

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China (internal)** Human Rights Watch 9 Sept and Amnesty International 24 Sept released reports accusing Xinjiang regional govt of conducting systematic mass campaign against Muslims involving arbitrary detention, torture, mistreatment, and pervasive controls on daily life; corroborates reporting since 2014 by NGOs, scholars and media describing widening scale of detentions without due process, political indoctrination, control over religious practice, restriction of movement and pervasive mass surveillance. Also called on China to provide information on all detainees, end measures, follow due process, and allow monitors access. New UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet in 10 Sept maiden speech called allegations deeply disturbing and urged China to provide access for her staff to monitor situation across country. Beijing rejected Bachelet's call, saying there was no need for UN monitors to visit Xinjiang. China's State Council denied govt was mistreating Muslims, describing camps as professional training and educational centres. U.S. State Department 11 Sept said it was "deeply troubled". Pakistan's Minister for Religious Affairs urged China to relax restrictions on Muslims that otherwise could "increase the chances of an extremist viewpoint growing" during 19 Sept meeting with China's ambassador in Islamabad, *Dawn* and *The Nation* reported.

➔ **China/Japan** Japan's defence minister 3 Sept issued statement claiming China has been unilaterally escalating its military activities in sea and air around Japan, including conducting nuclear submarine movements near waters of the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. Japan 29 Aug scrambled fighters to intercept PLA Air Force electronic warfare and surveillance aircraft crossing Sea of Japan and East China Sea. *Sankei* newspaper 11 Sept reported that Japan plans to develop micro radar satellite systems to support its monitoring activities around East China Sea, including disputed islands it controls, to "cope with China's recent ambitious maritime expansion". Despite ongoing military friction, *Sankei* 1 Sept reported that PM Abe told it in interview that relations with China are now on "normal track". At 12 Sept meeting with Abe at Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, China's President Xi echoed Abe's "normal track" language, while Abe said they had been "moving in the direction of great improvement." Japan and U.S. conducted combined exercises flying B-52 bombers and fighters over East China Sea and Sea of Japan 27 Sept, drawing objection from China.

⬆ **Korean Peninsula** South Korean President Moon visited Pyongyang 18-20 Sept for his third summit meeting this year with North Korea's Kim Jong-un, discussing denuclearisation, progress toward permanent peace, and prospects for North-South economic integration; issued Pyongyang Declaration stating Kim agreed to allow international observers to oversee dismantling of missile test site and launch pad, while expressing "willingness" to permanently dismantle Yeongbyeon nuclear complex provided U.S. takes unspecified "corresponding measures". Still no commitments to providing nuclear inventory or clear denuclearisation timeline. In potential clash with sanctions enforcement, declaration called for rail and road links

to be reconnected by year-end and proposals to reopen tours to Mt. Kungang and Kaesong Industrial Complex. Summit came just after Pyongyang and Seoul opened joint liaison office in Kaesong region 14 Sept to facilitate communication and cooperation. U.S. 17 Sept convened urgent meeting of UN Security Council following confidential UN Panel of Experts report that reportedly cited Chinese and Russian help for North Korean sanctions evasion. Russia and China at 27 Sept Security Council meeting pushed for easing of sanctions to incentivise North Korea to open up; U.S. disagreed. U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo met with North Korean FM Ri Yong Ho on sidelines of UN General Assembly 26 Sept; Pompeo expected to visit Pyongyang in Oct to prepare for second U.S.-North Korea summit; U.S. President Trump praised Kim, said he did not have a time frame for denuclearisation, and said sanctions must stay for now. Widely rumoured visit by Chinese President Xi to Pyongyang to attend country's 70th anniversary celebrations did not materialise; attending instead, Politburo Standing Committee member Li Zhanshu met with Kim Jong-un 10 Sept, described China's hopes that North Korea and U.S. will implement bilateral summit agreements and declared China's commitment to full denuclearisation of peninsula. Anniversary parade in Pyongyang 9 Sept conspicuously omitted displays of provocative military hardware; Trump described absence of ostensibly nuclear-capable inter-continental ballistic missiles as "big and very positive statement" by North.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** Taipei continued efforts to shore up diplomatic recognition with support from U.S.. Four U.S. senators 3 Sept introduced draft "Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act" that would authorise State Department to downgrade relations with govts that take adverse action against Taiwan. Signalling displeasure with countries that recently severed ties with Taipei, U.S. 7 Sept said it had recalled its ambassadors to Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. Four of seventeen remaining countries recognising Taiwan — Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) — reiterated their support. Following Vatican-China agreement on bishops, Taiwan 27 Sept said diplomatic relations with Vatican are stable. U.S. 24 Sept approved sale of spare parts for F-16 fighter planes and other military aircraft to Taiwan. European Parliament report 29 Aug called for EU and its member states to urge China "to refrain from further military provocation towards Taiwan and endangering peace and stability". China's Taiwan Affairs Office 16 Sept accused island's intelligence agencies of conducting espionage and infiltration activities on mainland, called on Taipei to immediately stop "to prevent further damage to the increasingly complicated cross-Straits relations"; Taipei dismissed reports.

