

Asia

North East Asia

➡ **China/Japan** Chinese Premier Li said after 20-22 Aug trilateral meeting in Beijing with Japan and South Korea that cooperation is “important safeguard and catalyst for region” and countries must “defend regional peace and stability”. Washington Post 21 Aug reported Japan building “wall” of defensive installations, including missile bases, on Ryuku archipelago.

➡ **Korean Peninsula** Amid North Korea testing projectiles throughout month, U.S. President Trump received letter from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un stating willingness to resume talks, and tensions could now ease following end of U.S.-South Korea military drills. Trump 10 Aug said Kim in letter expressed willingness to meet once exercises ended, raising possibility of U.S.-North Korea talks around UN General Assembly in Sept, though North Korean attendance at assembly currently uncertain. Trump 25 Aug in meeting with Japanese PM Abe signalled his objection to joint military drills between U.S. and South Korea, describing them as “complete waste of money”. North Korea 2, 6, 10, 16 and 24 Aug launched salvos of short range missiles; however South Korea and Trump played down launches. Missiles reportedly fired in response to 5-23 Aug U.S.-South Korea joint military drills and South Korea’s 2020-2024 defence plan, unveiled 14 Aug, which adds over 7% in year-on-year defence spending; plan will see construction of large-deck landing ship capable of hosting up to twenty F-35B fighter aircraft. North Korea failed to respond to South Korea to claim body of man who drowned in Imjin River and floated into South Korean territory 31 July, highlighting breakdown of bilateral ties.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Tensions between Taiwan and China continued as U.S. pushed through arms deal with Taiwan, and President Tsai raised concerns of Chinese activities. U.S. administration 21 Aug formally notified U.S. Congress it was moving ahead with \$8bn sale of 66 F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan. In response, Chinese foreign ministry same day threatened imposing sanctions on U.S. companies involved in deal, claiming they “constitute severe interference” and “undermine China’s sovereignty and security interests”. Tsai 10 Aug warned of “Chinese infiltration in Taiwan” including fake news, after a Reuters report claimed Chinese authorities paid Taiwanese media groups for positive coverage. Tsai’s cabinet 15 Aug proposed to parliament over 8% increase in annual military spending, largest yearly increase since 2008. U.S. navy 23 Aug sailed amphibious ship through Taiwan Strait in fourth freedom of navigation operation in 2019. Chinese authorities 27-29 Aug prohibited ships from entering water near Taiwan off coast of China’s Zhejiang Province for 48 hours to hold military exercises; Taiwan defence ministry confirmed U.S. military plane 29 Aug flew over “median line” of strait.

South Asia

➡ ✂ **Afghanistan** U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha (Qatar) continued to progress, entering possible final round ahead of potential framework agreement in coming

month, while insurgent attacks struck Kabul. In Doha, U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad 21 Aug met with Taliban representatives in potentially last round of talks ahead of framework agreement; followed 3-12 Aug round, which reportedly concluded with both sides agreeing near-final text; Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid called discussions “long and useful” without providing details. U.S. President Trump 29 Aug announced U.S. would reduce troops to 8,600 as first step. Insurgent attacks continued, particularly in Kabul, despite lull around Eid holiday 11-14 Aug: Taliban 2 Aug targeted police checkpoint in Daykundi province, killing at least ten policemen; in west Kabul, Taliban car bomb 7 Aug exploded in majority Shia neighbourhood, killing fourteen. Islamic State-Khorasan Province 16 Aug carried out deadliest bombing in Kabul this year, killing at least 80 at Shia Hazara wedding; President Ghani called bombing “barbaric”, Taliban condemned attack. In Jalalabad city, during celebrations of independence anniversary, ten unclaimed explosions 19 Aug injured dozens; U.S. military 21 Aug reported two soldiers killed in combat in Faryab province, increasing U.S. combat-related deaths in 2019 to fourteen – highest since 2014. In Chahardara area, Herat province, Taliban 27 Aug killed fourteen pro-govt militiamen; in western Baghdis province, militants same day attacked army checkpoint, killing eight soldiers. Govt 30 Aug announced at least 28 Taliban killed in clashes with Afghan forces in north-east Takhar province. Taliban 31 Aug staged offensive on provincial capital Kunduz, reportedly killing twenty soldiers and five civilians before security forces repelled militants. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 3 Aug said 1,500 civilian casualties in July, highest monthly number since 2017, with over half caused by bombings. Taliban 6 Aug denounced election planned on 28 Sept as “sham” and pledged to disturb process. NGO Amnesty International 28 Aug reported human rights activists under intensifying attack from both authorities and armed groups since 2014.

