

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China (internal)** Further reports emerged describing extensive growth of political re-education camps used for mass detention of Muslims in Xinjiang region. Jamestown Foundation report 5 Nov cited evidence of dramatic increases in Xinjiang local govt budgets for construction of security facilities, prisons and detention centres in areas with high concentration of ethnic minorities. China 6 Nov faced Universal Periodic Review by UN Human Rights Council; thirteen mostly Western countries expressed concern over China's treatment of minorities, calling on Beijing to release those arbitrarily detained and close camps; China rejected criticism and did not respond to requests to allow independent UN observers into region. Six UN officials 12 Nov penned letter to Beijing describing Xinjiang regulations and justifications for re-education centres as contrary to international human rights law, while group of fifteen Western ambassadors, spearheaded by Canada, co-signed letter to Xinjiang Party Secretary requesting meeting to discuss alleged human rights abuses against ethnic Uighurs; foreign ministry dismissed letter as interference in China's internal affairs. Coalition of 278 scholars issued statement 26 Nov calling on states and institutions to demand Beijing end detentions and impose sanctions. China's state media continued to frame camps as necessary and effective response to terrorism and extremism. China's ambassador to U.S. said any sanctions would draw "proportionate retaliation", Reuters reported 27 Nov. Chinese state media late Nov reported that authorities in Ningxia province, home to Hui Muslim minority, signed "cooperation anti-terrorism agreement" with officials in Xinjiang, prompting concerns among rights groups of possible spread of crackdown.

➔ **China/Japan** Chinese lieutenant-general led military officers responsible for East China Sea on visit to Japan 18-22 Nov; most senior delegation to visit since 2010, showing improving ties. U.S. and Japan held biennial "Keen Sword" Pacific maritime military exercises near Japan 29 Oct-8 Nov, joined by Canada for first time. PM Abe and U.S. VP Pence during 13 Nov meeting in Tokyo announced combined \$70bn infrastructure development commitment to Indo-Pacific region, seen as response to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Japanese media 27 Nov reported govt is considering upgrading Japan's two *Izumo*-class helicopter carriers to enable them to carry F-35B Lightning fighter jets; plans to acquire more jets; and may build a third such vessel.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** Talks between U.S. and North Korea almost ground to a halt with cancellation by North Korea of 7 Nov planned meeting in New York between U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo and North Korean counterpart Kim Yong-chol. Cancellation of talks followed statement from regime-linked North Korean think-tank floating idea that Pyongyang could restart nuclear activities if sanctions relief is not forthcoming. In interview with U.S. broadcaster 15 Nov, U.S. VP Mike Pence reaffirmed sanctions would stay in place until establishment of roadmap for North Korean denuclearisation, but avoided putting preconditions on holding of second U.S.-North Korea summit, declaring "it is imperative in this next summit that we come away with a plan for identifying all of the weapons ... all the development sites,

