan," rather than the more common "Taipei," marking an unprecedented move among European Union members and signaling stronger political support for Taiwan. China condemned the decision as a violation of its "One China" principle, downgraded diplomatic relations with Lithuania, recalled its ambassador, and imposed de facto trade restrictions that also affected Lithuanian-linked supply chains within the EU.

Cambodia alleges Thai occupation of disputed territory

(lm) Tensions along the 817-kilometer Thai-Cambodian border remain politically sensitive despite a December 27 ceasefire that followed renewed fighting in mid-2025.

In an interview with Reuters, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet alleged that Thai forces continue to occupy areas "deep into Cambodian territory," including locations beyond Thailand's previously asserted claim lines. He described the ceasefire as "fragile" and called for the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC) - a bilateral technical body established to survey, demarcate, and verify the land boundary based on existing treaties and historical documentation - to begin technical demarcation work "as early as possible," arguing that only formal measurement and verification under existing treaties can resolve competing claims. He also said Thai troops had installed shipping containers and barbed wire in contested areas and linked delays in demarcation to Thailand's February 8 election. [Reuters]

Thailand has categorically rejected the occupation claim, stating that it has strictly adhered to the December 2025 joint statement and urged Phnom Penh to refrain from disseminating what it called misleading information. The Defense Ministry has said Thai troop deployments reflect agreed de-escalation measures and involve no reinforcement. Thai officials have emphasized that established bilateral mechanisms remain active, including the Regional Border Committee (RBC), where technical discussions have continued without final conclusions. The JBC, Bangkok maintains, can resume once Thailand's new government is formally constituted. [Bangkok Post 1]

The dispute has also taken on an international dimension. Hun Manet raised the issue while attending a meeting of U.S. President Donald Trump's newly formed Board of Peace in Washington and expressed hope that the body could contribute to de-escalation. Thai officials said Thailand did not participate but is closely monitoring Cambodia's international engagements and has consistently clarified its position through diplomatic channels. Bangkok has also confirmed contact with France regarding colonial-era maps from the 1907 demarcation period, following reports that Cambodia sought historical boundary documentation from Paris. [Bangkok Post 2]

More recently, on February 21, Cambodian media reported that Thai forces opened fire near the An Ses area in Preah Vihear province, injuring a Cambodian soldier. Cambodia later stated that five to seven shots were heard and that one soldier sustained a knee injury. Thailand later formally rejected the allegation, stating that its forces had issued verbal warnings after observing increased Cambodian troop movements near the Anma area opposite Nam Yuen district in Ubon Ratchathani, but had not used firearms. Bangkok warned against the dissemination of unverified reports that could escalate tensions. [Bangkok Post 3]

Also on February 21, the Thai armed forces released a white paper compiling historical records and operational data related to past border incidents, including clashes in 2011 and developments in July and December 2025. Thailand stated that all deployments comply with the December 27, 2025, joint statement that ended renewed mid-2025 fighting and reaffirmed that force would be used only as a last resort. [Bangkok Post 4]

Malaysia seeks additional funding to extend fencing along Thai border

(lm) Malaysian security authorities will seek additional government funding to extend barbed-wire fencing along illegal crossing points opposite Thailand's Sungai Kolok district in Narathiwat province, after completing the first phase of construction earlier this month.

The General Operations Force, a paramilitary border unit under the Royal Malaysia Police, is requesting financial support through Malaysia's National Security Council to fence 69 additional informal crossing routes located at previously demolished jetties along the Golok River. The river constitutes part of the Malaysia–Thailand land boundary between Kelantan state and Thailand's Narathiwat province.

