



ASIA-PACIFIC INTEREST GROUP NEWSLETTER

Welcome Message from APIG Co-Chairs

Dear APIG Colleagues,

Welcome to the September 2024 edition of the APIG newsletter! We are thrilled to introduce the second episode of the APIG Podcast, alongside updates on regional developments spanning various topics. We are in the midst of planning collaborative events with other interest groups among other exciting APIG initiatives, and we eagerly anticipate sharing more details with you shortly.

Additionally, we'd like to acknowledge Manjiao Chi for his dedication and leadership as co-chair, whose tenure as co-chair concluded in March this year. Since then, David Devlaeminck has stepped in and will be serving in the co-chair capacity over the next three years.

Thank you for your continued engagement with APIG!

Warm regards,

Yueming Yan & David Devlaeminck, APIG Co-Chairs

Editor's Note

In this edition of the APIG newsletter, we explore a range of international law issues arising in the Asia-Pacific region. The feature is based on the latest episode of our podcast series *International Law in the Asia-Pacific Today*. This episode by Sarah Lee (attorney at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP in New York) spotlights the latest developments in Myanmar from the perspective of a human rights officer of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The full podcast episode can be accessed on the group's page at asil.org/APIG.

The remainder of the newsletter covers regional updates across a range of topical issues – the new trade agreement between the European Free Trade Association States and India, the entry into force of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity Agreement, and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' statement on escalation of conflicts in Myanmar, to name a few. We welcome feedback as always and look forward to any contributions you may wish to offer.

Chiann Bao, Arbitration Chambers

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Views contained in this publication are those of the authors in their personal capacity. The American Society of International Law and this Interest Group do not generally take positions on substantive issues, including those addressed in this periodical.



Spotlight on Myanmar

Podcast interview by Sarah Lee (attorney at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP in New York) for International Law in the Asia-Pacific Today

Disclaimer: The opinions and views expressed in this interview are solely those of the individuals involved and do not necessarily represent the views of ASIL or the APIG.

It has been seven years since the events that led to the significant displacement of the Rohingya from Myanmar started in 2017, and the situation remains unresolved. According to an annual report by the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission in Myanmar, the challenges in the region have escalated.

John Coughlan is a human rights officer with the Myanmar team of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). He has worked with OHCHR for eight years, based in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Thailand. John has also worked with local society groups, including local organizations in Cambodia and Thailand, as well as Amnesty International.

Below is an excerpt of the discussion in the interview. To listen to the full discussion, please listen to the podcast episode, accessible [here](#).

Regarding the situation in Myanmar, what is the current situation and recent developments?

In each region of Myanmar, the military is engaged with ethnic armed organisations (EAOs). There was the coup in February 2021 and, since then, it has been a slow process of intensification. In October 2023, the Three Brotherhood Alliance launched Operation 1027, leading to further intensification of conflicts.

What is really striking about the conflict in Myanmar is the civilian toll. This is a characteristic of conflict everywhere but the military in Myanmar does not distinguish between military and civilian targets. In fact, by the doctrine of the military in terms of how they wage war on the EAOs, anyone occupying an area that is a theatre of conflict is fair game. It is very difficult to track, but I understand that, at different times, the military is in control of less than half of the territory of Myanmar. So various EAOs are controlling different chunks of territory. We see that, as the military retreats from certain areas, it relies more and more on indiscriminate weapons such as airstrikes and shelling. At the OHCHR, our documentation focuses on these prac-

tices, particularly as they affect civilian areas such as marketplaces and hospitals, highlighting the escalating humanitarian consequences.

We also see a huge amount of displacement, with 2.8 million people internally displaced. In Rakhine, there are different ethnic groups, the two most prominent being ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya. There have been displaced people in Rakhine since 2012 and most prominently in 2017. Since the coup in February 2021, displacement has arisen, particularly in north and increasingly central Rakhine, involving both Rohingya and Rakhine people. Most recently, military conscription has prompted movements across Myanmar, with individuals seeking safety in areas controlled by EAOs or attempting to obtain visas to travel abroad. The displacement of peoples appears likely to continue.

How is international law addressing the crisis and where is it falling short?

Victims' groups and lawyers are working together to make novel arguments to address some of the issues in Myanmar. We have seen victim-led initiatives in places like Argentina, and the Philippines more recently, where a group of ethnic Chin people brought a case in the Philippines Court.