allowing for inspections of those sites and a plan for dismantling the nuclear weapons”. New U.S.-South Korea working group on North Korean issues meeting for first time 20 Nov coordinated UN Security Council waiver allowing joint survey to assess state of rail links between two Koreas; breaking with previous position, U.S. reportedly “expressed full and strong support” for joint survey; according to Sept Pyongyang Declaration, road and rail reconnection work should begin end-Nov/early Dec. U.S. 21 Nov announced planned Foal Eagle military exercise with South Korea early 2019 will be scaled down “to keep it at a level that will not be harmful to diplomacy”. U.S. think-tank CSIS 12 Nov released satellite photos reportedly showing that Pyongyang is maintaining over a dozen missile launch sites.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Commissioning two former U.S. warships for Taiwan’s navy 8 Nov, President Tsai said Taipei “will not retreat an inch” despite warnings from China over deepening defence ties with U.S.. U.S. VP Mike Pence 17 Nov in rare meeting with Taiwan’s representative at APEC said Trump administration will continue to uphold Taiwan Relations Act and “One-China Policy”. Taiwan officials early Nov accused China of trying to influence local elections. Ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) suffered major defeat in 24 Nov local elections, losing key cities to China-friendly opposition Kuomintang (KMT). In response, President Tsai resigned as DPP chair. In 24 Nov referendum, voters rejected proposal to compete as “Taiwan” rather than “Chinese Taipei” at Olympics; name change could have become obstacle to participation. U.S. Navy 29 Nov sent two ships through Taiwan Strait for third time this year, stepping up demonstrations of support for Taipei.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan** Taliban made further territorial gains and launched large-scale attacks on previously peaceful areas of Ghazni province, and govt forces suffered heavy casualties in Farah province. Major incidents included Taliban assaults 6-7 Nov and again from 20 Nov on Jaghori district (Ghazni province), overrunning govt positions and reportedly killing at least 30 soldiers; Taliban 28 Nov attacked British security firm, killing six including one Briton. Taliban roadside bomb 26 Nov killed three U.S. soldiers in Ghazni, worst loss of life for U.S. military so far in 2018 in Afghanistan. At least six killed in suicide attack on a demonstration in Kabul 12 Nov claimed by Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP). In Farah province, Taliban early Nov assaulted govt positions in Pusht-i Kuh, Khok-i Safed and Baka Bluk districts, killing dozens; and 26 Nov killed at least twenty police in ambush near Lash wa Juwayn district. Defence and interior ministers 14 Nov acknowledged serious threats in Ghazni, Ghor, Farah, Uruzgan and Kunduz provinces. Arrest of Hazara militia commander 25 Nov prompted further violent protests in Kabul, forcing govt to release him two days later. Suicide attacker 20 Nov killed at least 50 at gathering of religious scholars near Kabul Airport; Taliban condemned attack. IS-KP claimed responsibility for 23 Nov explosion in mosque in Afghan army base in eastern Khost province, killing at least 26. U.S. airstrike 27 Nov reportedly killed at least 23 civilians in Garmsir district (Helmand province). Delegations from Taliban and Afghanistan’s High Peace Council participated in international peace conference in Moscow 9 Nov, but reported no progress; Afghan delegation restated offer for unconditional direct peace talks with Taliban, while Taliban called intra-Afghan talks premature as long as Taliban are negotiating withdrawal of U.S. forces. U.S.

envoy Zalmay Khalilzad held talks with Taliban representatives in Doha 14-16 Nov; Taliban described meetings as “preliminary talks”, said “no agreement was reached on any issue”. President Ghani 28 Nov announced roadmap to peace with Taliban that he said would take at least five years. Complaints about alleged fraud and disenfranchisement during Oct parliamentary elections continued; full preliminary results delayed until 1 Dec.

➔ 🌟* **Bangladesh** Fears heightened over potential for election-related violence in atmosphere of political acrimony and mistrust, amid continuing clashes between opposition supporters and police. Ruling Awami League 8 Nov announced general election for 23 Dec, but four days later moved election date to 30 Dec ostensibly in response to demands from Bangladesh National Party (BNP)-led opposition alliance Jatiya Oikya Front (United National Front, UNF); govt rejected opposition demands to postpone polls by one month and create independent caretaker govt to oversee election. UNF 11 Nov agreed to participate in election “despite prevailing unfavourable conditions” (including continued imprisonment of BNP leader Khaleda Zia) “as part of its movement to restore democracy”. BNP supporters and police clashed in Dhaka 14 Nov, with some 40 people wounded; BNP 11 Nov claimed thousands of its supporters have been arrested since mid-2018 in ongoing govt crackdown. Court 15 Nov granted bail to photographer and activist Shahidul Alam, arrested under internet laws in Aug for criticising govt’s crackdown on student demonstrators. Following late Oct agreement with Myanmar on repatriation of Rohingya refugees (see Myanmar) govt 14 Nov announced voluntary repatriation would begin next day, with 2,260 people scheduled to return in groups of 150 per day; amid refugee protests, disappearance into hiding of many of those due to be repatriated, and international criticism, FM next day said “there is no question of forcible repatriation”, and govt subsequently said it would wait until after elections to decide course on repatriation.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Govt deployed 100,000 armed police to secure two-phase Chhattisgarh assembly election 12 and 20 Nov; polls saw 76% turnout despite Maoist boycott and threats. In Chhattisgarh state, four civilians and several security forces and suspected Maoist rebels were killed in clashes during month; group of 62 Maoists 6 Nov surrendered in Narayanpur district. Security forces 5 Nov shot dead five suspected Maoists, including two women, in Malkangiri district, Odisha state. Two suspected female Maoist rebels killed Nov 19 in encounter with security forces in Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra state.

