

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** Tensions persisted amid continued Chinese military exercises. Japanese Ministry of Defence reported Chinese naval flotilla including Liaoning aircraft carrier 11 April passed through Miyako Strait in East China Sea, before sailing on past eastern and southern coasts of Taiwan to carry out drills; also reported flotilla returned to East China Sea through Miyako Strait 28 April (see Taiwan Strait). Tokyo 9 April announced Japanese air force scrambled jets to intercept Chinese military aircraft 675 times 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020, 5.8% increase compared to previous year.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** While speculation about health of DPRK leader Kim Jong-un increased, North Korea carried out further weapons tests and military exercises in continued demonstration of hard-line position, and South Korea's ruling party won landslide general election. Concerns and speculation about Kim's well-being arose as he remained out of public eye for over two weeks; meanwhile, Seoul and Beijing rejected reports Kim is critically ill. Pyongyang 9 April held artillery exercises overseen by DPRK leader Kim and 14 April tested possible cruise missiles and fighter jet-launched air-to-ground missiles; moves reportedly aimed at demonstrating regime strength domestically despite widely suspected COVID-19 outbreak. Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff 14 April downplayed tests, saying they were not "particularly provocative or threatening to us". Commander of U.S. forces in Korea 2 April said Pyongyang's claim of having no COVID-19 cases was "impossible", and that DPRK's March weapons tests had "increased tension". U.S. govt 15 April issued threat advisory warning about Pyongyang's "malicious cyber activities", saying it poses "significant threat to the integrity and stability of the international financial system", said DPRK uses cyber-attacks "to generate revenue for its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs". UN panel on sanctions 17 April released report claiming North Korea sharply increased trade in coal and oil products in 2019 with help of Chinese shipping industry in defiance of sanctions, but report removed from UN website same day. In South Korean general elections 15 April, incumbent-President Moon's Democratic Party and allies won landslide victory securing 180 seats (increase of 57) of 300 available in National Assembly; despite COVID-19 fears, turnout over 66%, highest in eighteen years. U.S.-South Korea tensions continued over agreement for sharing cost of maintaining 28,500 U.S. troops on Korean peninsula; Reuters 10 April reported U.S. President Trump rejected Seoul's offer of increased payment of at least 13% compared to previous accord.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** Tensions remained high amid series of tit-for-tat Chinese-American military manoeuvres close to Taiwan, and govt's relations remained strained with World Health Organization (WHO) and lack of membership in face of COVID-19 concerns. Chinese aircrafts – J-11 fighters, H-6 bomber, and KJ-500 surveillance aircraft – 10 April conducted drills near south of Taiwan and flew through Bashi Channel, body of water separating Taiwan from Philippines; later that day U.S. reconnaissance aircraft flew over area, while U.S. warship sailed

through Taiwan Strait. U.S. reconnaissance aircraft 11-12 April flew over waters south of Taiwan. Defence Ministry reported Chinese naval flotilla including Liaoning aircraft carrier 12 April passed eastern and southern coasts of Taiwan to carry out drills, having passed through Miyako Strait in East China Sea previous day (see China/Japan); Taiwanese navy scrambled ships to monitor situation. Amid continued tensions over Beijing's apparent blocking of Taipei from accessing information from WHO as it is not a member, organisation's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, a former Ethiopian health and Foreign Minister, 8 April said he had received personal abuse and death threats that originated from Taiwan, alleging foreign ministry "didn't disassociate themselves [from the abuse]"; foreign ministry next day released statement expressing "profound regret and strong protest regarding the false accusations".