Additionally, the National Unity Government of Myanmar that was in power before the coup, has submitted a declaration to the International Criminal Court (ICC), accepting jurisdiction under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute. If that were to be accepted, that would open the door to referrals by other state parties. But action in the ICC is subject to referral by the Security Council, and achieving consensus on such matters, given the complexities involved, could be challenging in the context of Myanmar. In 2020, the International Court of Justice in *Gambia v Myanmar* handed down its provisional measures order, which includes taking actions to prevent the loss of life of the Rohingya people. However, the implementation of these measures continues to face significant challenges.

On the ground, there is the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, which collects evidence for future prosecutions, whether by domestic courts or in the event of any future prosecutorial initiatives such as a hybrid court or an international court. At the moment there is a deadlock, but we would like to see accountability and prosecutions.



Regional Updates

Afghanistan

Taliban Railway Authority inks deal worth \$500 million with an Iranian Company

On 14 March 2024, an Iranian enterprise signed a significant deal worth \$500 million with the Taliban Railway Authority. This contract obligates the Iranian firm to provide 20,000 railway sleepers for the advancement of Afghanistan's railway infrastructure.

For more information, visit: <https://www.afintl.com/en/202403142394>

ASEAN

ASEAN-China South China Sea Joint Working Group holds 43rd meeting

The 43rd Meeting of the ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (the Declaration) took place from 13-15 May 2024 in Bangkok. According to a Thai press release, ASEAN Member States and China reviewed the Declaration's implementation and discussed the situation in the South China Sea. The parties continued negotiations on a South China Sea Code of Conduct, and considered how negotiations might be accelerated to achieve an "effective and substantive" Code of Conduct "in accordance with international law", including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Further information is available here: <https://www.mfa.gov.th/en/content/prasean0524-2?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c306000683e>

ASEAN Foreign Ministers issue statement on escalation of conflicts in Myanmar

On 18 April 2024, ASEAN Foreign Ministers issued a statement expressing their deep concern over an escalation of violence in Myanmar. The statement called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urged all parties to comply with international humanitarian law and to protect civilians. The statement also reaffirmed ASEAN Member States' commitment to "the full and swift implementation of the Five-Point Consensus in its entirety", referring to the steps agreed between ASEAN leaders in April 2021 to

achieve a peaceful resolution to the situation in Myanmar.

The full statement is available here: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Final-ASEAN-FM-Statement-on-the-Escalation-of-Conflicts-in-Myanmar-1.pdf>

ASEAN affirms stance on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament at UN Disarmament Commission

On 1 April 2024, the Lao PDR delivered a statement on behalf of ASEAN at the UN Disarmament Commission. Through the statement, ASEAN emphasised the need for nuclear weapons States to adhere to "concrete, measurable, timebound actions on nuclear disarmament with established deadlines, and to report the implementation of their obligations until the goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons is achieved". ASEAN also reaffirmed that Southeast Asia should remain a nuclear weapon-free zone, as well as its recognition of "the inalienable right of States to peaceful use of nuclear energy".

The full statement is available here: https://www.un.int/lao/statements_speeches/statement-he-mr-anouparb-vongnorkeo-permanent-representative-lao-people%E2%80%99s

Australia

Joining Statement Endorsing Principles for 6G: Secure, Open, and Resilient by Design

On 27 February 2024, the Governments of Australia, United States, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, and the United Kingdom jointly stated that they concurred on the shared principles for the research and development of 6G wireless communication systems.

Indian Ocean Conference 2024

On 9 February 2024, Australia hosted the Indian Ocean Conference 2024 for the first time. 400 delegates from across the Indian Ocean region and beyond met in Perth, Australia for the conference. The conference theme was "Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean".

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Co-Convenors of the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce announce substantial conclusion of negotiations on a number of global digital trade rules

On 20 December 2023, following the final negotiating round of 2023 at the WTO, members of the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on Electric Commerce (**JSI**) reached substantial conclusion of a number of global digital trade rules.

The JSI on E-Commerce co-convenors, Australia, Japan, and Singapore, have also released a joint statement to continue working toward the timely conclusion of the agreement, accessible here: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/media-release/co-convenors-wto-joint-statement-initiative-e-commerce-announce-substantial-conclusion-negotiations-number-global-digital-trade-rules>.