➔ **Kashmir** Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik 21 Nov dissolved state legislative assembly, citing “impossibility of forming a stable government by the coming together of political parties with opposing ideologies”. Election Commission next day said new elections to be held within next six months. Violence in region continued; Indian security forces 30 Oct reported they killed two militants in Tral district, including nephew of Pakistan-based jihadist Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar; 1 Nov killed two suspected militants in Budgam district; 6 Nov killed two suspected militants and 25 Nov killed at least six suspected militants and one civilian youth in Shopian district; six militants killed 23 Nov in gun battle with security forces in Anantnag district. Authorities imposed curfew 2 Nov to forestall religious violence after armed men killed Anil Parihar, ruling BJP’s state secretary and his brother in Kishtwar town previous day. Reported death toll for 2018 – 400

according to Indian army figures – worst in a decade. Pakistani officials said cross-Line of Control (LoC) firing by Indian troops claimed several lives in Azad Jammu and Kashmir bordering villages including one woman killed 2 Nov, and 10 Nov critically injured five civilians. In wake of ceasefire violations in recent months, Indian and Pakistan armies 23 Nov held brigade commander-level meeting at Poonch-Rawlakote border crossing to recommit to 2003 ceasefire agreement. India 22 Nov approved building of new border entry point and road connecting northern State of Punjab to border with Pakistan, making it easier for Sikh pilgrims to visit holy site. India 23 Nov protested harassment and denial of access to their Islamabad-based High Commission officials at two centres of worship near Lahore to meet Indian pilgrims visiting Pakistan under 1974 Bilateral Protocol.

➡ **Maldives** During his swearing in ceremony 17 Nov, President Solih vowed to end corruption, investigate human rights violations allegedly committed under former President Yameen and restore justice.

➡ **Nepal** Criticism of Nepal Communist Party (NCP)-led govt continued to grow over its slow performance and increasing lack of transparency. Govt widely criticised for violating working procedure and not disclosing decisions taken in 11 Nov Council of Ministers meeting; media representatives described move as latest in effort to curb press freedom. PM K.P. Oli also initiated performance evaluation of his cabinet amid calls for a reshuffle. Oli was criticised for glorifying himself in bid to highlight govt's progress with full front-page advertisements featuring his photo across most major newspapers 27 Nov to roll out new Social Security policy; policy was first announced in 2009. Concerns raised by reports that govt is considering broadening National Intelligence Department mandate to allow intelligence-gathering on cabinet members, constitutional bodies, and non-state agencies. Senior NCP leaders frustrated with delays in holding meeting of party's Standing Committee to address increasing internal dissent, which grew over lack of consultation on recent ambassadorial appointments. Rift between federal and provincial govts regarding devolution of power widened following 4 Nov circular that new civil service staff for provincial and local govt would be recruited at federal level. Human rights activists called on govt to press Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to ensure safe return of Rohingya refugees during 29-30 Nov visit to Kathmandu for Asia Pacific Summit; Nepal one of 26 countries to abstain from voting on 16 Nov UN General Assembly resolution condemning human rights violations in Myanmar including against Rohingya Muslims.