➡ **Bangladesh** Security forces continued anti-militancy operations while attempt at repatriating Rohingya refugees to Myanmar stalled. Amid regional tensions over Indian govt’s 5 Aug decision to change constitutional status of Kashmir (see Kashmir), Bangladeshi security officials implied events could encourage militancy in Bangladesh; head of paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 9 Aug warned security forces would take “strict legal actions” against those creating unrest. RAB 7 Aug arrested suspected member of banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in Dhaka and next day, police arrested five suspected members of Wolf Pack, faction of militant Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, in Dhaka alleging they were preparing attack on police officers. UN Committee Against Torture 9 Aug issued its concluding observations on country’s record, expressing concern over allegations of enforced disappearances, custodial deaths and widespread use of torture by security forces; recommended govt to set up independent enquiry into allegations of RAB abuses. As part of repatriation efforts, govt 15 Aug said it was ready to return some 3,450 refugees (approved by Myanmar from list of over 22,000 sent by govt late-July); however no refugees turned up on 22 Aug, day repatriation due to begin, amid Rohingya concerns over security, rights and access to services if they return to Myanmar.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Clashes between security forces and Maoists continued: in Chhattisgarh state (east), special forces 3 Aug killed seven suspected Maoist rebels in raid on jungle camp in Rajnandgaon district. In Lakhisarai district, Bihar state (north east), militants 20 Aug killed two civilians, including former

Maoist leader, suspected of being “police informers”. In Telangana state (centre), police 21 Aug killed one insurgent in gunfight in Bhadrachalam district.

↓ 🇮🇳* **Kashmir** Indian govt revoked Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) special constitutional status, arrested J&K politicians and put Muslim-majority region under lockdown, raising tensions with Pakistan and risking new violence along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) and within J&K. Fulfilling 2019 electoral promise to ultra-nationalist Hindu constituency, Indian PM Modi 5 Aug revoked Kashmir’s autonomous status under constitutional article 370, including article 35-A which gave permanent residents sole rights to own property within J&K and employment with local government. Lower house of Parliament 6 Aug passed Kashmir Reorganisation Bill dividing J&K into two territories (J&K and Ladakh) and downgrading status from state to Union Territories, J&K having legislature with limited powers, Ladakh having no legislature. Indian govt 2-5 Aug deployed tens of thousands of additional troops in J&K, imposed communication blackout and detained around 300 Kashmiri politicians, including former Kashmiri Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti. Despite crackdown, 10,000 people 9 Aug protested and clashed with police in Srinagar. In Baramulla district, militant 21 Aug fired on police, killing one officer before being killed. Communication blackout remained throughout J&K end month. BBC 29 Aug published report alleging beatings and torture of civilians by security forces. On day of 5 Aug announcement, Pakistani govt called decision “unlawful and destabilising”, with PM Khan next day raising concerns over possible ethnic cleansing in J&K and India using militant attacks as pretext for “conventional war”; 7 Aug downgraded diplomatic relations with India and suspended bilateral trade. UN Sec-Gen Guterres 8 Aug called on “all parties to refrain” from steps affecting J&K’s status and to exercise “maximum restraint”; UN Security Council 16 Aug held closed door consultative meeting on J&K, first in over 50 years, prompting India’s criticism of “international interference”. In cross-LoC clashes, India 3 Aug claimed to have killed five to seven Pakistani commandos during failed Pakistani incursion; Islamabad 15 Aug said four soldiers died by Indian firing and claimed to have killed five Indian soldiers same day and six 20 Aug.