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## South Asia

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➔ **\* Afghanistan** Political tensions rose ahead of 20 Oct parliamentary elections that many fear will be tainted by fraud, amid concerns that Taliban and Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) could step up attacks. Military operations intensified and attacks on civilians remained high during Sept; Taliban claimed to have overrun Jani Khel district in Paktia province (east) 3 Sept and Khomab district in Jowzjan province (north) 10 Sept, although authorities disputed claims. Taliban 8 Sept overran significant areas in Baghlan province's Baghlan Markazi district (north); govt forces 11 Sept claimed to have retaken part of area. Taliban also overran

Daimirdad district, Maidan Wardak province in centre 10 Sept, several outposts near provincial capital of Sar-i Pul province (north), and outposts across western province Farah. Military also intensified operations, killing almost 300 Taliban 10-13 Sept according to defence ministry; UN mission 10 Sept said despite Taliban onslaught there were “no sustained changes in territorial control” in previous three months. IS-KP-claimed suicide bombing and car bomb attack 5 Sept at wrestling club in area home to predominantly Shiite and Hazara minorities west of Kabul killing 26; and suspected suicide bomb attack 11 Sept at Afghan-Pakistan border crossing Momand Dara district, Nangarhar province, targeting crowd demanding arrest of police commander and his family for alleged criminal activities, killing 72; some accused commander in question of facilitating attack. Ahead of 20 Oct vote, range of parties and groups continued to oppose electoral preparations, demanding biometric-based voter registry and mounting protests that briefly closed election commission offices in Kabul and several provincial capitals. U.S. Sec State 4 Sept appointed Zalmay Khalilzad, Afghan-born former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, as special envoy to Afghan peace effort, interpreted as sign of renewed U.S. focus. Planned Russian-hosted peace conference 4 Sept, involving representatives from twelve countries plus Taliban delegation, was postponed. Taliban 28 Sept denied reports they had met with Afghan govt delegation in Saudi Arabia to discuss security around elections.

➡ **Bangladesh** Awami League (AL) govt continued arrests and detentions of critics; 6 Sept arrested prominent road safety campaigner Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, who leads student protests against unsafe transport, on extortion charges; human rights groups dismissed charges. Bangladeshi and international activists and artists called on govt to release photographer and activist Shahidul Alam, arrested under internet laws in Aug for criticising govt’s crackdown on student demonstrators. AL majority in parliament 19 Sept passed Digital Security Act, rejecting criticism that law gives police power to arrest citizens for hurting religious sentiments or inciting violence online; Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar claimed act was only to protect state and citizens from cyber crimes. State Minister for Information Tarana Halim 12 Sept announced establishment of Rumor Identification and Removal Centre to monitor social media sites; critics see move as attempt to stifle free speech ahead of general elections in Dec. Opposition Bangladesh National Party 12 Sept said they would not allow elections to go ahead without release of imprisoned leader Khaleda Zia, currently jailed for corruption and with further criminal cases against her pending.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Approximately 40 suspected Maoist rebels 23 Sept reportedly surrounded cars of one former and one current Telugu Desam Party (TDP) politicians and shot them dead during official visit to Dumbriguda Mandal area, Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh.

