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# *INSIGHT* SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



Hanoi, Vietnam

Photo Courtesy- Udai Bhanu Singh

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## Southeast Asia

### ASEAN

#### ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting

The Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials was held on 19<sup>th</sup> January via videoconferencing. The Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam chaired the meeting, Emaleen Abd Rahman Teo. The meeting discussed the priorities of Brunei, ASEAN's response and recovery action to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the meeting marked the first official meeting of senior officials under the ASEAN Political, Security Community Pillar<sup>1</sup>.

#### ASEAN Chairmanship 2021

After Vietnam, the ASEAN chairmanship 2021 is taken by Brunei Darussalam. The chairmanship is rotated annually among the member nations. With the theme of 'we care, we prepare, we prosper'<sup>2</sup>, the smallest state in the ASEAN is ready to take the responsibility of recovering the region from the setbacks of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The officials outlined a blueprint of the ten goals, further divided into three strategic areas—digitalization, sustainability, and recovery, which will favour the recovery of the economy. With the current power dynamics, the geostrategic position, and the relation of the bloc with the major powers, security and strategic affairs will prioritize.

#### ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials' Meeting (ARSOM)

The 17<sup>th</sup> ARSOM meeting was held virtually between ASEAN and Russia on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021, reviving and strengthening the strategic partnership. The officials completed and reaffirmed the importance of the new ASEAN-Russia Comprehensive Plan of Action (2021-2025)<sup>3</sup>. Along with discussing the cooperation in the development of COVID-19 vaccines and reducing and recovering the economic impact between the two sides, emphasis was laid on strengthening the regional security architecture, counter-terrorism, and transnational organized crimes.

### INDIA-ASEAN

#### India's next Envoy to ASEAN

Shri Jayant Khobragade is set to be the next ambassador to the ASEAN Secretariat in the ASEAN headquarters in Jakarta<sup>4</sup>, announced by the Ministry of External Affairs on 21<sup>st</sup> January. Envoys from India have been in the HQ since 2014 when both sides elevated their strategic partnership and ramping up cooperation in security and trade. Mr Jayant is an officer of the Indian Foreign Service and currently is serving in the Ministry of External Affairs.

#### India supplying relief materials to Fiji

On 17<sup>th</sup> December, Fiji was hit by Tropical Cyclone Yasa which caused large-scale damage and destruction in the country. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2021, India sent its first consignment of relief aid and

<sup>1</sup> <http://asean2021.bn/Theme/news/news-19.01.21.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Brunei takes the chair for the year of recovery. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2053215/brunei-takes-chair-for-year-of-recovery>

<sup>3</sup> ASEAN, Russia to strengthen the strategic partnership. <https://asean.org/asean-russia-strengthen-strategic-partnership/>

<sup>4</sup> Shri Jayant N. Khobragade has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to ASEAN. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dt1/33402/Shri+Jayant+N+Khobragade+has+been+appointed+as+the+next+Ambassador+of+India+to+ASEAN>

material. Over six tons of supplies were sent over by the National Disaster Response Force and with the help of Air India and Fiji Airways, the supplies airlifted and dropped in the area of immediate need. Disaster risk management is one of the most important aspects of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative<sup>5</sup> and its stand by Fiji and its efforts to support and restore the affected lives of the citizens.

### **India-Singapore Defence Ministers' Dialogue**

The 5<sup>th</sup> India-Singapore Defence Ministers' Dialogue (DMD) was held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021<sup>6</sup>. The meeting took place amidst the ongoing Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. Shri Rajnath Singh, Raksha Mantri of India, and Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence of the Republic of Singapore, extended their bilateral ties, reviewed the progress of various initiatives in areas of Defence industry and technology, and discussed the areas of potential cooperation for future Defence ventures despite the limitations imposed by COVID-19<sup>7</sup>. The intelligence and cyber intelligence of India and Singapore have also increased their engagements with one another. An agreement on Submarine Rescue Support and cooperation between the two navies was signed<sup>8</sup>. India reaffirmed their support for the

future endeavours of the ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting-Plus (ADMM).

