

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** Ahead of proposed visit of Chinese President Xi to Japan in June, Japan and China continued efforts to improve relations; at bilateral talks in Beijing 14-15 April, Chinese FM Wang urged his counterpart not to restrict Chinese technology companies such as Huawei, adding countries should turn “competition into coordination”. Chinese defence ministry 25 April said govt was willing to enhance defence exchanges with Japan. Military exercises and operations continued; Japan Air Force 1 April scrambled jets to intercept Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) electronic warfare and surveillance plane and two bombers passing through Miyako strait in East China Sea, second scrambling of jets against Chinese aircraft in 48 hours. Japanese defence ministry 9 April announced F-35A stealth jet disappeared during training drill over Pacific, later confirming plane had crashed; amid concerns China and Russia were searching for wreckage to test classified technology of F-35A jets, Japan and U.S. sent out coastguard vessels and military aircrafts to search for plane.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** Diplomatic tensions persisted as North Korea responded angrily to U.S.-South Korean military exercises, while Chairman Kim Jong-un secured Russian diplomatic support during late-April summit with President Putin. U.S. and South Korea 22 April began combined military air exercise, prompting strong criticism from Pyongyang, which accused them of violating self-imposed 2018 freeze on joint military exercises, raising concerns that Pyongyang may respond militarily in coming weeks. Diplomatic manoeuvring continued; Kim 24-26 April travelled to Vladivostok, Russia to meet with President Putin, first joint summit since Putin and former leader Kim Jong-il met 2011. Kim secured unambiguous Russian support, with visit widely perceived as message to U.S. that govt can look to other sources of international back-up. Kim also ended visit early, implying possible dissatisfaction at outcome. Earlier, Pyongyang responded angrily after U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo agreed with characterisation of Kim Jong-un as a “tyrant” during Senate hearing; 18 April said it would not negotiate with U.S. if Pompeo was present and accused him of hypocrisy and incompetence for alleged failures at Hanoi summit; Pyongyang also commented on “fortunate... personal relationship” between Kim and President Trump. North Korean Vice FM Choe Son-hui 30 April said U.S. will face “undesired consequences” if it fails to revise its position by end 2019. South Korean lawmaker 24 April told media that North Korea had replaced hardline general Kim Yong-chol as chief negotiator and head of United Front Department (UFD, which manages relations with South Korea), installing in his place former head of civilian inter-Korean exchanges Jang Kum-chol, generally regarded as more diplomatic; Pyongyang also conducted “ideological audit” of UFD and according to some reports executed four officials over failed Hanoi summit. Japan 23 April abandoned its calls for “maximum pressure” on North Korea and removed description of “grave and imminent” threat from North Korea’s missile program in its annual foreign policy report, seen as attempt to encourage dialogue.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** President Tsai 4 April promised “forceful expulsion” of Chinese jets from Taiwanese airspace after two Chinese J-11 fighter jets crossed median line of Taiwan Strait 31 March, reportedly China’s first breach of traditionally-agreed maritime border since 1999; Chinese govt 10 April defended flights as routine and dismissed Tsai’s comments. Beijing 15 April said Chinese warships, bombers and reconnaissance aircraft conducted day of drills around Taiwan; Tsai denounced manoeuvres as “coercion”. Taiwanese Defence Ministry 15 April announced ten-year budget, rising annually to over \$13bn; U.S. State Department same day announced renewal of training of Taiwanese F-16 pilots and maintenance support ahead of July decision on Taiwan’s request to buy 66 F-16V fighter. American Institute in Taiwan 3 April announced U.S. Marines will guard Institute’s new compound in Taipei, due to be opened May. Tsai and U.S. officials 10 April commemorated 40th anniversary of Taiwan Relations Act in ceremony in Taipei. French warship passed through Taiwan Strait 6 April; China 25 April said it had lodged “stern representations” for “illegal” passage. U.S. 28 April sailed two warships through Taiwan strait, prompting China to express concern.