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan** Amid ongoing domestic political crisis, violence in the north, north east and central provinces bordering Kabul continued at high levels. Clashes between Afghan forces and the Taliban in Balkh (north) and Takhar (north east) provinces 19 April killed over 25 security forces, while Taliban early April recaptured Yamgan district in Badakhshan Province (north east). Govt offensive advanced in Khamab district, Jawzjan province (north). In many other areas, Afghan forces remained in defensive posture, notably in Maidan Wardak province (centre) where small-scale Taliban attacks continued and focused on blocking govt access to Kabul-Ghazni highway. Levels of violence dropped in south due to labour-intensive cultivation of poppy harvest and in west due to seasonal flooding, and outbreak of COVID-19 in Herat province. Taliban yet to announce traditional spring offensive, often broadcast late-April; lack of announcement suspected to be part of non-public terms of Feb U.S.-Taliban agreement. Intra-Afghan negotiations remained stalled; Taliban and govt made limited progress on prisoner release, with totals yet to reach 5000 Taliban members and 1000 govt officials as stipulated in Feb agreement as pre-condition for intra-Afghan talks. U.S. military action such as airstrikes and night raids reportedly continued to decrease in volume. Intelligence service 4 April announced arrest of emir of Islamic State-Khorasan Province and other top members, though details of operations inconsistent. Following govt measures to contain COVID-19 spread, including restriction of intra-provincial travel, lockdown of urban centres and public health measures, unemployment rose and remittance wages fell, with scarcity of food and other basic commodities driving up market prices dramatically. Domestic political crisis continued following President Ghani and main opponent Abdullah Abdullah March standoff over establishment of new government; both sides yet to reach compromise despite reports of progress toward a deal that would see Abdullah play leadership role in peace process and preside over consultative council of political figures.

➔ **Bangladesh** Govt reportedly used COVID-19 crisis to silence critics, while security operations against alleged members of banned militant groups continued. Awami League govt accused of using COVID-19 to crackdown on dissenting voices following PM Hasina's 31 March warning against spreading COVID-19-related rumours and NGO Human Rights Watch same day alleging govt "silencing those who express concern over the govt's handling of the epidemic" using controversial

Digital Security Act. Media director of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 9 April said paramilitary force had established “Cyber News Verification Centre”, arresting ten and investigating 50 others for spreading “misinformation and rumours” about coronavirus. Workers in export-orientated garment industry continued to flout COVID-19 lockdown, imposed 26 March, holding mass protest rallies countrywide, including in Chittagong 18 April, and demanding wages following closure of factories, hundreds of which re-opened by end-April; hundreds continued protests throughout month including in Rangpur, Kurigram, Satkhira and Jessore demanding food and other assistance. Amid concern over potential COVID-19 spread in Rohingya refugee camps, Hasina 7 April ordered restriction of entry to camps in Cox’s Bazar district for all except govt officials and authorised personnel, with govt next day imposing restrictions on all but emergency services and prohibiting entry of foreigners. Bangladesh Coast Guard 15 April rescued 400 Rohingya refugees after their boat blocked from landing in Malaysia due to COVID-19 restrictions; dozens died and many of those rescued close to death said NGO Médecins Sans Frontières; incident raised fears of a repeat of 2015 Rohingya maritime migration crisis. By end of month, several other boats still at sea, also prevented from landing in Malaysia and blocked by Bangladesh re-entering its waters. As part of anti-militancy efforts, police 2 April claimed to have killed member of banned Sarbahara party during gunfight in Naogaon district; RAB 27 April detained two members of Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh in Sylhet District. Police 7 April arrested former army captain Abdul Majed, sentenced to death in 1998 for killing Bangladesh’s founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, in capital Dhaka; govt 12 April hanged Majed following President Hamid 8 April rejection of his appeal for clemency.

↓ **India (non-Kashmir)** Hate speech falsely accusing Muslims of propagating COVID-19 went unabated, fuelling intercommunal attacks, while clashes between security forces and Maoists persisted. Muslims widely accused on social media and some local media of intentionally spreading COVID-19 through “corona jihad” after govt officials determined large number of country’s cases linked to March gathering organised by Islamic organisation Tablighi Jamaat in capital Delhi. Although event took place prior to lockdown, senior member of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and minister of minority affairs, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, 2 April accused Tablighi Jamaat of “Talibani crime”; others called for leaders to be hanged or shot. Organisation of Islamic scholars, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, 6 April petitioned Supreme Court to call halt to fake news and media reports demonising Muslims over event, but Supreme Court 13 April said it would “not gag the press”; independent lawyers 23 April filed new petition. Despite some 400 Indian scientists 9 April refuting claims that Tablighi Jamaat was chiefly responsible for COVID-19 spreading, attacks on Muslims, boycott of their businesses and Muslim ban from some neighbourhoods persisted; attacks also reported against Muslim volunteers distributing food, including some by police and local BJP members. After Kuwait govt, United Arab Emirates Princess and Arab intelligentsia objected to online hate speech, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 19 April condemned “Islamophobic campaign in India”, called on govt to take steps to counter growing Islamophobia and protect Muslims. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 28 April classified India among countries “of particular concern” in its annual report. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), security operation 16 April killed Maoist in border area between Dantewada and Bijapur