### **India Exports Akash and BrahMos to nine Nations**

India has now drawn up a list of nine nations that are interested in importing the Akash Surface-to-air missile system and BrahMos supersonic cruise missile system. Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines<sup>9</sup> out of the nine countries have shown interest in the Akash, indigenously missile system and BrahMos, precision-strike weapon.

### **ASEAN-India Hackathon**

The Ministry of Education collaborated with the Ministry of External Affairs and organized a virtual Hackathon where all ten countries of ASEAN and India took part<sup>10</sup>. The event took place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2021. 330 students and 110 mentors were a part of the 36-hour long event<sup>11</sup>. The event aimed at elevating relations between ASEAN and India in the field of science, technology, and education<sup>12</sup>. The teams had to develop solutions on two themes: education and blue economy. Dr S. Jaishankar, Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal and other eminent ministers of ASEAN nations attended the prize distribution and commented on the work put in by the teams and creativity.

<sup>5</sup> [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33360/India\\_Delivers\\_Humanitarian\\_Assistance\\_amp\\_Disaster\\_Relief\\_Support\\_to\\_Fiji\\_after\\_Tropical\\_Cyclone\\_Yasa](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33360/India_Delivers_Humanitarian_Assistance_amp_Disaster_Relief_Support_to_Fiji_after_Tropical_Cyclone_Yasa)

<sup>6</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1690391>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/India-singapore-reaffirm-bilateral-ties-in-5th-defence-ministers-dialogue20210120162456/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/India-singapore-reaffirm-bilateral-ties-in-5th-defence-ministers-dialogue20210120162456/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/India-draws-up-nations-list-for-akash-and-brahmos-export/articleshow/80151155.cms>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ndtv.com/education/first-asean-India-hackathon-concludes>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33481/ASEANIndia+Hackathon>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ndtv.com/education/first-asean-India-hackathon-concludes>

## BRUNEI

### India and Brunei boost bilateral ties.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2021, a virtual meeting was held between the Minister of External Affairs, Dr S Jaishankar and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dato Seri Setia Haji Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof. The meeting was to boost the bilateral relations between the two nations. Dr Jaishankar congratulated Brunei on taking over the ASEAN chairmanship in 2021<sup>13</sup>. Both the leaders discussed and expressed their satisfaction with the current bilateral ties in sectors like trade, investment, healthcare, constructions, defence cooperation and gave assurance to support each other in national development and unite against the global challenges.<sup>14</sup>

## CAMBODIA

### Cambodia postpones the annual joint drill with China.

Tea Banh, the Defence Minister of Cambodia announced an indefinite postponement of the Annual Golden Dragon Infantry exercise between the Cambodian Army and Chinese Army. The drills and exercise started in 2016

China funding the drills every year. Despite ending the joint exercise, China will continue Bilateral Military aid<sup>15</sup>. The exercise is a symbol of Sino-Cambodian friendship. The exercise is out on hold because of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and inadequate preparations after the October floods.

### Strategic cooperation between Cambodia and the EU for the next seven years.

On 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Foreign Minister of Cambodia, Park Sokhonn and European Ambassador Carmen Moreno met virtually to devise an outline for their strategic developments and cooperation for the next seven years (2021-2027). The three main objects and aims to be fulfilled were economic growth and job creation; agriculture and natural resource management focusing on fisheries, and governance by the rule of law.<sup>16</sup> There were an exchange of views on the ASEAN, especially ASEAN Regional Integration Cooperation and the developmental gap amongst the ASEAN nations<sup>17</sup>. They discussed the need for enhancing and adapting to better methods to improve bilateral investment, Europe access to Cambodian rice, skills and social protection and issues concerning the migrants<sup>18</sup> considering the ongoing pandemic that created economic disorder.