➡ **Pakistan** Supreme Court's 31 Oct acquittal of Aasia Masih "Bibi", Christian woman sentenced to death in 2010 for blasphemy, prompted violent protests countrywide by Islamist groups, spearheaded by Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), political front of hardline Barelvi Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah. Protests ended 2 Nov after ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) struck deal with TLP, pledging to prevent Bibi from leaving Pakistan, not oppose review petition against Supreme Court judgment, and reportedly release religious activists detained for violent acts; perceived govt capitulation raised concerns that radical Islamist parties and groups would be further emboldened. Police arrested TLP leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi 13 Nov to "safeguard public life, property and order" after he refused to withdraw call for further protests; over 300 Rizvi supporters arrested in violent clashes with police. Amid ongoing economic downturn govt continued to seek external support including

assistance from China and International Monetary Fund bailout package; 20 Nov received \$1bn from Saudi Arabia, part of controversial support package agreed in Oct. Relations with U.S. worsened as President Trump in 18 Nov interview accused Pakistan of doing “nothing” for U.S. and assisting Afghan Taliban, prompting Khan to accuse U.S. of using Pakistan as “scapegoat for their failures” in Afghanistan. Several security personnel killed in ongoing attacks including in North Waziristan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Pakistani cleric and mentor of Afghan Taliban, Maulana Samiul Haq, killed in Rawalpindi, Punjab 2 Nov. Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for 17 Nov killing of ex-deputy inspector general of police in Quetta, Balochistan. Police 23 Nov killed three suspected suicide bombers attempting to attack Chinese consulate in Karachi; two police and two Pakistani civilians also killed in attack, claimed by separatist Balochistan Liberation Army; PM Khan ordered inquiry, calling attack “conspiracy” against strategic China-Pakistan cooperation. Explosion at market in Kalaya, Orakzai district shortly after killed at least 35; Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Month saw continued political paralysis and volatility amid strong resistance to President Sirisena’s unexpected and unconstitutional late Oct move to sack PM Wickremesinghe and install ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa as PM. With Rajapaksa unable to secure parliamentary majority, Sirisena 9 Nov announced dissolution of parliament and called new parliamentary elections 5 Jan, violating constitutional provisions. More than a dozen petitioners challenged Sirisena’s decision in Supreme Court, which 13 Nov placed interim stay on dissolution and called further hearings early Dec. Parliament reconvened 14 Nov, passing no confidence motion against Rajapaksa by voice vote after pro-Rajapaksa United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) MPs prevented roll-call vote; Rajapaksa and Sirisena rejected vote’s validity. United National Party (UNP) 15 Nov proposed second no confidence motion; UPFA MPs again disrupted proceedings and forced early adjournment. Violence broke out 16 Nov as Rajapaksa supporters threw chairs, cushions, books and chilli-laced water at speaker and police protecting him; majority of MPs rejected Rajapaksa in another voice-vote, again rejected by Rajapaksa and Sirisena. UPFA 18 Nov agreed to roll-call vote but next day refused to honour agreement. With UPFA boycotting, parliament 29 Nov passed UNP motion to deny funding to PM’s office as long as Rajapaksa holds office without parliamentary majority. Popular protests continued with tens of thousands marching in support of Rajapaksa 6 Nov, large pro-UNP rally 15 Nov. Amid warnings of long-term economic damage, rupee fell to record low and ratings agencies 20 Nov downgraded country’s credit. Foreign governments increased pressure on govt: EU ambassador told reporters 1 Nov GSP+ trade benefits, restored in 2017, were at risk if constitution not respected; Japan announced suspension of large development assistance package; and U.S. announced \$500mn aid was on hold; International Monetary Fund suspended ongoing currency support program pending political clarity.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** Month saw further reports of clashes between military and pro-independence movement West Papua Liberation Army in Papua province’s Highlands; two Liberation Army fighters reported killed in clash with police and soldiers in Lanny Jaya district 3 Nov, after shooting dead a man they believed was

spying for military. Police reportedly arbitrarily arrested over peaceful 100 pro-independence activists in Jayapura 19 Nov, releasing them next day. National Intelligence Agency reported findings that imams at dozens of mosques, including some in Jakarta attended by civil servants, were expressing support or sympathy for Islamic State (ISIS) and encouraging congregants to fight for it; also noted signs of radicalisation at university campuses.