Australia – Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement

On 7 December 2023, the Prime Minister of Australia and the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea signed the Agreement Between the Government of Australia and the Government of Papua New Guinea on a Framework for Closer Security Relations and released a joint statement. The Agreement deepens security cooperation between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

New regional agreements to boost trade in the Indo-Pacific

On 17 November 2023, the Trade Minister of Australia joined Ministers from 13 other Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (**IPEF**) countries to substantially conclude new regional agreements to promote clean energy investment, lift and align trading standards, and protect supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region.

Bangladesh

IMF concludes the 2023 Article IV Consultation with Bangladesh

On 23 December 2023, Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (**IMF**) approved the first review under the Extended Credit Facility (**ECF**) / Extended Fund Facility (**EFF**) and Resilience and Sustainability Facility

(**RSF**) arrangements for Bangladesh. This decision enables the authorities to access funds amounting to SDR 352.35 million (about US\$468.3 million) under the ECF/EFF and SDR 166.67 million (about US\$221.5 million) under the RSF. The total disbursements under the ECF/EFF have reached SDR 704.70 million (approximately US\$936.6 million), while the RSF disbursements amount to SDR 166.67 million (around US\$221.5 million) so far. The Executive Board has also wrapped up the 2023 Article IV consultation with Bangladesh.

For more information, visit: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/12/12/pr23440-bangladesh-imf-exec-board-concludes-2023-art-iv-consult-completes-1st-rev-ecf-eef-rsf>

Brunei

Brunei holds third Strategic Dialogue with the UK

On 26 March 2024, Brunei and the UK held their third Strategic Dialogue, marking 40 years of Brunei-UK diplomatic relations. Talks were held covering issues such as defence, climate change, human rights and ASEAN centrality, as well as the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Further details are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/3rd-uk-brunei-strategic-dialogue-joint-statement>

Cambodia

Cambodia's Hun Sen addresses concerns over Funan Techo Canal

On 16 May 2024, Cambodian Senate President and former Prime Minister Hun Sen gave a speech covering Cambodia's planned 180-kilometre Funan Techo Canal, which aims to connect Phnom Penh to the sea. Hun Sen alluded to Vietnamese concerns regarding the USD 1.7 billion project, expressing the view that harm would not be caused to neighbouring countries along the Mekong River. Hun Sen called on the Cambodian Government to launch construction, stating that Cambodia had already fulfilled its obligation under Article 5 of the 1995 Mekong Agreement to notify the Mekong River Commission's Joint Committee.

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Further details are available here: <https://pressocm.gov.kh/en/archives/97365>

Mainland China

China's Supreme People's Court (SPC) launches new database of verdicts

On 27 February 2024, the SPC launched a new database of verdicts after a controversial move to roll back access to rulings raising concerns about a decline in transparency. The public can now access the new database of court verdicts from the website of SPC. The database, with more than 3,700 rulings currently archived, was introduced to help make verdicts more standardized, timely, systematic and consistent, and to make it easier to search for cases. It will be a supplement to the existing China Judgments Online (CJO), another website run by the SPC.

China commemorates the 45th anniversary of China-US diplomatic relations

On 5 January 2024, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the cooperation between China and the US is no longer a choice but an imperative and called for a healthy development of China-US relations at a reception for commemoration of the 45th anniversary of China-US diplomatic relations. He called for the two sides to make full use of all mechanisms that have been restored to build bridges of communication between them. These words come after a year in which tensions between China and the US intensified.

For more information visit: <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-foreign-minister-healthy-us-china-ties-no-longer-a-choice-/7428007.html>

China promotes further opening-up to pave way for entry to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)

On 7 December 2023, China's State Council unveiled a comprehensive plan to promote the high-level institutional opening-up of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone (FTZ) by aligning it with high-standard international economic and trade rules. The plan contains 80

measures, aiming to build a national institutional demonstration zone for opening-up, and to explore new paths and accumulate new experience for comprehensively deepening reform and expanding opening-up.

For more information visit: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202312/1303244.shtml>

China eyes the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) role to spur digital field

On 14 November 2023, Wang Shouwen, China's international trade representative and vice-minister of commerce, emphasized at a ministerial meeting between China and DEPA member countries in San Francisco that the Chinese government attaches great importance to joining DEPA, actively advancing the accession process, proactively aligning with high-standard international economic and trade rules, as well as steadily expanding institutionalized openness in terms of rules, regulations, management and standards.