districts; villagers same day discovered body of policeman reportedly killed by Maoists. Clashes between Maoists and security forces 17-29 April left four Maoists and one civilian dead in Sukma, Bijapur and Narayanpur districts. In Jharkhand state (east), three Maoists 4 April died in clashes with security forces in West Singhbhum district; Maoists 19 April shot dead civilian suspected of being police informer in West Singhbhum. In Maharashtra state (west), Maoists 8 April shot dead former police officer suspected of being informer in Gadchiroli district.

↓ **Kashmir** Militant attacks and counter-insurgency operations inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) sharply intensified, while clashes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) continued. Militant related-violence spiked in J&K: in Anantnag district, militants 2 April killed local resident and same day killed paramilitary officer; paramilitary forces said they had killed four alleged Hizbul Mujahideen militants in Kulgram district 4 April; next day, army claimed five suspected militants, who infiltrated across LoC, killed in clash in Kupwara district, which reportedly also killed five soldiers; police 8 April reported govt forces killed militant in clash in Baramulla district; following day, security forces killed alleged Jaish-e-Mohammed militant in Sopore town; police official 17 April said govt forces killed four militants in two separate clashes in Kishtwar and Shopian districts; security forces 26 April killed four alleged militants in Ashtal village, Kulgram. Cross-LoC fire between India and Pakistan continued amid increased hostile rhetoric on both sides. Following new set of domicile rules for J&K issued by Indian govt 1 April, easing rules for securing permanent residence, including for students, civil and military personnel and their children, Pakistani PM Khan next day tweeted law was attempt to “illegally alter the demography” of Kashmir “in violation of all international laws & treaties”; Indian external affairs ministry 4 April responded Islamabad would best serve J&K by “ending cross-border terrorism and desisting from its campaign of violence and false propaganda”. Pakistani army 9 April said it shot down Indian surveillance drone, though India denied ownership; India army 10 April reported Pakistani cross-LoC firing killed three civilians; Pakistani military said Indian firing seriously injured six civilians 11 April and killed young child 13 April; senior Indian commander 13 April alleged Pakistani army attempted to infiltrate COVID-19 infected people into Kashmir Valley, accusations Pakistan branded as “baseless”. Indian army chief 17 April accused Islamabad of “fomenting trouble” and “exporting terror” into Kashmir during pandemic; same day, Pakistani foreign ministry rejected allegations as “irresponsible” and “spurious”.

➡ **Nepal** Leadership disputes escalated within ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), threatening stability of PM KP Oli’s govt and drawing further attention to sluggish handling of COVID-19 pandemic. NCP Co-Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and senior leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, among others, demanded Oli’s resignation as PM and party chair for ignoring views of other party members in relation to Oli’s controversial legal move to issue two ordinances 20 April aimed at easing the threshold for registration of new political parties and appointments to Constitutional Council. Ordinances widely criticised for politically exploiting COVID-19 pandemic during which parliament is suspended, and for neglecting dissenting members of Oli’s own cabinet; ordinances eventually repealed 24 April by President Bidya Devi Bhandari. NCP govt’s stifling of dissent was in focus again with 22 April arrest of former bureaucrat Bhim Upadhyaya, a vocal critic of NCP

govt, for allegedly posting misinformation about COVID-19 pandemic and accused of defaming Oli and his cabinet members on social media; 13 other people charged under similar cybercrime offences over online posts related to COVID-19 during lockdown. World Food Programme 18 April warned of looming food insecurity due to significant reductions in harvest of wheat and other winter crops; govt seeking up to \$860mn in new donor funding to cover healthcare costs. Govt's continued refusal to re-admit Nepali citizens into country received widespread criticism with Supreme Court 17 April issuing interim order directing govt to rescue high-risk Nepali migrant workers stranded abroad following 22 March ban on incoming international flights; over 20,000 Nepali citizens in India remain unable to return due to border closure and thousands others stuck in lockdown in Gulf countries. Govt 26 April extended nationwide lockdown until 7 May.