Malaysia has already installed fencing along 27 routes covering approximately 1.5 kilometers opposite Sungai Kolok. Authorities stated that all unauthorized jetties used for informal crossings have been dismantled. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand positions itself as post-election bridge to Myanmar amid regional concerns

(lm) Thailand has signaled a more active diplomatic role following Myanmar's recent military-organized election, offering to act as a "bridge" to help reintegrate Myanmar into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), while urging progress on regional concerns.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow met his Burmese counterpart, Than Swe, in Phuket for informal talks focused on post-election engagement. Thailand called on Myanmar to demonstrate tangible steps toward dialogue with ethnic groups, expand humanitarian access, and avoid attacks on civilians, referencing ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus agreed in 2021, which has seen limited implementation.

Both sides also discussed cooperation on transnational crime, including online scam networks and narcotics trafficking, and the revival of cross-border trade at the Mae Sot–Myawaddy checkpoint. Bilateral trade conducted through border channels amounts to approximately THB 200 billion (USD 5.8 billion), reflecting Thailand's significant economic exposure along the 2,400-kilometer shared border.

Thailand emphasized that its engagement reflects national security and economic interests as a frontline state. However, domestic critics cautioned that engagement should not be perceived as endorsement of Myanmar's military authorities, particularly amid reports of continued airstrikes near the Thai border. [Bangkok Post]

US raises prospect of relaxing tech export controls for Vietnam

(hn/ms) Vietnam's engagement with the US gained fresh momentum following a meeting between President Donald Trump and Communist Party General Secretary Tô Lâm in Washington, where Trump indicated he would work to remove Vietnam

from US lists restricting access to advanced technologies. Vietnamese authorities described the talks as supportive of deeper cooperation in economic, scientific and technological fields, though no detailed policy framework or timeline was announced.

While neither side detailed specific policy changes, Vietnam has for years faced limitations under US export control regimes that govern the transfer of sensitive technologies. These controls, administered primarily through the Export Administration Regulations (EAR), affect items deemed strategically significant, including advanced semiconductors, high-performance computing components, aerospace technologies and certain dual-use systems with potential military applications.

Vietnam is not subject to the most severe US technology prohibitions applied to countries such as China, Iran or North Korea. However, Vietnamese entities and transactions can still encounter licensing requirements and compliance hurdles, particularly for technologies linked to advanced chip design, telecommunications infrastructure, satellite systems and defense-related equipment. Such restrictions influence how Vietnamese firms access cutting-edge US hardware and software.

The meeting came alongside major commercial agreements involving US aerospace manufacturer Boeing, underscoring aviation's central role in economic ties between the two countries. Vietnamese airlines announced deals collectively valued at more than USD 30 billion. Vietnam Airlines confirmed an agreement to purchase 50 Boeing 737-8 narrow-body aircraft, while Sun PhuQuoc Airways signed a USD 22.5 billion contract for 40 Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners, aircraft designed for long-haul international operations. Budget carrier Vietjet secured financing arrangements linked to Boeing aircraft acquisitions.

Analysts note that wide-body aircraft orders often reflect ambitions to expand intercontinental connectivity. Vietnam's aviation market has grown rapidly, driven by rising tourism, business travel and economic expansion. Large-scale purchases of US-manufactured aircraft also carry implications for trade dynamics, as such transactions influence bilateral trade volumes and industrial linkages.

Defense cooperation has also continued to evolve. Recent exchanges have emphasized maritime security, capacity-building initiatives and programs addressing war legacies, including unexploded ordnance clearance and environmental remediation. Vietnam's defense posture remains guided by its longstanding "Four Nos"

doctrine, shaping the scope of international security engagement while allowing expanded cooperation.

Observers view the combination of technology discussions, aviation contracts and defense initiatives as part of the broader trajectory of US–Vietnam relations. Since the normalization of ties three decades ago, cooperation has expanded across trade, investment and strategic domains, with technology policy developments likely to draw close attention from investors and industry participants. [Bloomberg] [Indo-Pacific Defense Forum] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Vietnam military planning document reveals enduring distrust of US despite expanding partnership

(ms) An internal Vietnamese military document describing preparations for a potential "second American invasion" has cast new light on Hanoi's strategic thinking, exposing deep institutional distrust of the US even as bilateral ties have reached their strongest level since the Vietnam War.