For more information visit: <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202311/16/WS6555703ba31090682a5ee6a8.html>

China celebrates a decade of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

On 16 October 2023, China kicked off a summit gathering leaders, representatives and delegations from more than 140 countries in Beijing to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its Belt and Road Initiative. The summit is an important milestone for China marking a decade since the launch of the BRI, which for the past 10 years funnelled hundreds of billions in Chinese financing toward building ports, bridges, highways and power plants largely in poorer countries across the world, expanding China's global influence along the way.

For more information visit: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/15/china/china-bri-forum-xi-jinping-vision-intl-hnk/index.html>

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Hong Kong

Hong Kong and Peru substantially conclude free trade agreement negotiations

On 17 May 2024, the Hong Kong Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development met with the Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru and jointly announced the substantial conclusion of negotiations of the free trade agreement (**FTA**) between Hong Kong and Peru on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting in Arequipa, Peru. The agreement will cover trade in goods, trade in services (including e-commerce), investment and other related areas.

For more information, visit: https://www.cedb.gov.hk/en/news/press_release/2024/pr17052024a.html

Hong Kong and Bahrain sign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement

On 3 March 2024, Hong Kong and Bahrain signed an Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (**IPPA**) to strengthen mutual investment protection. Following the IPPA signed with Türkiye in October last year, the Hong Kong-Bahrain IPPA is the second such agreement that this term of Government has signed. Hong Kong has also signed IPPA with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates in the Middle East region. The Hong Kong Government is currently conducting negotiations of an IPPA with Saudi Arabia and considering establishing an Economic and Trade Office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

For more information, visit: https://www.cedb.gov.hk/en/news/press_release/2024/pr03032024a.html

Hong Kong signs first protocol to amend ASEAN - Hong Kong, China free trade agreement

On 9 January 2024, Hong Kong signed the First Protocol to Amend the Free Trade Agreement (**FTA**) between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (**ASEAN**) and Hong Kong (**the Protocol**), to update the Product Specific Rules (**PSR**) of origin under the FTA, enhancing the coverage of the PSR from more than 200 categories of products to almost 600. The signing of the Protocol aims to help enhance the competitiveness of the products con-

cerned and trade flows, creating more business opportunities for Hong Kong businesses in the ASEAN market.

For more information, visit: <https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/ita/fta/hkasean/index.html>

India

EFTA and India sign Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement

On 10 March 2024, the European Free Trade Association (**EFTA**) States, including Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, entered into a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (**TEPA**) with India. This historic agreement between India and EFTA is poised to deliver substantial economic advantages. It will foster stronger and more robust supply chains, open up fresh avenues for businesses and individuals, resulting in a surge in trade and investment, job opportunities, and overall economic expansion.

For more information, visit: <https://www.efta.int/media-resources/news/efta-and-india-sign-trade-and-economic-partnership-agreement>

India - UAE sign Trans-Continental Trade Corridor Agreement

On 13 February 2024, India and the United Arab Emirates (**UAE**) signed a trade agreement. The agreement aims to establish a trade corridor connecting Europe with India through parts of the Middle East, utilizing sea and rail routes. The plan is backed by influential allies such as the US and the European Union, highlighting its ambitious nature.

For more information, visit: <https://www.tbsnews.net/world/india-uae-sign-pact-trans-continental-trade-corridor-792438>

India appeals WTO's second panel report in dispute regarding Indian tech tariffs

On 14 December 2023, India notified its decision to appeal the panel report regarding the case brought by the

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European Union in “India — Tariff Treatment on Certain Goods” (DS582). The panel report was distributed to WTO members on 17 April 2023. The appeal was distributed to WTO members on 14 December 2023.

For more information, visit: https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news23_e/ds582apl_14dec23_e.htm

Indonesia

Indonesia and EU continue negotiations on an EU-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

Negotiations continue between Indonesia and the European Commission on behalf of EU Member States regarding a proposed free trade agreement known as the EU-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (**CEPA**). The parties concluded their 18th round of negotiations between 13-17 May 2024, covering issues including the position under the CEPA on investment liberalisation, trade and sustainable development, and State-owned enterprises.