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan** Intra-Afghan peace dialogue stalled and spring fighting season began, while political tensions grew amid competition for influence over nascent peace process, delayed presidential election and extension of President Ghani’s mandate. Planned intra-Afghan dialogue on peace between Taliban and Afghan representatives scheduled for 20-21 April was postponed indefinitely 18 April, with organisers citing “lack of agreement around participation and representation”. Taliban accused govt of breaching agreements that participants could join in personal (not official) capacity and sabotaging dialogue, while opposition figures said they were not sufficiently represented. U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad 24 April returned to Kabul, building support for anticipated U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha early May. Seven out of eighteen candidates registered to contest presidential election mid-April announced boycott of govt’s 29 April national consultative meeting (*jirga*) aimed at rallying support behind govt’s position in process. Taliban dismissed meeting as “fake”, but gathering of thousands bolstered Ghani ahead of expected challenges to his legitimacy after expiry of his five-year mandate. After announcing start of its annual spring offensive 12 April, Taliban advanced on Kunduz city before being repelled by govt forces 14 April. Taliban targeted several district centres, attacking Murghab in Badghis province 31 March-20 April, and Ab Kamari district centre 5-6 April; security forces claimed to have retaken both. Govt sources reported more than 1,000 security forces killed in single month at start of annual fighting season. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) continued attacks on urban centres, killing ten in Jalalabad 6 April, and attacking govt ministry in Kabul 20 April, killing at least seven. IS-KP clashes with Taliban in Kunar province late March-early April reportedly displaced more than 21,000. UN 24 April reported govt and international coalition attacks were responsible for majority of civilians killed in first three months of 2019. Political tensions remained high: Supreme Court 22 April announced Ghani could stay in office beyond 22 May end of mandate until 28 Sept presidential election; eleven of eighteen presidential candidates said mandate extension was illegitimate and called for interim govt.

➔ **Bangladesh** Amid continuing political tensions, govt 1 April moved imprisoned opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) leader and former PM Khaleda Zia to hospital due to ill-health; Minister of Home Affairs 6 April told media that govt would release Zia on bail if application was filed. BNP 6 April said negotiations with govt on releasing Zia and sending her abroad for treatment were ongoing. Govt's decision reportedly rests on six BNP members – successful candidates in Dec general elections who refused to join parliament in protest at alleged electoral rigging – joining parliament before 30 April; one took oath 25 April and another four 29 April. MP from Gano Forum party defied his party to take parliamentary oath 2 April. Following violence around March local elections, rival factions of ruling-Awami League (AL) continued to clash; clashes between supporters of former and newly-elected AL officials in Bhahmanbaria district (east) left one dead 1 April, while clashes between two AL factions in Boalmari sub-district, Faridpur district (centre) left 40 injured 16 April. AL candidate's supporters reportedly attacked Hindu constituents of independent candidate in Sadar sub-district 24 March. Final phase of local elections anticipated for 18 June amid threat of opposition boycott and concerns over further outbreaks of violence. Police 29 April reported two suspected militants blew themselves up during security forces raid in Dhaka.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Maoists attacked officials around general election being held in phases 11 April-19 May. Suspected Maoist roadside bomb killed five people, including MP from ruling-Bharatiya Janata Party, in Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh state (east) 9 April; suspected Maoists 18 April killed polling official in Kandhamal district, Odisha (east). Maoist attacks on security forces continued; in Chhattisgarh, suspected Maoist rebels 4 April killed four members of security forces in Kander district and next day killed soldier during gunfight in Dhamatri district. Maoists and security forces 15 April clashed in Giridih district, Jharkhand state (east), leaving three suspected rebels and one soldier dead.

➔ **Kashmir** Relations between Pakistan and India remained tense with continued clashes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir), while within Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Indian security forces continued repression of separatists. In cross-LoC clashes, Pakistan claimed Indian fire killed three soldiers and one civilian 2 April and one civilian 15 April, while claiming retaliatory Pakistani fire killed five Indian troops 5 April. India 18 April suspended cross-LoC trade claiming it was used by “Pakistan-based elements” to traffic weapons, drugs and money. Pakistan 27 March formally rejected India's dossier holding militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed responsible for Feb attack on Indian security forces in J&K, saying it failed to prove involvement of Pakistan-based elements and asking for further evidence. Pakistan FM Qureshi 2 April asked U.S. to broker dialogue with India and 7 April said govt had informed UN Security Council that India intended to launch attack inside Pakistan later in month. Inside J&K, suppression continued with over 1,000 people reportedly arrested since deadly Feb attack; security forces 25 April claimed to have killed two militants in gunfight in Anantnag district (centre). J&K residents 18 April voted in general election amid calls from separatists for boycott and threats from militants, and reports of clashes between protesters and security forces; reported turnout 45.5% in J&K but under 10% in some constituencies including Srinagar. Ruling-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 8 April released election manifesto supporting

abrogation of articles 35-A and 370 of Constitution that give J&K special status, while main opposition Indian National Congress committed to amending law that gives impunity to special forces in J&K.