➡ **Myanmar** Concerns continued over possible forced repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, while ethnic peace process appeared to enter fragile stage ahead of dry season with spike in fighting and all sides losing confidence in the current peace process. Fighting among ethnic armed organisations spiked in Shan state, specifically between Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and Shan State Army North (SSA-N), and between RCSS and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA); two largest armed groups' suspension of participation in ethnic peace process (Karen National Union late Oct and RCSS 2 Nov) dealt significant blow. Following 30 Oct agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh to proceed with limited repatriation of Rohingya refugees, planned return of some 2,260 scheduled to begin 15 Nov did not proceed after no one was willing to return; Bangladesh stated it will not proceed with repatriations until after its elections 30 Dec (see Bangladesh). UN and aid organisations had strongly criticised plan. Several reports emerged of refugees, fearful of forced returns, resuming dangerous boat journeys across Bay of Bengal, possibly aided by organised smuggling operations. On sidelines of ASEAN summit 11-15 Nov, Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad again criticised State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and govt's oppression of Rohingya; summit outcome statement 15 Nov stated need for accountability and creation of conditions in Rakhine state conducive for refugee returns. In 14 Nov meeting with Suu Kyi, U.S. VP Mike Pence called for progress on accountability for violence against Rohingya and for pardon of two Reuters journalists jailed in 2017. Govt criticised UN General Assembly's 16 Nov resolution which endorsed UN Fact-Finding Mission's report and establishment of Independent Mechanism to prepare prosecutorial files. With possibility of end to EU's Everything But Arms preferential trade scheme and pursuant uncertainty over future of garment industry reportedly having serious effect on business and investor sentiment, EU delegation visited early Nov to assess human rights environment.

➡ **Philippines** Preparations continued for Jan plebiscite on Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), while violence involving Islamic State (ISIS)-linked groups and New People's Army (NPA) persisted. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leader Murad Ebrahim visited national army HQ 19 Nov, reciprocating Oct visit by army chief of staff to MILF camp; during visit, MILF and military leaders discussed security preparations for 21 Jan plebiscite on creation of new Bangsamoro region through ratification of BOL, campaigning for which starts 7 Dec. Earlier, Moro National Liberation Front in 29 Oct meeting with Presidential Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza reiterated support for BOL and pledged to conduct information, education and communications campaign in their communities to support yes vote. Local officials in Maguindanao 8 Nov pledged support for joint security plan signed by police and army late Oct to tackle bomb attacks by ISIS-linked groups in region, which continued to clash with military during month; military late Nov announced operations to target militants ahead of plebiscite. As attacks blamed on communist NPA insurgent group continued, and peace talks remain stalled, govt 22 Nov

authorised deployment of more police and military personnel in central provinces of Samar, Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental and Bicol Region; later clarified order was not a prelude to declaration of martial law. Philippines Commission on Human Rights warned move could worsen situation and govt “should address the roots of violence and crime” to stop cycle of violence. Clashes with NPA also reported in Quezon and Aurora (north), Misamis Occidental (Mindanao), Iloilo (centre). Presidential palace 1 Nov announced creation of national task force to address communist insurgency. Discussion over whether to extend martial law in Mindanao beyond 31 Dec continued, with military recommending extension, citing ongoing threat from terrorism and NPA and support from some local govt officials. Presidential Peace Adviser Dureza resigned 27 Nov following corruption allegations against two officials in his office. Govt 20 Nov signed bilateral cooperation agreement with China.