Further details are available here: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/09242a36-a438-40fd-a7af-fe32e36cbd0e/library/0b1100a5-1418-4327-861f-d6e44c726b71/details?download=true>

OECD Council adopts OECD Accession Roadmap for Indonesia

During its 2-3 May 2024 Ministerial Level Meeting, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**) Council adopted the Roadmap for the OECD Accession Process of Indonesia (**the Roadmap**). This followed the OECD Council’s 20 February 2024 decision to open accession discussions with Indonesia. The Roadmap sets out that before being invited to accede to the OECD Convention, a review will be conducted evaluating Indonesia’s alignment with OECD standards. The review will assess the extent to which Indonesia maintains, amongst other things, an “open and transparent regime for foreign direct investment” and “effective measures to promote Responsible Business Conduct”.

The full Roadmap is available here: <https://www.oecd.org/mcm/documents/Accession-Roadmap-for-Indonesia.pdf>

Japan

Entry into force of Singapore Convention on Mediation in Japan

On 1 April 2024, the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (**Singapore Convention on Mediation**) entered into force in Japan. The Convention establishes a framework for the enforcement of international settlement agreements resulting from mediation in order to promote the use of mediation as a method of resolving international commercial disputes.

Entry into force of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Agreement Relating to Supply Chain Resilience

On 24 February 2024, the IPEF Supply Chain Agreement entered into force. Six IPEF partners – Fiji, India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and the United States – are Parties to the IPEF Supply Chain Agreement. Two additional partners – Thailand and Malaysia – announced on 6 June 2024 that they completed their respective domestic processes, and have deposited their instruments of ratification. The agreement is designed to enable IPEF partners to work together collaboratively to make supply chains more resilient, efficient, transparent, diversified, secure, and inclusive through information exchange, sharing of best practices, etc.

Protocol Amending the Agreement between the European Union and Japan for an Economic Partnership

On 31 January 2024, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium to the European Union and the Director-General for Trade, DG Trade, European Commission, and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Mission of Japan to the European Union signed the Protocol Amending the Agreement between the European Union and Japan for an Economic Partnership.

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Korea

Korea and Peru sign Agreement for Cooperation on Climate Change

On 4 June 2024, Korea and Peru concluded the agreement between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Peru concerning Cooperation on Climate Change. Based on this agreement, the two countries are committed to enhancing substantive cooperation on climate change, including accelerating the low-carbon transition in energy, industry, transport, and agriculture, among other sectors, exchanging climate policies and technologies, and organizing capacity building activities.

ROK Hosts Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on 2025 Review of UN Peacebuilding Architecture

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the “Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on the 2025 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture” in Seoul on 28 May 2024. The event aimed to assess progress in UN peacebuilding activities and to share the Asia-Pacific region’s peacebuilding experiences and opinions to enhance peacebuilding effectiveness.

The event convened representatives from 14 countries including Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Qatar, the Solomon Islands and Thailand, as well as academics and representatives from the United Nations Secretariat, the ASEAN Secretariat and the Asian Development Bank.

For more information, visit: https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322589&page=6

Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Lao PDR calls for improved support for climate-vulnerable States at UN Conference on Small Island Developing States

The Lao PDR participated in the Fourth UN Conference on Small Island Developing States hosted by Antigua and Barbuda from 27-30 May 2024. The Lao PDR issued a statement which urged reform by international financial

institutions to promote improved access to finance for climate-vulnerable States. The Lao PDR also called for redoubled efforts for the implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States, as well as for greater cooperation to promote the adoption of digital technologies in developing countries.

The full statement is available here: <https://www.un.int/lao/node/60937>

Malaysia

Malaysian Parliament passes Jurisdictional Immunities of Foreign States Act 2024

On 14 May 2024, Royal Assent was given to Malaysia’s Jurisdictional Immunities of Foreign States Act 2024 (**the Act**), which sets out a framework for foreign State immunity before Malaysian courts and related issues. The Act, which is to come into force on such date as prescribed by the Malaysian Prime Minister, affirms the jurisdictional immunity of “*a foreign State in respect of itself on its official capacity and its property*”, subject to listed exceptions. The Act will empower the Malaysian Prime Minister to withdraw immunity from any State which does not confer corresponding immunity to Malaysia.