### Cambodia-Vietnam

Prime Minister Hun Sen sent a letter to the president of Vietnam, Nguyen Phu Trong, to congratulate him

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.outlookIndia.com/newscroll/eam-jaishankar-holds-talks-with-bruneis-foreign-minister/2032335>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33537/Bilateral\\_Relations\\_Review\\_Meeting\\_Virtual\\_between\\_Honble\\_Minister\\_of\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_and\\_HE\\_Dato\\_Seri\\_Setia\\_Haji\\_Erywan\\_bin\\_Pehin\\_Da](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33537/Bilateral_Relations_Review_Meeting_Virtual_between_Honble_Minister_of_External_Affairs_Dr_S_Jaishankar_and_HE_Dato_Seri_Setia_Haji_Erywan_bin_Pehin_Da)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/cambodia-postpones-annual-joint-drill-with-China-indefinitely-/5765005.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/eu-kingdom-boost-cooperation>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50808812/eus-development-cooperation-strategy-with-cambodia-2021-2027-focuses-on-three-priority-areas/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50808812/eus-development-cooperation-strategy-with-cambodia-2021-2027-focuses-on-three-priority-areas/>

on getting re-elected for the third time<sup>19</sup>. Both the parties, the Cambodian People's Party and the Communist Party of Vietnam have decided to further enhance their relationship chiefly in the sphere of peace, economic interest, defence and security between the nations and in the region as well.

### **India supplies COVID-19 vaccines on an urgent basis.**

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen requested the Prime Minister of India to supply 100,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine on an urgent basis<sup>20</sup>. The Serum Institute of India agreed to supply around 100,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Phnom Penh. India has provided and supplied vaccines to over seventeen countries including Myanmar and Bangladesh.

### **India and Cambodia bilateral FTA**

A virtual meeting held between the Indian Ambassador to Cambodia Davyani Khobragade and the Cambodian Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak, discussed the possibilities of setting up a bilateral free trade agreement. Both the countries which cooperate in all sectors, now want to enhance the cooperation in trade and investment sector as well. The trade between Cambodia and India valued at \$190 million in 2020 alone.

## **INDONESIA**

### **Malaysia PM visit**

Indonesia invited the Prime Minister of Malaysia to visit the country on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2021. Joko Widodo's invitation for the official visit was in the spirits of close friendship established based on bilateral relations. Both the leaders discussed prominent issues like economic, regional, and bilateral security<sup>21</sup>, address their joint efforts to combat international discrimination against Malaysian and Indonesian Palm oil<sup>22</sup> and their joint efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Both nations are major players in the ASEAN and have expressed their concerns about the Military Coup in Myanmar and have urged Burnie, current chair of the ASEAN, to hold a meeting with other ASEAN nations together on the Myanmar crisis<sup>23</sup>. Both the leaders stressed the South China Sea and the importance of obeying International Law. The PM of Malaysia added the idea of being self-restrained and avoiding militarization in the South China Sea<sup>24</sup>.

### **Thailand, Indonesia, and Myanmar have a three-way talk.**

The coup in Myanmar has created chaos and unrest not only in the country but in other ASEAN nations as well. The newly-appointed Foreign Minister of Myanmar Wunna Maung Lwin, Indonesia Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi and Thailand's Foreign Minister, Don Pramudwinai met at the Don Mueang Airport in Thailand<sup>25</sup> to discuss peaceful solutions

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50810345/commitment-to-further-solidarity-between-cambodia-and-vietnam/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-India-diplomacy-idUSKBN2A70C8>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/press-release-mfa-news>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/press-release-mfa-news>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-malaysia-idUSKBN2A50G1>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-malaysia-idUSKBN2A50G1>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2074247/indonesia-thailand-seek-peaceful-solution-to-myanmar-crisis>

for the ongoing political unrest in Myanmar. This was the first visit abroad of a senior official since the Military coup. The meeting focused on intensifying collaboration in regional and multilateral arenas<sup>26</sup>. The Ministers asserted their views on the importance of understanding and putting forward the safety and wellness of the citizens of their country. Moreover, they also laid emphasis on respecting the ASEAN charter and the principles conveyed in the charter.

### **France and Indonesia strengthening relations**

France and Indonesia have reaffirmed their relationship on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021, after a telephone call between Mr Jean-yves Le Drian and Ms Rento Massudi<sup>27</sup>. Mr Drian assured their interest in working for a free, open Indo-Pacific that will follow rule of law and intensify the strategic relations especially in Defence and Maritime cooperation<sup>28</sup>. France commented on Indonesia's response to Myanmar's military coup.