The document, titled *"The 2nd US Invasion Plan,"* was drafted by Vietnam's Ministry of Defense in August 2024 and later analyzed by the human rights organization The 88 Project. Its contents, first highlighted by the Associated Press, suggest that elements within Vietnam's defense establishment continue to regard Washington as a potential long-term threat rather than a fully trusted strategic partner.

According to The 88 Project's assessment, the document frames the US as a "belligerent" power willing to employ unconventional warfare, political pressure, or even military intervention against states perceived to be outside its geopolitical orbit. While the text acknowledges that the immediate risk of conflict with Vietnam is low, it emphasizes vigilance against scenarios in which the US or its allies might "create a pretext" for intervention.

More broadly, the planning paper reflects longstanding anxieties within Vietnam's ruling Communist Party about regime stability. Vietnamese military analysts warn of the possibility of externally supported "color revolutions" — a reference to mass protest movements that have led to political upheavals in countries such as Ukraine and the Philippines. The document suggests that US promotion of values including democracy, human rights, and religious

freedom could serve as tools for political destabilization.

Ben Swanton, co-director of The 88 Project, argued that the concerns expressed in the paper align with patterns seen in other Vietnamese policy and security documents. In his analysis, the invasion plan offers rare insight into how segments of Vietnam's political and military leadership interpret Washington's global posture, particularly in Asia.

The revelations stand in contrast to the rapid improvement of US–Vietnam relations. In 2023, the two countries elevated ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, placing the US formally alongside China and Russia in Vietnam's highest tier of diplomatic relationships. The upgrade has driven expanded cooperation in trade, technology, education, and security, with Washington describing Vietnam as a key partner in maintaining regional stability.

Yet analysts say the leaked document underscores persistent divisions within Hanoi. Nguyen Khac Giang, a Vietnam-focused researcher at Singapore's ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, has noted that conservative and military-aligned factions within the Communist Party have historically been more skeptical of closer engagement with the US, shaped by both ideological considerations and historical memory.

Vietnam's modern strategic posture remains defined by careful balancing among major powers. China is Vietnam's largest trading partner and a critical neighbor despite maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The US, meanwhile, is Vietnam's largest export market and a growing source of investment and technology. This dual dependence has encouraged Hanoi to pursue diversified partnerships while avoiding formal alliances.

Episodes of tension have periodically surfaced. In 2024, Vietnamese state media accused the US-linked Fulbright University Vietnam of encouraging a "color revolution," allegations that were later downplayed by government officials but which highlighted sensitivities surrounding foreign influence. Vietnamese authorities have also tightened controls on civil society and dissent, often citing national security concerns.

US officials declined to comment directly on the military document but reiterated support for the bilateral partnership. Diplomats and scholars say the divergence between Vietnam's public diplomacy and internal security planning is not unusual for a one-party state navigating a complex geopolitical environment. [Associated Press] [The 88 Project]

EU adds Vietnam to tax list following OECD review, raising compliance considerations

(hn/ms) Finance ministers of the European Union have added Vietnam to Annex I of the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes, following a review of jurisdictions' adherence to international tax transparency standards. The update forms part of the EU's regular screening process assessing non-EU economies against criteria including tax transparency, fair taxation, and the implementation of measures against base erosion and profit shifting.

Vietnam's inclusion is linked to findings from an OECD Global Forum peer review covering the 2021–2023 period, specifically concerning Exchange of Information on Request (EOIR) standards. EOIR rules measure a jurisdiction's ability to provide tax-relevant information to treaty partners upon request. The classification does not relate to Vietnam's corporate tax rates, investment incentives, or broader fiscal policy.

Placement on Annex I, often referred to as the EU "blacklist," does not alter Vietnam's domestic tax regime or invalidate its double taxation agreements. However, the designation may influence how individual EU member states apply defensive tax measures under their national laws. Depending on jurisdiction, such measures can include enhanced reporting obligations, additional scrutiny of cross-border payments, withholding tax adjustments, or limitations on deductibility for certain transactions involving listed jurisdictions.