The Act is available here: <https://lom.agc.gov.my/act-detail.php?language=BI&act=853>

Malaysian Government formally establishes Pedra Branca / Pulau Batu Puteh Commission of Enquiry

On 29 April 2024, the Malaysian Government formally established a Commission of Enquiry into Malaysia’s handling of the *Pedra Branca / Pulau Batu Puteh* case, which saw the International Court of Justice award sovereignty over a disputed island to Singapore in a 2008 judgment. The Commission of Enquiry’s Terms of Reference mandate it to, amongst other things, recommend actions: (i) against parties who handled the claims, (ii) to improve work processes, and (iii) to protect related maritime features and territorial waters.

The full Terms of Reference are available here: https://lom.agc.gov.my/ilims/upload/portal/akta/outputp/2116585/PUB169_2024.pdf



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World Trade Organisation's Dispute Settlement Body adopts panel report on Malaysian palm oil complaint

On 26 April 2024, the World Trade Organisation's Dispute Settlement Body adopted a panel report concerning Malaysia's complaint against measures including EU rules affecting Malaysian palm oil imports (the Report). Although a number of claims made by Malaysia were not accepted, the Report found, amongst other things, that the EU had administered certain measures inconsistently with applicable international trade law.

The Report is available here: <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/DS/600R.pdf&Open=True>

Maldives

Maldives-China sign Defence Agreement

On 5 March 2024, the Maldives and China signed an agreement for the provision of military assistance free of charge. This agreement is set to strengthen the bilateral ties between the two nations.

For more information, visit: <https://www.dw.com/en/maldives-signs-defense-deal-with-china-amid-rift-with-india/a-68440100>

Myanmar

Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar calls for cooperation from Myanmar military

On 27 May 2024, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) issued a further request for information to the Myanmar military in connection with reports of potential crimes. The IIMM urged the Myanmar military to “fully cooperate” with the IIMM's investigative activities.

The full statement is available here: <https://iimm.un.org/myanmar-mechanism-calls-on-myanmar-military-to-respond-to-its-requests-for-information/>

Mongolia

The Seventh Meeting of the Mongolian-Belarusian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation

On 25 January 2024, the 7th Meeting of the Mongolian-Belarusian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation was held in Minsk, Belarus. It was discussed possibilities of expanding and strengthening cooperation in the fields of education, science, technology, agriculture, mining, road transport, infrastructure, and public safety at the meeting. The sides also agreed to work together towards the implementation of the “One Billion Trees” national campaign initiated by Mongolia to combat climate change, land degradation, desertification, and yellow dust storms.

Draft of the Bill on Opening an Embassy in Uzbekistan

On 9 January 2024, the draft of the bill on opening an embassy in Uzbekistan was submitted to the Chairman of the State Great Hural Mr. G. Xandanshatar. Mongolia believes it has a great potential to cooperate with Uzbekistan in increasing and diversifying food products that meet the requirements of Mongolia's food security norms and objectives.

First Mongolian Judge Elected as the International Criminal Court (ICC) Judge

On 5 December 2023, A Mongolian candidate, Justice Erdenebalsuren Damdin of the Supreme Court of Mongolia was elected as the first ever Mongolian judge of the ICC. He won the election in the first round of voting, which was demonstrative of Mongolia's active foreign policy and faith which the international community placed in Justice Erdenebalsuren Damdin.

Mongolia and Canada signed a cooperation agreement in the standards sector

On 20 November 2023, the Mongolian Agency of Standardization and Metrology (MASM) and the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) signed an Agreement

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on Cooperation in Ottawa, Canada. Under the agreement, they will promote cooperation by adopting Canadian advanced standards in Mongolia and introducing standards for cold-resistant buildings, roads, and bridges as well as low heat-loss technologies based on the climate similarities between the two countries.

Pakistan

Pakistan and UAE sign two agreements worth over \$3 billion

On 17 January 2024, Pakistan and the UAE strengthened their economic partnership by signing two inter-governmental framework agreements. This move has solidified their ties and paved the way for a comprehensive investment pact that surpasses \$3 billion. This substantial agreement covers collaboration in railways, economic zones, and infrastructure and aims to enhance relations in the marine and logistics sectors. It also includes the creation of a specialized goods corridor and economic zone near Karachi.