### **Defence deal between Indonesia and China.**

30<sup>th</sup> March marked the signing of the pact that allows the transfer of Japanese equipment and technology to Indonesia<sup>29</sup>. The deal will strengthen the military and diplomatic ties between the two nations and counter the growing Chinese military assertiveness in the

region. The Defence ministers of both the countries called the discussion 'two plus two' security talks and have discussed their apprehension in the growing Chinese influence and territorial claims in the South China Sea. Mogami-class stealth frigates, \$3.6 billion worth arms deal will enhance Indonesian navy and patrolling activities.

## **MALAYSIA**

### **Malaysia pushing ASEAN COVID-19 funding**

Foreign Minister Hishammuddin raised concerns, during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in January 2021, 'pushing for the ASEAN COVID-19 Fund to be formulated and expedited as soon as possible'<sup>30</sup>. The fund will help the member states in procuring the vaccines and every region can have access to the vaccine. He acknowledges the ASEAN's 2021 key focus areas and expressed his views on recovering the economy of the region.

## **MYANMAR**

### **Boost for India-Myanmar military ties.**

Following the successful visit of Chief of Army Staff of India, Gen MN Naravane and Foreign Secretary H.V. Shringla to Myanmar for a series of a bilateral meeting in October of 2020, the Myanmar Military under commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing forced more than fifty militants of the

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-foreign-minister-bangkok-meet-indonesian-counterpart.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/indonesia/news/article/indonesia-call-between-mr-jean-yves-le-drian-and-his-indonesian-counterpart-26?xtor=RSS-1>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/indonesia/news/article/indonesia-call-between-mr-jean-yves-le-drian-and-his-indonesian-counterpart-26?xtor=RSS-1>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.Defencenews.com/global/asia-Pacific/2021/03/30/japan-indonesia-sign-arms-transfer-pact-amid-China-concerns/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/01/21/malaysia-wants-asean-covid-19-fund-expedited-says-foreign-minister/1942760>

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang faction) to abandon their hiding base in Myanmar<sup>31</sup>.

### **Chinese Foreign Minister visits Myanmar.**

Mr Wang Yi visited Myanmar on a four-nation visit. He also met with the President of Myanmar, Win Myint<sup>32</sup>. Chinese Government has promised to provide Myanmar with 300,000 doses of vaccines. This visit was important as it reinstated their interest in the BRI and the railway project which will help in the economic cooperation between the two nations. Myanmar shared its view on peace and stability at the border and regional cooperation as they share the same border<sup>33</sup>. Myanmar has repeatedly asked China to not build any fences in the buffer zones between the two border and Myanmar pointed out that China has been building fence since October of 2020 and urged them not to continue the same.

### **Gen Sergy Shoigu's visit Nay Pyi Twa.**

Myanmar and Russia are expanding their Defence cooperation. The Russian Defence Minister Gen Sergy Shoigu visited Myanmar on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021. With the visit, Russia has agreed to equip Myanmar in the military-technical area by providing MiG-29 jet fighters, Su-30 Warplanes, Pechora-2M anti-

aircraft missiles system<sup>34</sup>. The meeting concluded with Myanmar, being a major country of ASEAN manages the peace and stability of the region and with the help of Russian technology and military equipment and the two national armies have been working together despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Myanmar receives COVID-19 vaccines from India.**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2021, Myanmar receives 1.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from India to inoculate 750,000 people.<sup>35</sup> AstraZeneca Vaccines are manufactured by the Serum Institute of India at the beginning of the pandemic, Myanmar was able to contain the spread of the virus amongst the citizens, but currently, the country is tacking a second wave with the number of cases increasing every day. As one of the worst-hit countries by the COVID-19, India has taken the step to provide Myanmar with free doses. Saurabh Kumar, Indian ambassador to Myanmar, told the reporters that the vaccines are a gift to Myanmar from India.