For multinational enterprises and investors, the practical implications are therefore largely compliance-driven rather than structural. Companies with significant EU-Vietnam financial flows may review transfer pricing documentation, tax residency records, and intercompany arrangements to ensure alignment with member-state-specific rules. Transparency frameworks such as public country-by-country reporting and mandatory disclosure regimes may also require more granular disclosures involving Vietnam.

Vietnamese authorities have responded by reaffirming their commitment to OECD cooperation and tax transparency reforms. Officials cited recent amendments to the Law on Tax Administration and related regulations, alongside a national action plan addressing OECD recommendations.

The EU list is revised biannually, allowing jurisdictions to be reassessed as technical standards evolve. [Vietnam] [Vietnam Briefings] [Vietnamnews]

Vietnamese nationals charged in UK people-smuggling case

(ms) United Kingdom authorities have charged five men, including several Vietnamese nationals, following a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation into an alleged people-smuggling network moving Vietnamese migrants from France to the UK.

According to the NCA, the group is suspected of organising irregular crossings via lorries and small boats since mid-2024. Investigators said the network targeted Vietnamese migrants and allegedly retained genuine passports to enforce debt-repayment arrangements.

Van Huy Nguyen, 22, was arrested in Rawmarsh, Rotherham. Four others — Vinh Van Nguyen, 31; Lia-Chien Trong, 33; Sy Trai Ho, 27; and Quang Van Nguyen, 31 — were re-arrested from prison, where they had been on remand for separate money-laundering and identity-document offences.

All five face charges of conspiracy to assist illegal entry into the United Kingdom and transferring criminal property. They appeared before magistrates' courts in Sheffield, Liverpool, and Birmingham and were remanded in custody pending further proceedings.

The case has drawn attention in Vietnam, where authorities have repeatedly warned about trafficking risks and illegal migration routes to Europe. Vietnamese state media frequently highlight the dangers associated with smuggling networks, including financial exploitation and unsafe transport conditions.

UK officials said the arrests form part of broader efforts to disrupt organised immigration crime. The NCA stated that investigations remain ongoing, with financial flows and cross-border links under review.

The UK and Vietnam have expanded cooperation in recent years on trafficking, migration, and organised crime, reflecting shared concerns over transnational smuggling networks operating across Europe and Southeast Asia. [BBC] [Vietnam News]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

27 February 2026 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT+7), CPG, Thailand

Nepal's 2026 Elections: Youth Mobilization, Political Fragmentation, and Reform Prospects

On March 5, Nepal will hold midterm elections for its 275-seat House of Representatives following the dissolution of parliament in the aftermath of the youth-led "Generation Z" protests that swept the country in September 2025. What began as mobilization against corruption, nepotism, and entrenched patronage networks escalated into the most severe episode of political violence since the end of the civil war in 2006, culminating in the resignation of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and the appointment of an interim technocratic administration under former Chief Justice Sushila Karki. The upcoming vote will be the first nationwide election since these events and takes place within a context of political transition and institutional recalibration.

Taking place in the final phase of the campaign period, this webinar will provide an overview of Nepal's evolving political landscape ahead of the March 5 elections. It will examine the post-protest political context, party configurations, electoral dynamics, and possible coalition constellations, and discuss potential implications for governance and policy direction following the vote. For more information and registration, visit [CPG].

25 February 2026 @ 8:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, United Kingdom

Security and defence 2026

This hybrid conference examines how shifting global norms, rising defense spending pressures, and strategic realignments are reshaping the international security environment—from alliance cohesion challenges within NATO under renewed strain following the return of Donald Trump, to intensifying great-power competition.

Bringing together global policymakers, senior military leaders, industry executives, and civil society experts, the conference will assess evolving flashpoints, including China's military modernization and its interaction with North Korea, India, and tensions in the South China Sea, alongside persistent instability in the Middle East and the growing impact of climate change and cyber threats on conflict. For more information and registration, visit [Chatham House].