➡ **Kashmir** In Indian-administered Kashmir, militants continued targeting policemen with four killed by suspected militants 17-20 Sept in Jammu and Kashmir. Indian security forces 27 Sept shot dead one civilian reportedly in crossfire during gunfight with alleged militants in Qamarwari area of Srinagar, leading to protests against Indian rule across region. New Jammu and Kashmir governor Satya Pal Malik 12 Sept requested Supreme Court defer controversial legal challenge to Article 35-A of constitution, which provides special rights and privileges to Jammu and Kashmir’s permanent residents; court deferred hearing. Malik 2 Sept met visiting

Defence Minister Sitharaman and army chief Bipin Rawat for talks on security and governance issues, at same time as search operations were ongoing against suspected militants including in Pulwana district. India and U.S. 6 Sept released joint statement calling on Pakistan to ensure its territory is “not used to launch attacks”; Pakistan’s foreign ministry protested. Pakistani military claimed Pakistani civilians killed in firing across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) 4 Sept and 10 Sept. Leader of Pakistan-administered Kashmir Farooq Haider Khan 30 Sept accused Indian troops of shooting at his helicopter while it flew close to LoC; Indian army said helicopter had violated Indian airspace, which Pakistan denied. Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry 20 Sept confirmed PM Khan wrote to Indian counterpart Modi 14 Sept calling for resumption of bilateral dialogue on outstanding issues, including disputes over Kashmir and terrorism, and proposed FMs meet during late Sept UN General Assembly; India 20 Sept agreed to talks but cancelled next day; Indian foreign ministry said meeting was called off after “brutal” killing of security personnel by Pakistan-based entities and for issuing postage stamps of Kashmir rebel commander killed in 2016. Indian ambassador to Pakistan 7 Sept expressed optimism about relations under new govt but cautioned “terrorism is a deal breaker”. Tensions also remained over sharing of river waters; Pakistan late Aug reiterated objection to two Indian hydropower projects on Chenab River it claims violates 1960 Indus Water Treaty in bilateral meeting in Lahore. Indian army chief Rawat 24 Sept said India should carry out another “surgical strike” against “terror launch pads” in Pakistan; in 2016 India claimed, and Pakistan denied, that such strikes had taken place.

↑ **Maldives** In surprise result in 23 Sept presidential elections, united opposition candidate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih defeated incumbent President Yameen; Solih, who won with 58.3% compared with Yameen’s 41.7%, said vote showed country wanted “change, peace and justice”. Yameen, accused of political repression in run-up to vote, defended his record as president but admitted defeat 24 Sept. Electoral commission 26 Sept said Yameen’s Progressive Party of Maldives had requested delay in publication of final results, sparking opposition concerns it would attempt to annul results; however police and army same day said they would uphold result, and electoral commission officially declared Solih as victor 29 Sept.

➔ **Nepal** At 19 Sept Constitution Day event, PM Oli claimed rights-based movements “should be history” and focus should now be on “prosperity and development”; Oli also criticised recent public protests against govt’s increasing limitations of civil liberties. Three years since promulgation of Sept 2015 constitution, amendments demanded by southern plains-based Madhesi parties related to redrawing new federal provincial boundaries, equal rights for naturalised citizens, population-based provincial representation in upper house of parliament (all seven provinces currently get eight seats) remain unaddressed; Madhesi parties’ agitation for amendments waned considerably following 2017 elections. Nepal Army withdrew from participating in mid-Sept joint military exercise between Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries initiated by India following 30-31 Aug summit after criticism from both opposition and ruling party leaders about lack of discussion within parliament and lack of consultation with defence or foreign ministries. BIMSTEC controversy contributed to growing tensions within ruling Nepal Communist Party, with senior leaders reportedly discontent with Oli’s monopolising of leadership. NCP

co-chair and former Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited India and China in Sept and met Indian PM Modi among others; visits reportedly linked to Dahal's aspirations for prime ministership.