➡ **South China Sea** U.S.-China rivalry and South China Sea (SCS) territorial disputes kept tensions high at Asia-Pacific meetings during month, while military exercises continued, and China signed bilateral cooperation agreements with Brunei and Philippines. U.S. Sec Defense James Mattis 9 Nov for first time publicly called on China to “withdraw its missile systems from disputed features” during U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue in Washington, said there would be no lessening of freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs); Chinese official criticised FONOPs as “excuse to pursue military actions” and described China’s island bases as necessary response to threat; in rare positive note, both committed to improve communication, including developing military-to-military Crisis Deconfliction and Communication Framework. At ASEAN summit in Singapore mid-Nov, Chinese Premier Li called for “non-littoral countries” to respect China-ASEAN efforts for peace and stability; U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton 13 Nov said U.S. would oppose any agreements limiting free passage in SCS. U.S. Navy cruiser 26 Nov sailed through Paracel Islands, drawing complaint from China over challenge to its maritime claims. China 1 Nov confirmed it is operating weather stations on features it controls in disputed Spratly archipelago; rival claimant Vietnam lodged formal protest. Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative 20 Nov released satellite imagery showing new Chinese platform at Bombay Reef in Paracel Islands, also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam. Japan’s PM Abe continued efforts to balance China’s regional influence, including agreeing to \$1.8bn bond deal assisting Malaysia and strengthening economic and security cooperation with Australia, Japan, U.S. and India (see China-Japan). U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 14 Nov report warned of China’s “expansionist strategy” and accelerated capacity to contest U.S. militarily. Head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command expressed similar concerns, called for larger navy and shifting ballistic missile defence systems onshore to free up capacity. U.S. conducted naval exercises with Brunei in SCS; announced “complex warfare operations” by two U.S. warships in Philippine Sea 15 Nov; flew B-52 bombers near SCS 19 Nov. China reportedly launched project to build unmanned deep-sea submarine science and defence base in SCS. Xi and Trump met at G20 summit in Argentina 30 Nov-1 Dec.

➡ **Thailand** Violence continued in Deep South and uncertainty continued over date for general election. In Deep South, attackers 17 Nov fired grenades and small arms rounds at Ranger base in Nong Chik district, Pattani; no casualties. Two motorcycle-borne gunmen shot dead man at tea shop in Bannang Sata district, Yala

18 Nov. On 25 Nov, two defence volunteers and assistant village head were killed in gun attack at a market in Thepa district, Songkhla; bomb attack on ranger patrol in Yaha district, Yala, injured one; and six attackers shot at rangers and defence volunteers in Rangae district, Narathiwat, no injuries. Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre 23 Oct reported that violent incidents in southernmost provinces have declined by 70% since 2011, with only 140 incidents to date in 2018 compared to 619 in 2011. National Security Council 20 Nov announced lifting of state of emergency – in effect in most districts in Deep South since 2005 – in Narathiwat province’s Sukhirin district, and imposition of 2008 Internal Security Act, in view of improved security situation. Govt yet to declare official date for general election, widely presumed to be 24 Feb 2019. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 17 Nov invoked Article 44 of 2014 Interim Constitution to give Electoral Commission (EC) power to redraw constituency boundaries, amid complaints over lack of public consultation and EC’s perceived lack of independence, seen as likely to benefit pro-regime parties. New constituency boundaries published in Royal Gazette 29 Nov.

Pacific

➔ **Papua New Guinea** At 1 Nov meeting Australian and PNG PMs agreed on joint redevelopment plan for Lombrum Naval Base on Manus Island; U.S. 17 Nov said it will support redevelopment. On sidelines of 17-18 Nov APEC summit in Papua New Guinea, both Australian and Chinese leaders hosted meetings with Pacific Island nation leaders.