➡ **Pakistan** Militant violence continued while govt focused on responding to COVID-19 and its relations with Afghanistan. Amid COVID-19 lockdown announced 24 March, military 3 April echoed PM Khan's concerns that prolonged restrictions would adversely affect poor people, saying country could not afford "indefinite lockdown". President Arif Alvi 8 April reached agreement with clerics to reopen mosques for congregational prayers. Khan 15 April relaxed restrictions, allowing some industries, businesses and shops to reopen; opposition parties Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan Peoples Party, criticising govt's decisions, called for stringent lockdown. Govt 2 April revealed Financial Action Task Force granted govt additional five months to implement anti-terrorism financing measures due to postponement of June review of country's performance due to COVID-19. Sindh High Court 2 April overturned July 2002 conviction and death sentence for Ahmad Omar Sheikh for Jan 2002 kidnap and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi, acquitting three others and reducing Sheikh's sentence to seven years served for kidnapping; hours after verdict, all four detained after Sindh govt ordered arrests under public safety law that allows three month detentions; same day, top U.S. official for South Asia called judgement "affront to victims of terrorism" and welcomed appeal; 22 April Sindh govt challenged verdict in Supreme Court. Internationally, foreign ministry 1 April welcomed Afghan govt's announcement of negotiating team for Taliban dialogue, calling on all parties to "pursue reduction of violence". However tensions rose after Kabul 11 April rejected Islamabad's 9 April demand to hand over Islamic State-Khorasan Province chief, a Pakistani citizen who Afghan intelligence arrested 4 April; FM Qureshi 20 April stressed, in telephone call with acting Afghan FM Atmar, importance of "existing bilateral mechanisms" such as Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity whose working groups include one on security and intelligence cooperation. Militant violence continued, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province; in North Waziristan tribal district, soldier killed during 13 April operation against Pakistani Taliban; next day, militants killed soldier during gunfight; militant attack 20 April killed one soldier and injured three. Sindh police 19 April arrested four alleged terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent in Karachi.

⬇️🔴* **Sri Lanka** Amid COVID-19 fears, govt measures sparked concerns over intensification of crackdown on dissent, growing anti-Muslim hate speech left unchecked, and looming constitutional crisis should parliament not reconvene before 2 June deadline. Facing pressure from govt for elections, Election

Commission 20 April announced 20 June as new date of postponed parliamentary elections, despite constitution requiring parliament to sit by 2 June. President Rajapaksa refused calls to reconvene old parliament even after 27 April collective opposition promise to support govt policies to contain COVID-19 and despite 30 April expiration of govt borrowing authority. Muslims widely accused of spreading COVID-19 on social and traditional media; govt yet to challenge false accusations and hate-speech, accused of assisting biased reporting by pro-govt TV. Govt 11 April made cremation – in contravention of Islamic burial practices – compulsory for all COVID-19-related deaths despite objections from Muslim leaders and 8 April letter from four UN Special Rapporteurs calling on President Rajapaksa to follow World Health Organization guidelines. Amid fears of intensification of crackdown on dissent, Inspector General of Police (IGP) 1 April warned media institutions of legal action against those spreading “false” or “malicious” COVID-19-related messages, including criticism of govt officials; Human Rights Commission 25 April in letter to IGP criticised lack of legal grounds and discriminatory impact of arrests under new policies. Arrests of govt critics and opposition supporters continued: police 9 April arrested Muslim writer and govt critic Ramzy Razeek apparently following complaints about a 2 April Facebook post that called for “intellectual jihad” against anti-Muslim policies and hate campaigning; 13 April arrested opposition United National Party politician Ranjan Ramanayake for obstructing police duties while distributing COVID-19 relief supplies, Ramanayake 20 April released on bail; 14-15 April arrested brother of opposition All Ceylon Makkal Congress party leader, Rishad Bathiudeen, and prominent Muslim lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, for alleged involvement in 2019 Easter bombings.