➡ **Pakistan** PM Imran Khan's new Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) govt faced domestic and international challenges, including radical extremists threatening to besiege capital, military influence on policy, and U.S. pressure to end terrorist and militant sanctuaries. PTI came under pressure from late Aug as extremist Tehreek-i-Labaik Islam (Labaik, political party of Barelvi radical Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah) launched protest march from Punjab to Islamabad demanding govt sever relations with Netherlands over planned "blasphemous" cartoon contest by Dutch far-right; Labaik called off march 31 Aug after contest was cancelled. Govt 7 Sept removed Atif Mian, from minority Ahmadi sect, from Economic Advisory Council, reportedly under pressure from Labaik. On foreign policy front, U.S. Sec State Pompeo 5 Sept visited Islamabad amid tensions over allegations of Pakistani assistance to Afghan Taliban; ahead of talks, U.S. defence department 1 Sept proposed to reprogram \$300mn of withheld coalition support funds citing lack of Pakistani support of U.S. South Asia strategy. Khan 6 Sept said Pakistan would not be "part of anyone else's war". Khan same day insisted there was no divide between civil and military leadership; amid reports of split between cabinet and military high command on direction of high-profile China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), govt reportedly reviewing scale of projects; army chief reiterated "CPEC was Pakistan's economic future"; govt 20 Sept announced Saudi Arabia agreed to invest "heavily" in CPEC. Insecurity persisted with militants killing three soldiers in attack in North Waziristan tribal district (west) 13 Sept. Militants 18 Sept killed two paramilitary troops in shooting in Killa Saifullah district, Balochistan (south west). Parliament 4 Sept elected PTI's nominee Arif Alvi President, with opposition fractured and unable to put up joint candidate. Islamabad High Court 19 Sept suspended sentences against Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief and former PM Sharif, PTI govt's most prominent opponent, and his daughter and son-in-law, while hearing evidence in appeals against their conviction for corruption.

➡ **Sri Lanka** Mass "joint opposition" rally 5 Sept, organised by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's son Namal as part of Rajapaksa family political comeback attempt, attracted some 40,000-50,000, falling far short of predicted crowds of 200,000. Divisions grew within Rajapaksa family over who should be candidate for 2019 presidential election; in 13 Sept interview with Indian newspaper during visit to Delhi, Mahinda criticised constitutional change that bars Namal from running, and suggested he himself may attempt another run despite it being constitutionally barred. President Sirisena in 8 Sept speech promised statement at upcoming UN General Assembly (UNGA) to "vindicate the Security Forces from all allegations levelled against them" for conduct at end of 26-year civil war, and told newspaper editors 14 Sept he would formally request UN Human Rights Council (UNOCHR) make changes to 2015 resolution to "give us some concession to resolve this issue [of war crimes allegations]". Eventual 26 Sept UNGA speech praised "yeoman service rendered by our Security Forces in defeating a dreaded terrorist organization" and requested member states to "allow us space to resolve our problems and to progress as an independent country". Following widely reported presidential intervention into criminal cases implicating military officials, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) spokesman 13 Sept announced TNA now supported an international judicial process

for war-related crimes. Two former cabinet members acknowledged in 15 Sept media interview that govt forces had executed LTTE (“Tamil Tigers”) leaders at end of war. Cabinet 11 Sept approved new draft of proposed Counter Terrorism Act (CTA), with improved rights protections, designed to fulfil pledge to UNOCHR and EU to replace much-vilified Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Eight Tamils detained under PTA began hunger strike 14 Sept to protest long delays in their trials; in 26 Sept meeting with TNA leaders, govt officials repeated earlier promises to expedite cases.

