

## China Briefs

### President Xi's Visit and Rail Projects Highlight BRI Progress in SE Asia

The in-person visits of President Xi Jinping to the multi-nation summits in Southeast Asia in November, and the dramatic success of the ongoing rail projects led by China, mark the progress of the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) in this region and the larger Asia-Pacific. Xi attended the Group of 20 in Bali, Indonesia (Nov. 15-16) and the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting in Bangkok, Thailand (Nov. 14-19). Earlier, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang attended the ASEAN meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Nov. 10-13).

The China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor is one of the six main Eurasian corridors of the BRI, which “aims to better connect cities in this region with a network of railways and highways to facilitate” development, and for “strategic cooperation” (China State Council, 2020). In Thailand, the joint communique Nov. 19 of Xi and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-oh-cha spoke of moving forward on the China-Thailand-Laos Connectivity Development Corridor, which will connect the new China-Laos Railroad (1,000 km, completed in December 2021) to the Thai rail system, which itself is expanding with the China-Thailand Railway project.

In Indonesia, President Xi and President Joko Widodo Nov. 14 watched (by video-link) the trial run of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (JBHSR), under construction with Chinese technology. Expected to go into operation in June, 2023, the JBHSR is the link between China's BRI and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum—its

development infrastructure.

The two presidents together gave the command, “Begin,” and the sleek train slowly pulled out of the Tegalluar station, starting its trial run perfectly. The 143 km JBHSR will cut down the journey between Jakarta and Bandung to 40 minutes, from over three hours. On the sidelines of the Bangkok APEC summit, Xi had many meetings, including with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Adern, Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris.

President Xi said, in his Nov. 18 speech at the APEC CEO session, “The 21st century is the Asia-Pacific century. Our region, which accounts for one-third of the world's population, over 60% of the global economy, and close to half of global trade, is the most dynamic growth belt in the world.” He warned against those pushing a “Cold War mentality” and “bloc confrontation,” saying, “The Asia-Pacific is no one's backyard and should not become an arena for a big power contest.” Instead, “We need to build an Asia-Pacific security architecture to create conditions for ensuring economic development and durable peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.”

He committed China to “actively enhance the complementarity between the Belt and Road Initiative and the development strategies of other parties to jointly build a high-quality Asia-Pacific connectivity network.”

### China Readies Tokamak for Shipment to Thailand

China's HS HT-6M tokamak, one of four fusion devices developed by the

Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Plasma Physics (ASIPP), has been dismantled into 462 major parts and is ready for mid-December shipment to its new home at the Thailand Institute of Nuclear Technology (TINT). This is a huge operation. A specially constructed building will house the 84 ton tokamak, now renamed the Thailand Tokamak 1 (TT-1).

Xinhua reported Nov. 18 that the TT-1 is expected to arrive in Thailand in early January 2023. Some 60 Chinese scientists and engineers will be sent to Thailand in three groups, to help assemble, adjust and test the machine before its official launch early next year.

Thai engineers and scientists had been training for months at China's Institute of Plasma Physics in the Hefei fusion program, to prepare to operate TT-1. The project is based on an agreement that Thailand and China signed in 2018.

Matinon Maitreeborirak, an electrical engineer of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, who is also a coordinator of TT-1 and in charge of the project's plasma control system, stated “We have joined with TINT to develop Thailand's first tokamak.... Our goal right now is to train our staff to understand the basis of, and how to assemble, operate and maintain, the machine.”

### Fresh Three-Man Crew to China's Space Station, Joining Three Others

China sent off three fresh astronauts to the China Space Station Nov. 29, on a beautiful night launch, the first night launch in the Chinese

manned space program. The Shenzhou-15 crew worked for a few days with the Shenzhou-14 crew of three already at the station. This was the first time that there were six astronauts on board at the same time, and the first hand-off with both crews present, marked by a formal ceremony. The Shenzhou-14 crew remained on hand for some days while the new crew got acquainted with the station's functioning. This marks the official end of the construction phase of the Tiangong space station, and now the work of science and experimentation begins. The China National Space Administration also announced that recruitment for the fourth batch of astronauts has begun.

Another first for this mission is the presence of two crew members who are over 50 years old. One of them, Deng Qingming, an astronaut from the first batch of astronauts who had served as a back-up for several missions, will be flying for the first time. Fei Junlong, the commander of this mission, is 57 years old and flew 17 years ago as the commander on Shenzhou-6. Discussing his age at a pre-launch press conference on Nov. 18, Fei said, "Although we are the oldest crew in terms of average age, we're confident in our capabilities, as we are still in the 'state of youth.'"

The Shenzhou-14 crew has now touched down in the Gobi Desert.

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## Taiwan's Ruling DPP Loses Local Elections, President Resigns as Its Head

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on Taiwan was soundly defeated in the Nov. 26 local elections by the opposition party, Kuomintang (KMT), in voting for mayors and city councilmen. The DPP now controls only five of the 21 local government

offices, whereas the KMT won key mayoral races in Taipei, Taoyuan and Keelung.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen resigned as head of the DPP, which had been banking on a strategy of promoting tensions between Beijing and Taipei as part of the oligarchs' plans to threaten China with destabilization. She will continue to serve as President of Taiwan until the next election in 2024, but term limitations prevent her from running again.

Reuters, the British news agency, reported that "China's Taiwan Affairs Office said the result showed that mainstream Taiwanese public opinion was for peace, stability and 'a good life,' and that Beijing would keep working with Taiwan's people to promote peaceful relations and to oppose Taiwan independence and foreign interference."

Reuters quoted KMT Chairman Eric Chu on the victory: "'We will insist on defending the Republic of China and protecting democracy and freedom,' he told reporters, using Taiwan's official name. 'We will also work hard to keep regional peace.'"

On the relationship between local and national elections, recall that the DPP, after winning the 2016 presidency, saw similarly poor results in the 2018 local elections before securing a major victory in 2020, including Tsai's re-election. And note that among DPP members, Tsai's stance toward mainland China is relatively moderate. Vice President Lai, for example, is more strongly in favor of independence.

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## COVID in China: 1,400 Times Better than in U.S. on a Good Day

In China new COVID cases per day increased from Oct. 28 (1,168) to Nov. 21 (26,115), and then leveled off

in the last week (27,620 yesterday). This very high level (for China) is the equivalent of around 6,500 per day in the U.S., about a sixth of what is reported for the U.S. today. Moreover, the U.S. figure, due to the non-reporting of home testing, is a massive undercount.

Since China is testing and tracking so closely, its medical results are that much more impressive. COVID-19 deaths in China, zero for many weeks, zoomed to six in the last week. Compare this to the United States in the last week, which lost around 2,000 people to the virus, and Germany around 1,000. Per unit of population, the American and German deaths would be equivalent in China to 8,600 and 17-18,000, respectively, making the U.S. performance over 1,400 times worse, and that of Germany 2,800-3,000 times worse—not quite the same ballpark.

What are called two sub-variants (BA.F and BA.5.1.7) of Omicron's BA.5 variant broke out a month ago in China. Both evade immunity, and spread faster. So, by Nov. 11, China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its control protocols with 20 adjustments, and 10 days later the spread seems to have stabilized.

The faster transmission rate challenged how to test and track. Some local officials overreacted with too general, and sometimes unnecessary lockdowns; some did not move hard enough. So Chinese health officials have sent teams to the regions to work out problems in the process. As Wang Liping of China's CDC put it: "Epidemiological investigators, transport staff, and nucleic acid testing personnel should cooperate and exchange information, so as to grab the golden window of opportunity of 24 hours to prevail over the virus."

In China, six deaths are a national emergency.