South East Asia

➔ **Cambodia** Citing COVID-19 outbreak, National Assembly in which PM Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party holds all 125 seats 10 April unanimously passed state of emergency law, which allows govt to put in place broad range of measures in times of war or pandemics, including restrictions on people’s movement, communications, and distribution of information, with penalties of up to ten years imprisonment. Constitutional Council 27 April approved law, despite public criticism that it could be used to restrict civil and political freedoms. NGO Human Rights Watch 29 April reported that authorities “are using the Covid-19 pandemic to carry out arbitrary arrests of opposition supporters and govt critics”, said that police had arrested at least 30 people for allegedly spreading false information and other offenses between Jan and April, including one third linked to now-dissolved opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party.

➔ **Indonesia** Amid COVID-19 pandemic, surge of attacks by Islamic militant group Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) prompted reprisals from security forces in Central Sulawesi, while security operations continued in Papua in response to March deadly attack on PT Freeport gold mine office. Security forces launched reprisals against suspected members of separatist armed group, West Papua Liberation Army, who had claimed responsibility for March deadly attack in Timika, Papua province. Military 9 April reportedly raided house in Mimika regency, killing two suspected insurgents; next day killed another suspect in

Tembagapura mining district. Separatist political umbrella, Free Papua Movement, 11 April proposed ceasefire to govt to allow both sides to focus on efforts to contain spread of COVID-19, but govt failed to respond. Security forces 13 April shot and killed two men near PT Freeport gold Grasberg mine; local rights activists claimed men were misidentified as insurgents, military said 15 April it would investigate incident. Also in Papua, a clash between military and police officers 12 April left three policemen dead in Mamberamo district. Series of deadly attacks involving MIT erupted in Central Sulawesi province, allegedly reflecting group's attempt to take advantage of COVID-19 crisis: MIT militants early April kidnapped and beheaded farmer suspected of being informer; police on around 10 April shot and killed 20-year old, suspected to be MIT supporter despite reports contradicting claim, in Tobe village; 15 April police killed two suspected MIT militants after they attacked police officer in Poso city; MIT militants 19 April kidnapped and killed farmer in Kilo village; security forces 25 April shot and killed senior MIT member also in Kilo. Across country, police continued to arrest suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), including 13 April arrests of four suspected JAD members in Southeast Sulawesi province, reportedly plotting attacks, and 10 April of another three JAD suspects in Java island. In North Sulawesi province, prison riot broke out 11 April, allegedly triggered by COVID-19 related measures and fears among detainees.

↓ **Myanmar** Fighting between Arakan Army (AA) and military continued at high tempo, leaving dozens dead, while authorities allowed mass release of prisoners, and issued orders to prevent and punish acts of genocide. In Chin State, military 7 April clashed with AA near Nanchaungwa village, Paletwa township, launching airstrikes which left seven civilians dead. UN 17 April said near-daily military air strikes and shelling had killed at least 32 civilians in Rakhine and Chin States since 23 March; Malaysia-based organisation, Arakan Information Center, said total of 45 civilians killed in first half of April in Rakhine and Chin. Amid efforts to expand territorial reach, AA 3 April launched attack on military base in Gwa township, in far south of Rakhine State. Brotherhood Alliance – coalition of armed groups AA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army – 1 April extended unilateral ceasefire (which never applied in Rakhine State) until 30 April, referencing COVID-19 concerns; military same day said ceasefire “unrealistic”, questioned good faith of armed groups. World Health Organization vehicle transporting COVID-19 test samples 20 April was struck with small-arms fire in Minbya township, Rakhine State; UN driver next day died of injuries; military and AA blamed each other. Outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee 29 April said military's conduct in Rakhine and Chin “may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity”. Amid fears of COVID-19 in overcrowded prisons, President Win Myint 17 April announced country's largest ever prisoner amnesty, releasing some 25,000, more than a quarter of total prison population; very few political prisoners included. Ahead of 23 May deadline to submit report to International Court of Justice, Myint 8 April ordered officials to abide by Genocide Convention and to preserve any evidence of genocide. From 8 April, hundreds of detained Rohingya who faced court cases for travelling within country without permission released from prison and returned to displacement camps in Rakhine. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Coast Guard 15 April rescued 400 Rohingya refugees after their boat

blocked from landing in Malaysia due to COVID-19 restrictions. Incident raised fears of a repeat of 2015 Rohingya maritime migration crisis (see also Bangladesh).