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## South East Asia

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➔ **Cambodia** Amid wave of pardons for govt opponents following July general election, in which Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) won all 125 parliamentary seats, court 10 Sept granted bail to former Cambodian National Rescue Party (CRNP) leader Khem Sokha, jailed Sept 2017 and awaiting trial for treason, and placed him under house arrest.

➔ **Indonesia** Authorities 4 Sept reported police shot dead two suspected militants and arrested five while seeking perpetrators of late Aug shooting of two traffic police in West Java, believed to be members of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah. Local media reported up to 79 people arrested after demonstrating peacefully in provincial capital Jayapura 4 Sept calling for self-determination; students protested 24 Sept supporting efforts to take West Papua issue to UN General Assembly, 67 reportedly arrested. Earthquake and tsunami that struck Sulawesi island 28 Sept killed at least 844 people, with fears death toll could reach thousands.

➔ **Myanmar** International criticism of govt’s response to Rohingya crisis and treatment of jailed journalists continued, as did sporadic clashes between ethnic armed groups and military in north. Yangon court 3 Sept sentenced two local Reuters journalists to seven years’ prison with hard labour for violating Official Secrets Act, despite credible evidence that police had set them up and prosecution failing to make convincing case; journalists had been investigating killings of ten Rohingya by security forces and local villagers at time of their arrest in Dec 2017; case widely seen internationally as miscarriage of justice and bellwether for Myanmar’s declining press freedom. Speaking at World Economic Forum event in Vietnam 13 Sept, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi backed court’s action; also acknowledged that situation in Rakhine state “could have been handled better” and took responsibility for “political aspect” but declined to criticise what she termed “military aspect”. International Criminal Court 6 Sept ruled that it had jurisdiction over alleged forced deportation of Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh, even though Myanmar is not a state party, since part of the alleged crime occurred on territory of a state party (Bangladesh). Myanmar govt “resolutely rejected” ruling, calling it “the result of faulty procedure”, “manifest bad faith”, and “of dubious legal merit”. UN continues to express frustration at its lack of access to northern Rakhine state, despite MoU agreed by govt in May; on 12 Sept began two-week assessment in 23 villages in area selected by govt. In Rakhine State, tensions continued between authorities and Rakhine Buddhist majority; Sittwe court 10 Sept decided to confirm high treason charges, which carry life imprisonment, against Rakhine political leader and former lawmaker Dr. Aye Maung. Armed clashes involving ethnic groups remain relatively

limited, in part due to monsoon; sporadic fighting occurred in northern Shan State early Sept between troops of National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)-signatory Restoration Council of Shan State and non-signatory Ta'ang National Liberation Army, also in northern hills of Kayin State between military and Fifth Brigade of Karen National Union, an NCA signatory.

➔ **Philippines** Preparations underway for plebiscite on Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) to create new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR) amid attacks by suspected Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in south, and clashes continued between military and Abu Sayyaf and New People's Army (NPA) communist insurgency in the centre and north. Election commission 5 Sept scheduled plebiscite for 21 Jan 2019 in areas being considered for inclusion in BAR. Islamic State (ISIS)-linked BIFF suspected of responsibility for improvised explosive device in Sultan Kudarat provincial capital Isulan in Mindanao 2 Sept, which killed two and wounded over a dozen in second attack in a week. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal said attacks were attempt to derail peace efforts. Another bomb in Mindanao's General Santos City 16 Sept injured at least eight; bomb in North Cotabato's Midsayap same day caused no injuries. Authorities reported BIFF militants executed two farmers and injured two soldiers in attacks in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, 2 Sept. Gunfight between military and BIFF in Maguindanao's Datu Montawal town 7 Sept killed three suspected militants and one civilian. Military reported seven Abu Sayyaf killed and seventeen soldiers wounded in gunfights in Sulu's Patikul town 15 Sept, although local human rights group said they were civilians; military reported Abu Sayyaf militant killed in clash in area 10 Sept. Military 13 Sept reported 179 Abu Sayyaf had surrendered so far in 2018. Clashes between military and NPA continued, including in Negros Oriental province (centre), where clash with alleged NPA 3 Sept forced hundreds of civilians to flee; and police 12 Sept reported ambush by NPA on truck carrying civilians, killing at least nine; army reported two NPA militants and one soldier killed in separate clashes 13 Sept. Military requested President Duterte issue executive order to create national inter-agency task force to end insurgency. Duterte, facing two charges of crimes against humanity at International Criminal Court over thousands of alleged extrajudicial killings as part of his "war on drugs", in 27 Sept speech appeared to admit responsibility for killings.