### **Election Commission rejects the fraud claims.**

The election commission, on 28<sup>th</sup> January, declined all claims of the election being rigged or fraud. Myanmar military held a presser before the start of the new term of the parliament and the government. The military claims that the elections were fraud and have urged the election commission to investigate the irregularities in the elections and other voting malpractices<sup>36</sup> With the decline of such allegations,

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/India-myanmar-military-ties-pay-dividends-naga-rebels-return-mainstream.html>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1846055.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1846055.shtml)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.vifIndia.org/vifdigest/2021/february/11/myanmar-round-up-january-2021>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/myanmar-military-rolls-red-carpet-russian-Defence-minister.html>

<sup>35</sup> Myanmar receives the first batch of COVIS-19 vaccines from India. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN29R0ZR>

<sup>36</sup> Myanmar election commission rejects military fraud claims  
Thehindu.com/news/international/Myanmar-election-rejects-military-fraud-claims/article33698217.ece



the military warned to act if their demands were not fulfilled or addressed and declined to rule out the possibility of a coup<sup>37</sup>. The National League for Democracy (NLD) party won 83% of the seats and the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party won only thirty-three seats from the 476 total seats available. By the current events in Myanmar, the military could intervene before the new government formed.

### **The military coup in Myanmar.**

1<sup>st</sup> February 2021, Myanmar's military announced a state of emergency for a year and detained senior government leaders<sup>38</sup> in response to the allegations of fraud in elections. Following the military seizing power, Prime Minister Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other democratic leaders arrested. The troops have been patrolling continuously and a night-time curfew also imposed. Before detaining the PM, she urged her supporters to protest the military coup.<sup>39</sup>

### **REACTIONS:**

INDIA: The Ministry of External Affairs released a statement expressing India's 'deep concerns'<sup>40</sup>. India has shown its support during the democratic transition and believes that rule of law and democratic process will

be upheld.<sup>41</sup> New Delhi reacted to the coup in a very practical and realistic manner as India and Myanmar have good bilateral ties and strong military relations<sup>42</sup>. In addition, Myanmar is the only ASEAN country that has land borders with India making it an important feature in the Act East Policy of India. On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021, Anurag Srivastava, MEA Spokesperson, announced that India will continue the aid to combat COVID-19, humanitarian assistance and observe the ongoing situation in Myanmar<sup>43</sup>.

ASEAN: Myanmar is a member nation of the ASEAN. The bloc has a policy of non-interference i.e., members will not intervene in each other's domestic matters or internal matters. ASEAN nations have divergent views about the Coup taking place in Myanmar. ASEAN, regardless of its principle of non-interference, has urged Myanmar to try reconciliation. The response of ASEAN will play a major role in future especially in regional crisis management, prevention mechanism and the bloc's aspirations to sustain democratic values and practices. Brunei holds the chair for the year 2021, it released a statement proposing dialogue, reconciliation, and the need to return to normalcy<sup>44</sup>. Indonesia is a prominent member of the ASEAN, it has always been vocal about the Rohingya crisis and currently along with Malaysia, have announced their concerns about the coup. They requested the Foreign Ministers to hold a special meeting discussing the seriousness of the coup and what steps are needed

<sup>37</sup> Myanmar poll body says no election fraud after army warns of 'action' <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN29X1PS>

<sup>38</sup> Myanmar army says carried out detentions in response to election fraud <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2A114G>

<sup>39</sup> [bbc.com/news/world/world-asia-55882489](https://www.bbc.com/news/world/world-asia-55882489)

<sup>40</sup> <https://timesofIndia.Indiatimes.com/India/we-believe-rule-of-law-and-democratic-process-must-be-upheld-says-India-on-myanmar-coup/articleshow/80640644.cms>

<sup>41</sup> <https://timesofIndia.Indiatimes.com/India/we-believe-rule-of-law-and-democratic-process-must-be-upheld-says-India-on-myanmar-coup/articleshow/80640644.cms>

<sup>42</sup> <https://rusi.org/commentary/myanmar-military-coup-international-reactions>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.newIndianexpress.com/world/2021/feb/04/India-to-continue-humanitarian-assistance-to-myanmar-despite-coup-2259619.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/myanmar-asean-aung-san-suu-kyi-military-coup-14087150>

to maintain peace and stability<sup>45</sup> in the region. Countries like Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines have refused to comment on the Military Coup<sup>46</sup>. These countries view the coup as an internal matter and according to the policy of non-interference, these countries will remain aloof. Singapore Foreign Minister commented that there have been ‘alarming developments’<sup>47</sup> in Myanmar recently but did not approve the need for sanctions. He added, the sanctions will turn the situation more brutal and such violence will only cause harm to the citizens and the Rohingya’s, therefore Singapore expects a peaceful resolution.