➡ **Nepal** Concerns about Nepal Communist Party (NCP) govt's restrictions on civil liberties grew with new proposed legislation granting attorney general (AG) discretionary powers to decide on implementation of recommendations made by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); legislation would empower AG to request further evidence before registering NHRC-recommended cases. NHRC officials rejected move and claimed it would curtail commission's authority and undermine constitutionally-guaranteed autonomy. Rights activists also criticised govt demand that media houses share payroll and bank details of journalists as latest attempt to restrict press freedom; govt claim effort aimed at ensuring journalists being paid over minimum wage. Following widespread criticism of govt for previously ruling out negotiations with Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) led by hardline Maoist leader Netra Bikram Chand, reports claimed some ruling NCP leaders are reaching out to CPN leaders for informal talks. Second meeting of Inter-state Council (constitutionally mandated mechanism to resolve disputes between federal and provincial govts) 26 April dominated by tensions over lack of devolution of power to provinces, security arrangements and appointment of local administrators. Nepal Army 12 April denied reports of requesting to withdraw 231 troops guarding UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) HQ amid unrest in Tripoli and concerns about inadequate evacuation arrangements (see Libya).

➡ **Pakistan** Authorities opened corruption investigations into opposition leadership amid heightened political tensions, while militant attacks continued and tensions grew with Afghanistan and U.S. govts. National Accountability Bureau (NAB) launched new investigations into opposition figures, filing corruption cases against Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shahbaz Sharif 8 April and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) co-chairman and former President Asif Ali Zardari late March. Investigations come amid increased domestic criticism of govt: PPP strongly opposed govt's 18 April appointment to interior minister of former Intelligence Bureau chief Ijaz Hussain Shah, accused by former PM Benazir Bhutto of conspiring to kill her. PM Khan 9 April announced push to seize 30,000 madrasas in compliance with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) sanctions, reiterating govt stance against militant groups. Assurances coincide with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt's attempts to garner opposition support for constitutional amendment to allow third two-year term to military anti-terrorism courts which expired 30 March. Karachi Union of Journalists 5 April expressed concern over criminal investigations by intelligence agencies into four journalists; Reporters Without Borders 16 April criticised intimidation of media by security agencies. Militant attacks continued. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, assailants 8 April killed World Health Organization polio worker, and unclaimed bomb attack 27 April killed three paramilitaries, while clashes between Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants and security forces in Peshawar 16 April killed six suspected militants and one police officer. In Balochistan province, explosive device killed nineteen in Quetta 12 April, including eight Shia Hazaras; TPP claimed collaboration with anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Islamic State (ISIS) also claimed responsibility; bomb blast targeted convoy in Chaman same day, killing one; gunmen 18 April shot dead fourteen bus passengers, eleven of them from security forces; three Baloch militant groups claimed responsibility. Afghan govt

responded angrily to Khan's 26 March call for "neutral interim govt" in Kabul to hold "free and fair elections", recalling its ambassador, while U.S. Afghan envoy accused him of undermining negotiations with Taliban.