➡ **Nepal** Concerns over ruling-Nepal Communist Party (NCP)’s restrictions on political space continued amid new bill curtailing autonomy of govt’s media regulatory body. PM Oli-led govt 27 Aug tabled legislation on media body, despite previously committing to revising controversial proposal widely criticised after its registration in parliament in May; concerns remain that journalists could be heavily fined or imprisoned for violating regulations under new law. Activists also criticised govt for allegedly targeting individuals for their political beliefs following arrest of three journalists over last two months for their ties to hardline Communist Party of Nepal. Human rights groups expressed concerns about govt attempting to maintain close scrutiny on critics after three activists received intimidating calls from police 4 Aug. Opposition parties 27 Aug criticised govt for attempting to establish direct PM oversight into budgets of constitutionally-mandated institutions. Oli also faced internal pressures within NCP due to factional disputes involving two senior leaders and former PMs Jhalanath Khanal and Madhav Kumar, over their positions within party; dispute reportedly linked to Oli’s position within NCP vis-à-vis his fellow co-chair and former Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. NCP 26 Aug prohibited

leaders from criticising party, drawing further criticism of handling of internal disputes.

➡ **Pakistan** Political tensions between govt and opposition continued amid arrests of opposition leaders on corruption charges, while militant attacks remained at a high-level. Opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) 1 Aug attempted no confidence vote to oust Senate speaker and govt ally Sadiq Sanjrani but fourteen defections in opposition-dominated Senate led to defeat of motion. Amid PPP and PML-N mutual suspicions that other party caused defeat, Hasil Bizenjo – both parties’ joint candidate for Senate leader – accused Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt. General Hamid of engineering defections; local Gujranwala court 2 Aug summoned Bizenjo for accusing ISI of interfering in defections. Authorities stepped up corruption probes on opposition leaders: National Accountability Bureau 7 Aug detained former PML-N finance minister Miftah Ismail and next day arrested former PM Sharif Nawaz’s daughter Mariam Nawaz on corruption charges. Militant attacks continued, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and Balochistan’s capital Quetta: in KPK’s North Waziristan tribal district, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants 2 Aug killed four soldiers; in Bajaur tribal district, unclaimed bomb blast 5 Aug killed two soldiers; and in Upper Dir district, TTP 18 Aug killed five civilians in bomb attack. In Quetta, unclaimed explosion 2 Aug targeted Shia Hazaras in market, killing one; unknown group 16 Aug detonated bomb in mosque frequented by Afghan Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, killing four including his brother; next day, unknown gunman killed another Afghan prayer leader. In Daraban Kalan area in South Waziristan, TTP gunmen 24 Aug killed two in gas station. PM Khan 19 Aug gave three-year extension to Army Chief Bajwa, set to retire 29 Nov, alluding to tensions with India and potential U.S. agreement with Afghan Taliban as justifications; opposition Awami National Party called decision “payback” that risked politicisation of institution.

➡ **Sri Lanka** Political manoeuvring continued ahead of Dec presidential elections, amid controversial appointment of army commander accused of war crimes. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa formally made head of main opposition party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) 11 Aug and nominated his brother and former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa as SLPP candidate for Dec presidential election. Governing United National Party (UNP) remained divided over choice of candidate between PM Wickremesinghe and UNP deputy leader Sajith Premadasa. Security and political figures continued to testify in public parliamentary hearings into April terror attacks including Wickremesinghe 1 Aug; in testimony, police officials confirmed dangerous lack of coordination and information sharing between police and intelligence agencies. Police continued anti-militant operations, making arrests 3, 15 and 19 Aug of suspected members of banned groups National Towheed Jamaat and Jamathe Millathu Ibraheem, accused of Easter suicide bombings. President Sirisena 18 Aug appointed Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva – whom a 2015 UN report implicated in human rights violations – as army commander, generating strong international criticism; 19 Aug UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said she was “deeply troubled” by appointment which “comprises Sri Lanka’s commitment to promote justice and accountability”, U.S. Embassy in Colombo said appointment undermines govt’s “international reputation”; EU and other European states 20 Aug issued statement sharing

Bachelet's concerns; Foreign Minister 20 Aug rejected criticisms as "unwarranted and unacceptable" attempts to interfere. Amid concerns over possible politicisation of police investigations, Attorney General 15 Aug ordered police to conclude investigations into series of high-profile political crimes committed under 2005-2015 Rajapaska govt, including killings of journalists.