For more information, visit: <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40284443/pakistan-dubai-ink-over-3bn-investment-pact-at-davos>

IMF Executive Board completes first review of the Stand-By Arrangement for Pakistan

On 11 January 2024, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) successfully completed the first review of Pakistan's economic reform program, which is being supported by the IMF's Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). The Board's decision paves the way for an immediate disbursement of SDR 528 million (approximately \$700 million), which brings the total disbursements under the arrangement to SDR 1.422 billion (roughly \$1.9 billion).

For more information, visit: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/01/11/pr2406-pak-imf-exec-board-completes-first-review-of-the-stand-by-arrangement>

Pakistan rejects the Indian Supreme Court's verdict on Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir

The Government of Pakistan announced on 11 December 2023 that it strongly opposes the decision made by the

Supreme Court of India regarding the status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Pakistan claimed that India lacks the authority to unilaterally determine the status of this contested region, and stated that India must uphold its international obligations, regardless of domestic legislations and judicial verdicts.

For more information, visit: <https://mofa.gov.pk/news/pakistan-rejects-the-indian-supreme-courts-verdict-on-indian-illegally-occupied-jammu-and-kashmir-2>

Pakistan moves closer to signing landmark trade agreement with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

On 2 December 2023, Pakistan visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to discuss with the Chief Negotiator of the GCC of finalizing the investment-related section of the GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

The technical teams from both sides engaged in thorough discussions regarding the remaining aspects of the investment chapter, which encompassed investment protection and facilitation and the possible consequences of the FTA on bilateral trade and investment flows.

For more information, visit: <https://www.commerce.gov.pk/pakistan-commerce-minister-visits-ksa-to-finalize-investment-related-part-of-gcc-fta/>

Philippines

The Philippines participates in UN General Assembly debate on crimes against humanity

The Philippines participated in a UN General Assembly debate held from 1-2 April 2024 concerning the International Law Commission's Draft Articles on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity (the Draft Articles). The Philippines voiced its support for the Draft Articles' provisions on the general obligation on States not to engage in crimes against humanity, and on States' obligation to prevent such crimes. The Philippines reaffirmed the position that "[c]ooperation for the effective prevention of crimes against humanity must always proceed in conformity with international law". The Philippines also commented on the formulation used to define crimes against humanity.

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The full remarks are available here: https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/78/pdfs/statements/cah/40mtg_philippines_2.pdf

Singapore

Singaporean Prime Minister discusses relations with Malaysia during introductory visit

From 11-12 June 2024, Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong undertook an introductory visit to Malaysia. He held a joint press conference with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, addressing various facets of the Singapore-Malaysia bilateral relationship. Prime Minister Wong recounted “*very candid and productive discussions on our outstanding bilateral issues such as airspace, water, and maritime delimitation*”.

Further details are available here: <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lawrence-Wong-at-the-Joint-Press-Conference-with-Malaysia-PM-Anwar-Ibrahim-June-2024>

Singapore establishes working group with Cambodia and Lao PDR on cross-border electricity trade

On 29 May 2024, Singapore, the Lao PDR and Cambodia established a working group “*to facilitate cross-border electricity trade to drive the ASEAN Power Grid vision*”. The working group’s three aims are to: (i) create a framework on cross-border electricity trading; (ii) facilitate and develop guidance in relation to relevant approvals; and (iii) consider the commercial arrangements and infrastructure required for cross-border electricity trading.

Further details are available here: <https://www.mti.gov.sg/-/media/MTI/Newsroom/Press-Releases/2024/05/Joint-Press-Release-on-Lao-PDR-Cambodia-Singapore-working-group-to-facilitate-crossborder-electricity.pdf>

Singapore participates in UN Security Council debate on procedure and reform

On 11 March 2024, Singapore participated in a UN Security Council open debate on the Council’s working methods. Singapore expressed its support for a greater number of Council meetings to be held in an open format to allow UN Member States not on the Council to participate, as well as for initiatives aiming to limit “*the use of the*

veto against mass atrocity crimes”. Singapore also suggested other steps to facilitate dialogue between the Council and the wider UN membership.

The full remarks are available here: https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Overseas-Mission/New-York/Mission-Updates/United-nations_security_council/2024/04/20240311

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s pursuit of free-trade agreements

On 6 February 2024, the President Media Centre (PMC) announced the government’s intentions to establish free trade agreements (FTAs) with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and China by the end of 2024. These agreements highlight the government’s dedication to expanding Sri Lanka’s trade alliances and enhancing its economic resilience through strategic FTAs. By increasing access to new markets and promoting trade, these agreements strive to establish a more robust and sustainable financial foundation for the country.