**USA:** President Biden responded to the military coup and regarded it as an assault on the democracy and rule of law of Myanmar<sup>48</sup>. He added that the USA would review the sanctions laws and accordingly take steps against Myanmar<sup>49</sup>. He continues by speaking about collaborating with the regional partners and in the world to help restore democracy. After the violent incidents that took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, Antony J Blinken reported about the USA working with other international powers to hold the coup leaders accountable<sup>50</sup>. He added that the United

States will take ‘Firm action’ against the authorities<sup>51</sup>. The Treasury Department imposed ten sanctions earlier on this month on military officials and after the recent violent killings during the protests, two more sanctions imposed<sup>52</sup>.

**CHINA:** Wang Wenbin, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, in a press meeting stated the country’s reaction to the military coup in Myanmar, he addressed that all parties in Myanmar should meet and resolve their differences<sup>53</sup> keeping the legal and constitutional framework in view to maintain peace and stability. Chinese state media reviewed the detaining of Ms Suu Kyi and the military coup as a major reshuffling of the cabinet<sup>54</sup>. China has made huge investments in Myanmar<sup>55</sup> and since the power has been taken over by Commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing, China is diplomatically and safely using its stance to protect all the investing taking place in Myanmar.

**UNITED NATIONS:** UN Security Council meeting to examine the military coup and make prompt decisions. Britain drafted the statement, and the members of the Security Council were negotiating on the same. The statement would condemn the coup, call for military leaders and officials to respect human rights and rule of law, and release the detained

<sup>45</sup> <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indonesia-and-Malaysia-call-for-ASEAN-meeting-on-Myanmar-coup>

<sup>46</sup> <https://rusi.org/commentary/myanmar-military-coup-international-reactions>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2069183/singapore-says-myanmar-situation-alarming-but-no-need-for-sanctions>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/1/world-reacts-to-military-coup-in-myanmar>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/s-jaishankar-antony-blinken-discuss-situation-in-myanmar-101612892061475.html>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/us/myanmar-coup-us-designates-two-additional-officials-following-violence-in-mandalay20210223090753/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-usa-blinken-idUSKBN2AM056>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/us-sanctions-myanmar-military-officials>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/China-calls-for-all-sides-to-resolve-differences-after-myanmar-coup-101612166113160.html>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.wionews.com/world/China-blocks-un-security-council-statement-condemning-myanmar-coup-361052>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/China-making-cautious-moves-to-save-its-investments-in-myanmar-after-coup20210205144403/>

like Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of her party, immediately<sup>56</sup>. China and Russia were the only two countries who did not agree and China used its Veto power and blocked UN actions<sup>57</sup>.

**EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED KINGDOM:** Britain imposed sanctions on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021 on three military leaders accusing them of violating human rights. The Foreign Minister of the UK, Dominic Raab made a statement about the strict action that the U.K. will take against those who engage in violent and brutal acts against the citizens taking part in protesting the coup<sup>58</sup>. EU is Myanmar's third-largest trading partner but since the coup, the EU has been focusing on putting sanctions. European Council's President Charles Michel expressed their views about respecting the elections and democratic processes<sup>59</sup>. The Council of European Union held a meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February discussing domestic and foreign affairs. The ministers of the council have asked for de-escalation with an immediate end to the state of emergency and release of the detained leaders of the new party<sup>60</sup>. The council will observe the ongoing situation and review their policies and make amendments. EU has agreed to continue the Humanitarian Assistance<sup>61</sup> to the people in distress.

**AUSTRALIA:** the Foreign Minister, Marsie Payne, commented on the Myanmar coup calling out the military to respect the rule of law and resolve the disputes by releasing the detained civilians and political leaders<sup>62</sup>.