South East Asia

↓ **Indonesia** Tensions worsened in Papua amid large-scale demonstrations against the discriminatory treatment of Papuan students that turned violent with clashes between protesters and security forces. Local residents 15 Aug attacked Papuan students in Malang who were protesting without police permission in support of West Papua independence. Next day in Surabaya, ahead of Indonesia's 17 Aug Independence Day, an angry mob reportedly composed of security forces along with hardline group Islam Defenders Front and youth organisation Pemuda Pancasila reportedly threatened and harassed Papuan students outside their dormitory, after locals claimed they destroyed national flag; police arrested 43 students 17 Aug but released them next day. In response to incident, protesters 19 Aug began demonstrations in Manokwari, Sorong and Timika (Papua), some turned violent with local parliament building in Manokwari burnt down. Authorities deployed thousands of security personnel to region since 19 Aug; police 21 Aug said they arrested 45 people during protests in Timika, releasing eleven soon after. Information ministry 21 Aug temporarily cut internet access in Papua. Demonstrations 23 Aug turned violent when gunfight broke out between authorities and protesters in Wamena, one protester killed by police. Clashes continued 28 Aug, police reported one soldier and two civilians killed in Deiyai regency, while pro-independence activists claimed six protesters shot dead by police. Next day, protesters in Jayapura reportedly set fire to several govt buildings and damaged businesses. President "Jokowi" Widodo 29 Aug called for calm, while Coordinating Minister for Security affairs General Wiranto said the govt would not entertain demands for referendum on independence. Suspected Islamist militant 17 Aug attacked police officer with sickle in Surabaya, East Java; police shot suspect and took him into custody. Counter-terror unit Densus 88 arrested six suspects with alleged ties to Islamic State-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah during 22-24 Aug raids in East Java. Widodo 26 Aug announced plans to move country's capital from Jakarta to new city on Kalimantan province on Borneo.

↓ **Myanmar** Fighting significantly escalated in northern Shan State as militant groups combined to attack strategic targets. Joint force of Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) 15 Aug launched raids on several targets in Shan State and fired rockets at Myanmar's elite defence academy in Mandalay region, killing nine soldiers, three police and three civilians, and destroying bridge on main route from Mandalay to Chinese border at Muse; groups 17 Aug launched series of coordinated attacks around northern Shan State capital Lashio, including firing on vehicle of local philanthropic association travelling to help civilians trapped by fighting, killing one member of group; clashes also around the strategic town of Kutkai. Military 31 Aug extended unilateral ceasefire in Kachin and Shan, originally announced in Dec 2018, until 21 Sept. AA attacks on security forces in Rakhine state continued, including

early Aug ambush on military at Bangladesh border, killing deputy battalion commander; AA 20 Aug attack on convoy killed police captain and wounded four officers. Tensions continued over issue of repatriation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; though Bangladesh 15 Aug said it was ready to return some 3,450 refugees from 22 Aug – approved by Myanmar from list of over 22,000 sent by Bangladeshi govt late-July – no Rohingya refugees willing to repatriate, amid concerns over security, rights and access to services if they return to Myanmar. UN Fact-Finding Mission 5 Aug released report detailing Myanmar military’s business interests and calling for targeted sanctions and arms embargoes, concluding that revenue earned from domestic and foreign business deals substantially enhances military’s ability to carry out “gross violations of human rights with impunity”; Mission also condemned military’s use of “sexual and gender-based violence to terrorise and punish ethnic minorities” in report released 22 Aug.

➔ **Philippines** Security forces continued to clash with Abu Sayyaf militants and communist rebels. Suspected Abu Sayyaf militants 12 Aug killed two soldiers and one child during ambush in Mindanao province. Abu Sayyaf militants 19 Aug wounded two police officers during ambush in Sulu. In continued anti-militant operations, police 15 Aug arrested suspected Abu Sayyaf member in Pasay City. President Duterte 8 Aug said he had ordered recruitment and training of up to 10,000 elite special forces to combat threat of terrorism, which he claimed “is getting bigger”. Suspected communist New People’s Army (NPA) members 15 Aug killed two pro-govt militiamen in Abra province. Military 18 Aug arrested three NPA rebels and seized manufacturing site of explosive devices in Negros Occidental. Duterte 27 Aug in speech urged military to end communist insurgency, “serving notice” there will be “a little trouble” in coming months. Philippines 9 and 19 Aug filed diplomatic protests with China over maritime disputes (see South China Sea).