➔ **South China Sea** U.S., UK and Japan naval and overflight activities in South China Sea (SCS) drew criticism from Beijing, most notably U.S. flying B-52 bombers over SCS late Aug and Sept, which U.S. said were part of "regularly scheduled operations", but which Beijing called "provocative". Tensions already inflamed by U.S.-China trade war and U.S. assistance to Taiwan (see Taiwan Strait). China 22 Sept summoned U.S. ambassador and postponed joint military talks, after U.S. 20 Sept sanctioned Chinese military agency for buying Russian fighter jets and surface-to-air missile system; also cancelled high-level military visit to Washington and denied request for U.S. navy port call in Hong Kong. U.S. Navy destroyer USS Decatur 30 Sept navigated within 12 nautical miles of features China controls in Spratly Islands. Japan 17 Sept announced its *Kuroshio* submarine had conducted anti-submarine warfare exercises with three Japanese warships before port call in Vietnam, in Japan's first public announcement of such drills which PM Abe said had been conducted in area for fifteen years; China called for halt to such actions. China's People's Liberation Army conducted live-fire flight training exercises near the SCS

19 September, *People's Daily* reported. UK's amphibious assault ship HMS *Albion* 31 Aug conducted freedom of navigation operation by sailing near disputed Paracel Islands en route to Vietnam; HMS *Argyll* headed to SCS after joint UK-Japan Indian Ocean drills 26 Sept. Australia's largest maritime military drills, Exercise Kakadu, began in Darwin 31 Aug, with 27 nations participating including China for first time. U.S. and India 6-7 Sept discussed security in Indo-Pacific and signed communications pact enabling equipment sales and closer military coordination, part of efforts to balance China's growing influence.

► **Thailand** Violence continued in Deep South, while royal approval of two election laws cleared way for vote in 2019. In ongoing Southern insurgency, gunmen killed two civilians in daylight attack in Thepha district, Songkhla province 2 Sept; militants 8 Sept killed two village defence volunteers and wounded two others in Chanae district, Narathiwat. Roadside IED targeted officials in Songkhla's Chanae district 9 Sept, no injuries; insurgents ambushed motorcycle-borne ranger patrol in Nong Chik district, Pattani 11 Sept, killing two and wounding four. Insurgents launched coordinated attacks on two Provincial Electricity Authority offices in Yala and Pattani 30 August, no injuries. Royal Gazette 12 Sept published king's approval of two final organic laws on election, removing the final legal obstacles for general election to proceed according to ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO)'s roadmap. Law on election of members of parliament will take effect 10 Dec, after which constitution requires a general election be held within 150 days. NCPO 14 Sept partially lifted ban on political activity, allowing political parties inter alia to select executives and contact members. Most political activity, including campaigning, still prohibited; govt said ban on political gatherings of five or more people and other political activities will be lifted mid-Dec. UN Secretary-General's annual report 12 Sept listed Thailand among 38 countries engaging in reprisals and intimidation "against civilians who cooperate with the UN to uphold human rights"; junta spokesman said accusation was meant to discredit govt.