25 February 2026 @ 8:00-9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Hudson Institute, United Kingdom, USA

Nigeria: Country of Particular Concern or Counterterrorism Partner?

This online panel will examine the sudden shift in relations between the United States and Nigeria after Donald Trump designated Nigeria a country of particular concern over religious freedom, a move that unexpectedly gave way to expanded security cooperation. It will assess whether recent developments—including US military action and the deployment of trainers—signal a new normal in bilateral relations or a prelude to greater diplomatic and economic pressure, and what risks and consequences this partnership may hold for policymakers and ordinary Nigerians alike. For more information and registration, visit [Hudson Institute].

26 February 2026 @ 9:00-11:45 a.m. (GMT+7), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Leveraging Regional Cooperation and Integration to Navigate Global Uncertainties

This hybrid seminar explores how renewed regional integration can help Asia navigate rising geopolitical tensions and trade policy uncertainty, building on the region's long-standing gains from open trade, investment, and connectivity across the Asia-Pacific. It examines policy options to strengthen regional cooperation and cross-border linkages, and assess the pivotal role of Southeast Asia—with its dynamic digital economies, deepening production networks, and growing consumer markets—in advancing broader integration across the region. For more information and registration, visit [ISEAS].

26 February 2026 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, Belgium

From savings to sustainability: long-term investors and Europe's green transition

This event will examine how long-term investors—such as pension funds and national promotional institutions—can play a decisive role in financing the green transition by mobilising patient capital suited to large-scale, long-horizon infrastructure projects. It will also assess recent capital market reform efforts in the European Union, including proposals advanced by Enrico Letta, against the backdrop of growing institutional assets in OECD economies, and explore how transition planning frameworks can be made more fit for purpose. For more information and registration, visit [Bruegel].

27 February 2026 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Reporters at risk: Navigating Iran's internet blackout

The webcast will examine how journalists reported on the 2025–2026 protests in Iran amid severe repression and government-imposed internet shutdowns. The discussion will bring together experts and journalists to assess the risks correspondents faced, the strategies they used to remain resilient, and why their reporting matters for United States foreign policy. For more information and registration, visit [Atlantic Council].

2 March 2026 @ 2:30-4:00 p.m. (GMT+7), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Market-Oriented Disinformation and the Threat of Agentic Disinformation

This webinar will examine informational disorder—misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation—as a structurally produced feature of today's market-driven information ecosystem, shaped by platform business models, algorithmic incentives, and emerging AI-enabled practices such as agentic disinformation in AdTech. It will unpack the mechanics behind these dynamics, while the discussant will assess how similar incentives have played out in Southeast Asia, extending beyond market logics into political and social dimensions of disinformation. For more information and registration, visit [ISEAS].

2 March 2026 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

Gaza's Reconstruction: A Conversation on Water, Energy, and Infrastructure with EcoPeace Middle East

With a Gaza peace plan underway, this event will explore urgent planning for water, energy, and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip—one of the world's most water-scarce areas—where extensive damage, non-operational wastewater facilities reported by the United Nations, and severe electricity shortages are compounding humanitarian and reconstruction challenges. The discussion will assess how strategic, regionally coordinated reconstruction of water, energy, and infrastructure systems can support immediate recovery while advancing longer-term goals of stability, cooperation, and a durable foundation for Palestinian statehood. For more information and registration, visit [Stimson Center].

2 March 2026 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Radioactive Governance: The Politics of Revitalization in Post-Fukushima Japan

The Fukushima Dai'ichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster of 2011 was Japan's worst nuclear catastrophe, displacing more than 164,000 people after reactor cooling systems failed and radioactive material was released into the surrounding environment. This event will offer an ethnographic analysis of how Japan managed the aftermath, highlighting a state-led narrative that

downplayed radiation risks, promoted resilience, encouraged the return of evacuees, and supported the restart of nuclear power—contrasting with earlier nuclear narratives shaped by Chernobyl and Hiroshima. For more information and registration, visit [Belfer Center].

