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CHINA

Next Generation Frigate for PLA Navy

The Chinese Navy recently launched an upgrade of the Type 054A guided missile frigate. The new version, known as Type 054B is reported to be [bigger and faster](#). According to Chinese news media, the new-generation frigate “will feature a longer operational range, more functions and stronger combat capability”. One of the senior researchers from the PLA Naval Military Studies Research Institute closely following the launch, has informed that “Based on public information, the new frigate may be capable of [carrying land-attack cruise missiles](#) that will enable it to hit ground targets, a capability that previous Chinese frigates do not have”. Further the new frigate will also contain better information processing capacity and stealth design. Another military commentator highlighted that the new ship is suited for ocean operations far from Chinese coasts. It will play an [important escort role](#) in an aircraft battle carrier group, as the Type 054B frigate will be able to hunt hostile submarines on the periphery of the carrier group and boost the air defence network of the destroyers by conducting anti-aircraft and anti-missile operations. The next-generation frigate was launched at a China State Shipbuilding Corporation shipyard in Shanghai.

Australia and China High-Level Dialogue

On 7 September, Australia and China [held high-level talks](#) after an interval of three-years. The dialogue, in Beijing, primarily focused on trade, people-to-people contact, and security. During the discussions, Craig Emerson, the head of the Australian

delegation, acknowledged positive steps but emphasized the need for further efforts, while Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, urged collaboration in resisting the remnants of the Cold War mentality and trade protectionism. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia-China relations had deteriorated when Canberra called for international investigation of the origin of coronavirus. Australia, joining the AUKUS, pushed bilateral ties further downhill. In response, China restricted tourist flow and market access to Australian products. According to observers, the dialogue marks a step towards resolving the diplomatic freeze in the bilateral ties.

Beijing Against US-Taiwan Military Contacts

Following publication of media reports regarding 14 sets of US Volcano anti-tank munition-laying systems to Taiwan and the latter’s participation in military exercises with US National Guard, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense expressed [strong opposition](#) to official and military exchanges between the US and Taiwan. During a press briefing on 9 September, Defence Ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei, conveyed China’s opposition to military and diplomatic contacts between Taipei and Washington. He called on the US to “honour its solemn commitment of not endorsing ‘Taiwan independence’”, cease all forms of military contact with Taiwan, and refrain from escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait”. Warning the DPP authorities, he observed that the government’s activities will only escalate tensions in the Taiwan Straits. Tan declared that the PLA will thwart any attempts towards Taiwan independence and staunchly safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

JAPAN

Japan Prepares for unified SDF command

The Japanese Ministry of Defense in its supplementary budget request, published a line item that is expected to accelerate its preparations to [establish](#) a unified command structure in the event of a contingency. The new office of Unified Commander of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces is expected to be housed within the Defense Ministry's office complex in Ichigaya at Tokyo, and is expected to have an initial staff of 240. The new joint commander is to have the same seniority as the chiefs of staff of the three services, and will have command over the Ground, Fleet and Air Defense components, in case of contingencies, including a Chinese invasion of Taiwan or a humanitarian disaster relief effort within Japan. The commander's office is also expected to handle integrated planning for such contingencies, and handle peacetime training for the three services. The commander will report to the Chief of Staff of the JSDF, who will continue to be the senior-most uniformed official advising the defence minister. However, the joint commander will in future, be the counterpart of the commander of the United States' Indo-Pacific Command.

TAIWAN

Taiwan's Indigenous Submarine

As part of its indigenous defence programme, Taiwan launched its indigenously developed *Hai Kun* (Narwhal) submarine in Kaohsiung City. The submarine was the first of its kind "[domestically produced](#)". Further, the

National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST) will supply "[more than 1,000 missiles](#)" to the Taiwanese military in 2024, which will consist the following types of missiles: 70 supersonic anti-ship *Hsiung Feng III* missiles, 131 *Hsiung Feng II* anti-ship and *Hsiung Sheng* cruise missiles and 96 *Sky Bow III* anti-air missiles. Besides, 50 *Wan Chien* air-to-ground cruise missiles, 150 *Sky Sword II* missiles "[which could be fired from land or from sea, and 48 Chien Hsiang attack drones](#)", are also likely to be supplied.

Another development revealed a serious weakness in the Taiwanese military setup. The Taiwanese Defence Minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng [admitted](#) that "one out [of] every three spies caught passing on confidential information to China did so while still serving in the military...and the other two-thirds of spy cases in the military involved retired officers." He provided this information to the Taiwanese Parliament (Legislative Yuan.)

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

ROK defence diplomacy in September

During the meeting between [Republic of Korea \(ROK\) President Yoon Suk Yeol and Indonesia President Joko Widodo](#) in September in Jakarta, both sides agreed to enhance defence and arms industry cooperation to deepen their 'special strategic partnership', apart from economic cooperation. The major issue discussed between the two sides was processing joint collaboration on the KF-21 fighter jet project. Reportedly, the development of the 4.5 generation fighter will cost 8.8 trillion won while Indonesia's contribution will be 20 per cent of the total cost.

It has been reported that Indonesia remains the [largest export destination](#) for Seoul, despite the latter facing payment delays from Indonesia. Amongst the ASEAN countries Indonesia is the only country to have imported a Korean submarine and Korean KT-1 and T-50 training aircraft.

In a separate development, in Seoul on 25 September, [ROK Vice Defence Minister Shin Beom-chul and his Turkish counterpart, Alpaslan Kavaklioglu](#) agreed to strengthen cooperation on defence sectors, including protection of classified military information and bolstering defence companies for the development of Turkish Altay tanks.

Putin and Kim's Diplomatic Rifle Exchange

Reportedly, on 12 September, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met at the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's Far East, where they exchanged rifles, following a summit. During his visit to Russia, Kim also visited a Russian [aircraft manufacturing facility](#) specializing in fighter jets and later inspected Russia's Pacific Fleet. However, details about his visit were not reported. Commenting on the visit, the Coordinator for Strategic Communications in the US National Security Council, Admiral John Kirby, [observed](#) that the visit is symbolic of the deepening ties between Pyongyang and Moscow. He informed that during his recent trip to North Korea, Russia's Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu had made efforts to persuade Pyongyang to supply [artillery ammunition](#) to Russia.