↓ **Sri Lanka** Series of coordinated suicide bomb attacks on churches and hotels claimed by Islamic State (ISIS) killed at least 253 and injured hundreds 21 April in country's deadliest terror attack. Three suicide bombers attacked Easter Sunday morning church services in Negombo (west), Batticaloa (east) and Colombo (west) while three others simultaneously targeted luxury hotels in Colombo. Later same day, two smaller explosions occurred in Colombo suburbs. Over 250 people killed in total, mostly Christians, some tourists, 500 injured. Govt shut down social media messaging services and declared national curfew; by end of month arrested more than 150 suspects linked to small Islamist militant group, National Towheed Jamaat (NTJ), which govt said carried out attacks with foreign support. Discovery of NTJ safe house in eastern town Sainthamaruthu 26 April led to gun battles and explosions that killed fifteen suspects. Govt 22 April declared state of emergency, giving police and military new broad powers of detention; president 29 April issued ban on face coverings, targeting niqab and burqas worn by some Sri Lankan Muslim women. ISIS 23 April claimed responsibility for attacks, releasing video of men it says were bombers. Govt's failure to act on multiple intelligence reports warning of attacks, including 4 April report based on Indian intelligence, prompted widespread criticism and speculation that president's ongoing battles with his prime minister contributed to failure to share information within govt. President Sirisena 25 April sacked Defence Secretary and took steps to remove Inspector General of police. Claiming govt had ignored threat of "Islamic extremism", former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa 26 April reiterated his candidacy for president, promising to prioritise "national security" over "human rights". Tensions ran high amid fears of intercommunal violence; Pakistani (Christian and Ahmadi Muslim) refugees living in Negombo forced to flee homes and live in makeshift camps after attacks by local Christians.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** Violence continued in Papua province, where tensions increased around national elections 17 April. Both incumbent President Widodo and his challenger, retired general Prabowo Subianto, claimed victory in presidential election; official results due 22 May, with private polls suggesting decisive lead for Widodo; Subianto continued to claim widespread fraud, raising concerns over contested result. Tensions heightened around general election in Papua's Nduga regency as military pursued West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA); WPLA claimed it had killed two Indonesian soldiers early April, denied by military; military reported gun attack on election organisers and security forces in Alama district 18 April. WPLA claimed to have prevented voting in 32 districts, but military said voting not affected despite some exchanges of gunfire in Timika district. Two soldiers reported injured in ambush 24 April. Nduga local administration 3 April investigation report concluded that military committed human rights violations during crackdown that started in Dec 2018, and urged govt to withdraw. Report claimed almost 20,000 displaced by fighting, while Front Line Defenders NGO reported over 32,000; military said just over 3,500 displaced by armed group and rejected the report's

findings. Group of Papuan lawyers 12 April submitted judicial review to Constitutional Court challenging legality of Indonesia's 1969 incorporation of Papua, saying that "Act of Free Choice" referendum was conducted in a way that "grossly violated the human rights of Papuans".

➡ **Myanmar** Regular, serious clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military continued, particularly in Mrauk-U, Buthidaung and Kyauktaw townships, Rakhine state. AA ambush in Buthidaung 5 April reportedly resulted in deaths of Myanmar army captain and some 20 soldiers he was leading; AA 9 April overran police compound and nearby artillery base in Mrauk-U, reportedly killing at least a dozen police and abducting family members. Military reportedly suffered heavy losses while retaking bases and called in airstrikes by fighter jets; civilian casualties reported. Rohingya villagers also caught in crossfire; at least seven and possibly many more killed when they came under helicopter fire in southern Buthidaung 3 April, believed to be case of mistaken identity. Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militant group also ambushed police vehicle 22 April; no deaths reported. Rakhine State govt 1 April imposed overnight curfew in urban and rural areas across five townships (Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Minbya). Ahead of anticipated arrival of monsoon, small number of Rohingya continued efforts to cross Bay of Bengal to Malaysia before sea conditions deteriorate. UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 2 April appointed U.S. citizen Nicholas Koumjian to head UN-established Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), which is expected to start work by end of 2019 to collect evidence and prepare prosecutorial files "on the most serious international crimes committed in Myanmar since 2011". President Win Myint issued amnesties for more than 17,000 prisoners to mark Myanmar new year; only four of estimated 364 political prisoners included. Supreme Court 23 April upheld sentence of two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, jailed for breaking Official Secrets Act in case that has attracted widespread international condemnation and concern over free speech.