➤ **Philippines** Despite March ceasefire declaration between govt and communist insurgency, counter-insurgency operations against communist rebels continued in Mindanao, Visayas and Luzon; meanwhile, clashes between Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants and military persisted in south. Following end of agreed ceasefire, govt security forces 16 April announced continuation of combat operations against communist rebels, while NPA extended ceasefire until 30 April to “prioritize the fight against the pandemic”; govt 17 April accused rebels of 17 ceasefire violations, and NPA 13 April accused military of at least 13. President Duterte 27 April cancelled peace talks with communist rebels; 24 April threatened to impose martial law if rebels disrupt channelling of aid. In Maguindanao province, clashes between clans continued, including in Pagalungan, Talitay and Datu Saudi-Ampatuan municipalities, leaving six civilians injured and 200 families displaced. Clash between ASG militants and military 17 April left 11 soldiers dead and 14 wounded in Sulu province; six ASG members 23 April killed in clash with military in Patikul town in Sulu, eight soldiers wounded. By 28 April, five Indonesian hostages still with ASG.

↓ **South China Sea** Tensions mounted between China and Vietnam following incident near Paracel Islands, and in response to Chinese decision to create new administrative units near area. Chinese vessel 2 April hit Vietnamese fishing boat, which sank near Paracel Islands, with no casualties; Vietnamese FM 4 April lodged official protest with China, stating Chinese vessel “violated Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Hoang Sa archipelago”; U.S. State Department 6 April called on China “to stop exploiting the distraction or vulnerability of other states to expand its unlawful claims in the South China Sea”; Radio Free Asia reported Chinese Coast Guard 3 and 8 April deployed two ships to monitor China-Philippines contested islands. Chinese vessel 14 April accompanied by China Coast Guard ship was reportedly spotted 158 km off Vietnam’s coast, within its exclusive economic zone; Vietnam FM next day announced following closely China’s activity, and Chinese foreign ministry said same day that ship was “conducting normal activities in waters administered by China”. Chinese vessel reportedly entered Malaysian waters 16 April, apparently following exploration vessel from Malaysia’s state oil company Petronas; U.S. State Department 18 April called on China to refrain from “provocative and destabilizing activity”; three U.S. warships and Australian frigate 22 April held joint exercise near same area. Chinese state media reported “major administrative move” when Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs 18 April announced creation of two new subdivisions of Sansha city on Hainan Island: Xisha district, controlling Paracel Islands and surrounding waters, and Nansha district, governing Spratly Islands and surrounding waters; Vietnam 19 April submitted formal protest against new Chinese units. Philippine Foreign Secretary 22 April tweeted that Manila issued two protests with China’s embassy over new districts and “pointing of a radar gun at a Philippine Navy ship in PH waters”; U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo same day said U.S. “strongly opposes China’s bullying”. Chinese military 28 April accused U.S. warship of intruding “without permission” into Chinese territory waters near Paracel Islands, and that China had set in action procedure to track, identify and expel U.S. ship; U.S. Navy 29 April asserted rights under international law to use sea.

➔ **Thailand** In response to COVID-19, main southern insurgent group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) announced unilateral ceasefire, halting attacks in deep south, while govt continued security operations. BRN 3 April announced unilateral, open-ended cessation of “all activities” to allow healthcare agencies and other organisations to work unimpeded, move resulted in no evident insurgent attacks throughout April; govt had not reciprocated by end of month. Security forces 30 April killed three BRN militants in raid in Nong Chik, Pattani; one police officer wounded in gun battle. BRN posted video 30 April decrying continued Thai govt security operations. In face of COVID-19, govt 12-15 April cancelled Thai new year (Songkran) holiday; tens of thousands of newly unemployed people had however already left Bangkok following closure of malls, restaurants, and other business from 22 March. By mid-April, some seven million Thais were unemployed, Thai Chamber of Commerce said number could reach ten million in next two months. Govt 8 April announced program to provide relief payments of 5,000 baht (\$153) per month to unemployed and others experiencing hardship, for three months; govt swiftly received 26mn applications, far outstripping the nine million envisioned. Hundreds whose claims were denied 14 April gathered at Finance Ministry, hurling angry insults at officials. PM Prayuth caused further anger when 15 April he announced that there were only funds for one month, next day he retracted statement, apologised for “miscommunicating”. Cabinet 28 April approved extension of state of emergency until 31 May.