## LAOS

### Thailand Rejects Laotian Dam Report

A Chinese builder for the proposed Sanakham Dam in Laos sent an updated technical paper to the Thai National Mekong River Committee in the expectation of alleviating fears about the contentious scheme. According to sources, Thailand did not approve the changes, arguing that the current report had been insufficient and that further research was necessary. Thailand has repeatedly expressed questions about the environmental impact of the dam, which are of interest to facilitate the efficiency of the Mekong.<sup>63</sup>

## PHILIPPINES

### India and Philippines Defence Ties

Despite the significant disparity in population size, India and the Philippines tend to have ideal friendship on record. India and the Philippines have indeed started to hold frequent intelligence-sharing meetings on several sensitive topics. Both Manila and Delhi

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.wionews.com/world/China-blocks-un-security-council-statement-condemning-myanmar-coup-361052>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55913947>

<sup>58</sup> <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Coup/Myanmar-coup-Week-of-Feb.1-to-Feb.-21-EU-action-in-focus-as-foreign-ministers-set-to-meet>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/1/world-reacts-to-military-coup-in-myanmar>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/22/myanmar-burma-council-adopts-conclusions/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/22/myanmar-burma-council-adopts-conclusions/>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/1/world-reacts-to-military-coup-in-myanmar>

<sup>63</sup> Trouble Brews in South-East Asia as Thailand Rejects Laotian Dam Report - Future Directions International

are involved in aggressive territorial claims with Beijing, and both are primarily interested in the rule-based order. However, the diplomatic relations between Delhi and Manila have historically been relatively sparse.<sup>64</sup>

### Infrastructural Push

Systemic improvements, along with strong macroeconomic initiatives, have helped the Philippine economy expand by an aggregate of 6.3 per cent per annum in the last ten years. The Philippine economy has ranked among the top contributors in Asia in recent times. Today, the economy is struggling with restrictions due to obsolete and inadequate infrastructure. To address this problem, the Philippines has increased investment in highways, dams, air and sea-port facilities as well as other public projects in recent months.<sup>65</sup>

### Philippines and Vietnam fortify sea base.

With the growing naval deployments in the South China Sea and Taiwan, the regional countries and powers have taken steps to protect their EEZ. Philippines and Vietnam are two strong powers in the South China Sea and have fortified their positions in the sea and expanded naval patrolling in the disputed waters<sup>66</sup>. The country believes that with Biden coming into power, the security and military aid will intensify and both US and the Philippines, will indulge in joint exercises. The Military spokesperson conveyed that Filipinos

would respect the constitutional mandate and continue to assert their sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea<sup>67</sup>.

## THAILAND

### Thailand defends covid-19 strategy

Thailand backed its Covid-19 vaccination policy after high-level government analysts said that the Southeast Asian nation had been too slow to get enough shots to immunize its citizens. Thailand, which last year was surprisingly effective in suppressing the virus, is banking on a broader supply of the vaccine to boost its tourism-related industry, which has been ravaged by the pandemic. The health ministry hopes to vaccinate their citizens as soon as possible so that their tourism industry picks up again and people start visiting the nation.<sup>68</sup>

### Australia-Thailand Strategic Partnership

The Joint Resolution includes increased coordination in defence and stability, cyber policy, financial crimes, and organized crimes. In terms of occasional internal political instability and differences of opinion, the Australian Government recognizes the convergence of interests that encourages a willingness to retain as tight relations as possible to Thailand. On the other hand, after approximately 70 months of intensive diplomatic relations, the Thai government recognizes this measured status. There is much in particular that many realize to justify a strategic alliance.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> India and the Philippines: A New Chapter in Defence Ties? – The Diplomat

<sup>65</sup> The Philippines: A Good Time to Expand the Infrastructure Push (imf.org)

<sup>66</sup> <https://asiatimes.com/2021/02/vietnam-philippines-fortify-south-China-sea-bases/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://asiatimes.com/2021/02/vietnam-philippines-fortify-south-China-sea-bases/>

<sup>68</sup> Thailand Says Covid-19 Vaccine Strategy Is Not a One-Horse Bet (bloombergquint.com)

<sup>69</sup> Behind Australia–Thailand Strategic Partnership | East Asia Forum

## India and Indonesian Navies conduct Passage Exercise.

On 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021 Indian Navy and Philippines Navy conducted Passage exercise (PASSEX) in the Arabian Sea. INS Talwar and Indonesian Navy's Multirole corvette KRI Bung Tomo participated in the exercise.<sup>70</sup> The aim of the exercise was to enhance operational interoperability and cooperation among them.