➡ **Philippines** Clashes between Communist New People's Army (NPA) and security forces continued in Mindanao and in central regions as govt continued efforts to initiate local level negotiations following termination of peace talks with Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), while military operations continued against Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao. Speaking at campaign rally for 13 May general (not presidential) elections 13 April, President Duterte said he would create new peace panel to manage local-level negotiations with NPA. National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, established by Executive Order in Dec 2018, met for first time 15 April; Duterte ordered that cabinet member be assigned to each region to oversee peace and development efforts. Jose Maria Sison, exiled founding chair of CPP which has long rejected idea of local-level talks, described peace panel as "war panel". Several military and suspected NPA fighters killed in clashes during month, including two NPA killed in Davao del Sur 5 April; three suspected NPA in Negros Occidental 17 April; at least six soldiers in Samar 23 April. UN Humanitarian Agency reported almost 50,000 displaced by military operations against BIFF and remnants of Maute Group in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur during last week of April. Military continued offensives against Abu Sayyaf in Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi; several police, soldiers and suspected Abu Sayyaf fighters killed in clashes; at least three Abu Sayyaf and two hostages killed following rescue attempt off Banguingui, Simisa Island 5 April. Security forces arrested two brothers in Cagayan, northern Luzon 28

March, first arrest of suspected ISIS sympathisers outside Mindanao. As part of “normalisation” annex of Bangsamoro peace agreement, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) 29 March announced it had submitted names of 12,000 fighters to be decommissioned, representing 30% of total fighters to be decommissioned. Police 4 April killed four MILF in “misencounter” in Lanao del Sur; MILF said it would investigate. Tensions increased with China over maritime disputes (see South China Sea).

➡ **South China Sea** Amid Beijing’s reported deployment of hundreds of vessels in vicinity of Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in Spratly archipelago, confrontation between Philippines and China in South China Sea (SCS)/West Philippines Sea since late March evoked unusually stern rhetoric from President Duterte’s govt. Manila reportedly filed protest with Chinese embassy 29 March noting presence of Chinese vessels, many believed to be part of China’s maritime militia, near Pag-asa, where Philippines has been refurbishing facilities and repairing airstrip since late 2018; senior official 4 April called presence of Chinese vessels “illegal”, while Duterte same day said China should “lay off the Pag-asa”, and that he would tell soldiers to prepare for “suicide mission” if China were to attack or arrest Filipinos in area. Philippines govt spokesperson 12 April invoked Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague’s 2016 ruling that China has no legal basis to claim historical rights to area encompassed by “nine-dash line”; Duterte has previously preferred to set it aside in interests of stronger ties with China. In Beijing for Belt and Road Initiative Forum 25 April, Duterte and President Xi agreed to resolve issue bilaterally. Tensions coincided with 35th annual Balikatan joint military exercises 1-12 April, which saw U.S. deploy amphibious assault ship with twenty F-35B jets near disputed Scarborough Shoal which China seized from Philippines in 2012, marking new level of U.S. assertiveness in South China Sea. Philippines FM 16 April tweeted that country would take unspecified legal action against China for violating conventions on environmental protection. Two Vietnamese coastguard ships 27 April reportedly rammed Indonesian navy patrol vessel after it attempted to intercept illegal Vietnamese fishing boat off coast of Borneo; Indonesian navy detained twelve Vietnamese fishermen following clash.

➡ **Thailand** Ahead of final results of 24 March election due 9 May, ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) initiated raft of legal challenges against Future Forward Party, which came in third place with almost seven million votes on anti-junta platform, in apparent attempt to prevent it forming govt with Pheu Thai Party and five smaller parties. NCPO 3 April charged Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit with “sedition” in connection to role in 2015 anti-junta protest and violating regime orders prohibiting political gatherings of five or more people; Election Commission 23 April unanimously resolved to press charge against Thanathorn for alleged violation of media shareholding rules, which could disqualify him. Insurgent violence continued in southernmost provinces. In Pattani province, motorcycle-borne bomb wounded four policemen and villager in Khok Pho district 12 April; Muslim defence volunteer killed in drive-by shooting in Kapho district 16 April; two people killed in separate attacks 25 April. In Yala province, gunmen executed two Muslim border police in mosque in Than To district 5 April; gunmen killed assistant village headman in Muang district 17 April; gunmen shot dead rubber tapper in Bannang Sata 25 April.

Pacific

➔ **Solomon Islands** Riots broke out in capital Honiara 24 April after parliament appointed three-time PM Manasseh Sogavare, previously removed from office in 2017 no-confidence vote, for another term as PM following elections 3 April. Police used tear gas to disperse protesters and reportedly detained some 50 people, many in connection with looting and destruction of property.