For more information, visit: <https://pmd.gov.lk/news/sri-lankas-pursuit-of-free-trade-agreements-a-path-to-economic-stability-and-growth/>

Sri Lanka signs free trade deal with Thailand

In Sri Lanka’s pursuit of transforming into a high-income country by 2048, Sri Lanka signed a free trade agreement with Thailand, i.e., the Sri Lanka-Thailand Free Trade Agreement (SLTFTA), on 3 February 2024. The move intends to boost market opportunities, with negotiations encompassing various areas, including trade in goods, investment, customs procedure, and intellectual property rights, and expand market opportunities for Sri Lanka.

For more information, visit: <https://pmd.gov.lk/news/historic-agreements-strengthen-ties-between-sri-lanka-and-thailand/>

IMF staff concludes visit to Sri Lanka

A delegation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), headed by Mr. Peter Breuer, recently concluded a visit to



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Sri Lanka from 11 to 19 January 2024. The purpose of the visit was to engage in discussions regarding the country's macroeconomic developments and the implementation of economic and financial policies under the EFF arrangement. The IMF and the Sri Lankan authorities reached a staff-level agreement on economic policies to conclude the first review of the 48-month EFF-supported program in October 2023, following which Sri Lanka would have access to SDR 254 million (about US\$330 million) in financing once the review is approved by IMF Management and IMF Executive Board. On 12 December 2023, the IMF Board completed the first review under the 48-month Extended Fund Facility with Sri Lanka, providing the country with access to SDR 254 million (about US\$337 million) to support its economic policies and reforms.

For more information, visit: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/01/18/pr2414-sri-lanka-imf-staff-concludes-visit>; <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/10/19/pr23357-sri-lanka-imf-reaches-sla-on-the-review-of-sri-lanka-extended-fund-facility-arrangement>; and

<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/12/12/pr23439-sri-lanka-imf-executive-board-completes-first-review-under-eff-arrangement>

Taiwan

Taiwan urges support for its participation in the Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

On 23 January 2024, the Taiwan government called for support for Taiwan's participation in the IPEF to seek tighter economic ties between the US and Taiwan. Taiwan was not invited to join the IPEF, a US initiative aimed at deepening its economic engagement and building up a bulwark against Mainland China's growing influence in the region. Currently, 14 partnering countries have joined the initiative to negotiate the issues of trade, supply chains, clean energy, and tax and anti-corruption.

For more information visit: <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202401230010>

Taiwan responds to China's suspension of select tariff reductions under the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA)

On 21 December 2023, the government of Mainland China announced that it will suspend tariff relief under the ECFA on imports of 12 Taiwanese petrochemical products from 1 January 2024. The Taiwan government sees this announcement as "regrettable", and urges that any trade disputes be handled through the World Trade Organization, of which both sides are members. The Petrochemical Industry Association of Taiwan believes that the effects of the reinstated tariffs are likely to be felt up and down the industry's supply chains.

For more information visit: <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202312210011>

Thailand

Thailand hosts Cambodian Prime Minister on first official visit

On 7 February 2024, Thailand hosted Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet for his first official visit to the country. During the visit, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to further talks regarding the joint exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in the Overlapping Claims Area (OCA), an approximately 27,000 square-kilometre maritime area disputed between the two sides. Talks on the OCA commenced later in February 2024. Thailand has stated that discussions on joint exploitation should occur "*simultaneously*" with the resolution of maritime delimitation issues.

Further details are available here: <https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/postpr070224-2?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c306000683e>

Vietnam

Vietnamese Prime Minister directs ministries to enhance climate change mitigation efforts and develop carbon markets framework

On 2 May 2024, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh directed the Vietnamese Ministries of Industry and Trade, Transport, Construction, Agriculture and Rural Development, and Natural Resources and Environment



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to issue greenhouse gas mitigation plans. The Prime Minister's directive also tasked ministries with establishing a national carbon credit registration system, and with conducting an analysis of Vietnamese forests to determine the potential for carbon credit sales.

Further information is available here: <https://vietnam-news.vn/environment/1655040/pm-orders-intensified-carbon-credit-supervision.html#:~:text=The%20directive%20stresses%20the%20urgency.carbon%20markets%20and%20management%20mechanisms> ■