## SINGAPORE

### Role in China's Trade Strategy

Foreign trade served a critical role in the process development of the nations of East Asia. Singapore, in specific, is strongly reliant on foreign trade and has strong trade links with China. The global marketplace has had an enormous impact because of the virus and bilateral relations between Singapore and China has even been directly threatened. In 2021, as the lockdown begins to come within balance and vaccinations are circulated, the world economy will continue to recover, with a projection of a 5.2% rise for the world economy and an 8.2% growth projection for the Chinese economy and 6% export growth prediction for Singapore.<sup>71</sup>

### Upcoming Annual Meeting to Address the Challenges of Covid-19

The Extraordinary Annual Meeting 2021 in Singapore in August would be the first Global

Leadership Summit to discuss the complexities of returning from the global epidemic and to pave the foundations for a more sustainable and peaceful society. It will put leaders to work on defining responses to some of the most challenging issues of our moment.<sup>72</sup>

## VIETNAM

### 13<sup>th</sup> India Vietnam Defence Security Dialogue

The 13<sup>th</sup> India-Vietnam Defence Security Dialogue took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 and was held virtually. Defence Secretary Dr. Ajay Kumar and Sr Lt Gen Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Defence Minister of Vietnam co-chaired the meeting via videoconferencing. Both sides conveyed their satisfaction with the ongoing Defence cooperation despite the restrictions put up by the ongoing pandemic and discussed new areas of cooperation<sup>73</sup>. They reviewed the developments in bilateral defence cooperation initiatives and consider raising Armed Forces engagements under the structure of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

### India supply flood aid

Prannay Verma, Indian Ambassador to Vietnam, presented the Deputy Foreign Minister, Nguyen Dung with flood aid on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Under the Act East Policy of India, three thousand sets sent to the people affected by the floods in the central region of Vietnam<sup>74</sup>. The Ambassador sympathized over the loss of life and the damage caused by the floods and

<sup>70</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/PASSEX-exercise>

<sup>71</sup> Singapore's prominent role in China's trade strategy, Economy News - ThinkChina

<sup>72</sup> Special Annual Meeting in Singapore to Take Place in August 2021 > Press releases | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

<sup>73</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1687915>

<sup>74</sup> <https://economictimes.Indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/act-east-India-send-flood-aid-to-strategic-partner-vietnam/articleshow/80332026.cms?from=mdr>

Dr Dung thanked the Indian Government for the aid and support and the help and aid provided will deepen the bilateral relations between the nations.

**China builds a missile base near the Sino-Vietnam border.**

Vietnam claims that China is installing a Missile base just 70km from the Chinese-Vietnam border in the South China Sea. The images have confirmed that surface-to-air missiles and six launchers have installed<sup>75</sup>. Such a military base in the middle of the sea will only create

distrust between the two nations. Along with the Philippines, Vietnam is also moving towards fortification of its military bases<sup>76</sup> to be prepared for any conflict in the future. Hence increasing the military appearances in the area. The building of the bases by Vietnam is to make its stance clear against the Chinese therefore the bases built are well within striking range<sup>77</sup> Vietnam has decided to keep the military issues and economic, investment ties with China separate.

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<sup>75</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-Pacific/China-said-be-installing-missile-base-near-border-vietnam>

<sup>76</sup> <https://asiatimes.com/2021/02/vietnam-philippines-fortify-south-China-sea-bases>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/vietnam-builds-up-defences-against-China-in-spratly-islands20210224135234/>

## ABOUT US

The Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre focuses on policy-relevant research in respect of the ten ASEAN states, East Timor and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand. The Centre studies India's bilateral and multilateral relations with states of the region with a view to providing contemporary relevance to India's Look East policy. It has a futuristic approach and examines the emerging trends in the regional security architecture. The Centre studies the potential for India's enhanced defence cooperation (including maritime issues) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues with the region. It examines internal developments of countries in this region, especially political transition and the role of the military, and their implications for India. The Centre seeks to promote Track-II institutional linkages with the region.

### **Contributions are invited for:**

Book Review (800 words)

Commentary (900 - 1300 words)

Photo Essay (10-12 photographs, each with a caption,  
accompanied by a 1000 words essay)

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