Recent Book Releases

Atul Kohli, Kanta Murali, ***Democracy and Inequality in India: Political Economy of a Troubled Giant***, Cambridge University Press, 360 pages, published October 30, 2025. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs].

Sean Yom, ***Jordan: Politics in An Accidental Crucible***, Oxford University Press, 340 pages, published October 1, 2025. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs].

Chris Horton, ***Ghost Nation: The Story of Taiwan and Its Struggle for Survival***, Macmillan UK, 336 pages, published February 10, 2026. For a review, see [Los Angeles Review of Books].

Calls

The **International Association of Legislation (IAL)** invites paper proposals for its **"5th Global Conference on Parliamentary Studies: Parliaments at a Crossroads,"** to be held on June 4-5, 2026, in in Luxembourg and at the European Parliament. The manuscript submission deadline is February 28, 2026. For more information, see [IAL].

The **Law, AI and Regulation (LAIR) Conference** invites paper proposals for its second edition to be held on June 11-12, 2026, at Erasmus University Rotterdam. The manuscript submission deadline is February 28, 2026. For more information, see [Erasmus University Rotterdam].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Project Analyst – Operations** (Dhaka, Bangladesh). The deadline for application submission is February 27, 2026. For more information, see [UNDP].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Representative** in Paraguay. The deadline for

application submission is March 12, 2026. For more information, see [FAO].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Program Manager** – Bangladesh and Nepal. The deadline for application submission is February 26, 2026. For more information, see [WB].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Project Associate** – Movement Management 9Dublin, Ireland). The deadline for application submission is February 25, 2026. For more information, see [IOM].

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** seeks a **Deputy Senior Representative** (Director, Representation to Ukraine). The deadline for application submission is March 3, 2026. For more information, see [NATO].

The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** seeks a **Project Analyst (Central and West Asia Department)**. The deadline for application submission is February 26, 2026. For more information, see [ADB].

The **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** see an **Analyst (Impact Assessment and Foresight)**. The deadline for application submission is February 27, 2026. For more information, see [EBRD].

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) see a **Project Manager – ERP Reflection Project** (Paris, France). The deadline for application submission is March 6, 2026. For more information, see [MSF].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a **Strategy and Operations Adviser**. The deadline for application submission is February 27, 2026. For more information, see [NRC].

The **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** seeks a **Legal Adviser (Director)**. The deadline for application submission is February 22, 2026. For more information, see [OPCW].

Unitaid seeks an **Executive Director.** The deadline for application submission is March 14, 2026. For more information, see [WHO].

RTI International seeks a **Director – Surveys and Observational Studies**. The deadline for application submission is March 31, 2026. For more information, see [RTI

Team:

Aika Sagheer (as), Alex Bushnell (ab), Amy Carlotti Lu (acl), Aung Naing Lin (anl), Busawan Kachonnarongvanish (bk), Christopher Ocker (co), Dániel Babcsán (dnb), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Felix Serna Calvo (fs), Hoa Khanh Ngo (hn), Henning Glaser (hg), Jones Luka Naciri Taoufik (jn), Lalitphat Rakprik (lr), Linh Nguyen (ln), Lucas Meier (lm), May Thet Maung (may), Michel Schuh (mis), Morten Strantzen (ms), Muhammed Yulmaz (my), Myat Sandar Zaw (msz), Nat Ng Ther Li (nl), Nichapa Boonphattanasoonthorn (ab), Sibghat Ullah (su), Sonia Teo (st), Sreepreya Srinivasan (ss), Supasini Dusadenoad (sd), 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: **contact@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

You are receiving this email at [email address suppressed] because you signed up for CPG's Asia in Review newsletter.
Privacy Policy

Preferences | Unsubscribe