↓ **South China Sea** Chinese incursions into disputed territorial waters and U.S. warship sailing close to Chinese claimed islands led to increased tensions in South China Sea (SCS). Chinese oil exploration survey ship 7 Aug departed from disputed Spratly Islands, in area claimed by Vietnam and where it had been since early July, but 13 Aug returned to disputed waters. Amid ongoing tensions, Vietnam foreign ministry 16 Aug said it contacted China to protest “repeated violations”, demanding China withdraw its vessels. U.S. State Department 22 Aug condemned China’s “interference against Vietnam’s longstanding oil and gas activities”. Next day, after meeting between Australia PM Morrison and Vietnam PM Phúc in Hanoi, countries jointly expressed concern about developments in SCS and “disruptive activities in relation to long-standing oil and gas projects”. EU 28 Aug condemned “unilateral actions” that resulted in “mounting tensions and a deterioration of the maritime security environment”, urging all parties to “exercise self-restraint” and refrain from “militarising the region”. Philippines President Duterte 28 Aug visited China, meeting with counterpart Xi and discussing issues related to SCS. Earlier in month, Philippines twice filed diplomatic protest over Chinese incursions into disputed waters; foreign ministry 9 Aug lodged protest with China after spotting two Chinese survey ships in Philippines exclusive economic zone; FM Locsin 19 Aug ordered filing of diplomatic protest over Chinese “trespassing”. Next day, Duterte ordered all foreign vessels sailing in Filipino territory to seek permission from authorities, adding non-compliance will be responded to in “unfriendly manner”. U.S. Air Force 16 Aug said it will continue freedom of navigation operations in SCS citing

“commitment to region”. U.S. guided missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of Chinese artificial islands in Spratly Island chain 28 Aug; Chinese People’s Liberation Army called on U.S. to cease “provocative actions”.

➡ **Thailand** Month saw several small bomb attacks near and in Bangkok, while insurgent attacks continued in deep south. Coinciding with ASEAN foreign minister’s meeting in Bangkok 29 July-3 Aug, six small bombs and six incendiary devices detonated 2 Aug in Bangkok and Nonthaburi, injuring four; two IEDs failed to detonate; seven suspects arrested by 9 Aug, police warrants for seven others still at large issued by 20 Aug. One IED exploded 4 Aug in Nonthaburi, no injuries reported. Political controversy continued following PM Prayuth 16 July omitting sentence from constitutionally required oath that directs cabinet to uphold the constitution. PM Prayuth 8 Aug pledged to take “full responsibility” and said matter of legitimacy of cabinet and constitutionality of govt should be decided by Constitutional Court (CC); Ombudsman’s office 27 Aug referred matter to CC. Criminal court 14 Aug exonerated 24 defendants from United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship group, commonly called Red Shirts, including leaders Jatuporn Prompan and Nattawut Saikua, over 2010 protests, declaring it political rather than terrorist activity. During 17 Aug interview with *Reuters*, alleged Barisan Revolusi Nasional Patani Melayu leader said militant group and govt representatives met for preliminary talks 16 Aug; General Udomchai Thamasarorat, head of govt’s peace-dialogue delegation, declined to confirm report. Suspected insurgent detainee Abdulloh Esormusor, who lapsed into coma following interrogation after his arrest 20 July, died 25 Aug. Violence continued in deep south; three bombs exploded in Pattani province 4 Aug, no casualties reported. Unknown gunmen 8 Aug killed former militant leader Abdultore Kaso in Thepha district. Bomb blasts injured seven people across four Yala districts 21 Aug. Suspected insurgents 25 Aug robbed a gold shop in Na Thawi district Songkhla of \$2.5 million in valuables.