

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➡ **China/Japan** Former PM Abe issued controversial remarks on Taiwan, sparking Chinese diplomatic protest, while dozens of Chinese vessels entered waters around disputed islands. Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi 27 Dec said he agreed with Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe on opening up a hotline between two countries' officials amid tensions over disputed islets in the East China Sea. Former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe 1 Dec said invasion of Taiwan is major threat to Japan's territory and Taiwan-Japan relations are comparable to U.S.-Japan alliance; China's Assistant FM Hua Chunying same day called emergency meeting with Japanese ambassador to protest Abe's "extremely wrong remarks"; Japanese ambassador said Tokyo will not accept Beijing's "unilateral assertion". Joint press release following EU-U.S. high-level dialogue on China 2 Dec "expressed strong concern over China's problematic and unilateral actions in the South and East China Seas". Japanese govt 17 Dec revealed plans for creating senior diplomatic post focused on maritime issues in East China Sea, namely Taiwan and Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Japan Ground Self-Defense Force alongside U.S. 4-17 Dec held largest bilateral training exercise of year in Japan, Resolute Dragon 2021. Japanese PM Kishida 6 Dec said Japan would "examine all the options, including the capability to attack enemy bases ... and fundamentally strengthen our defence posture with a sense of speed". As of 19 Dec, 58 Chinese coast guard vessels had entered into waters surrounding disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands during month. Chinese aircraft carrier *Liaoning* 31 Dec concluded 20-day exercise in East China Sea and western Pacific, reportedly shadowed by Japanese aircraft carrier *Izumo* during drills.

➡ **Korean Peninsula** North Korea began winter with administration closure and commemorated ten-year anniversary of former leader Kim Jong-il's death amid economic uncertainty. North Korean govt 1 Dec closed administration for winter to finalise state accounts and review progress in key economic sectors. Leader Kim Jong-un same day said country needed to prepare for "very giant struggle" to boost economy in 2022 amid ongoing 22-month border closure due to COVID-19. Workers at Hyesan Youth Copper Mine, among country's largest industrial enterprises, as of 12 Dec reportedly had not received personal rations or meals since April, indicating impact of extended border closure. North Korea 17 Dec held events to commemorate tenth anniversary of previous leader Kim Jong-il's death, with main event held in front of mausoleum of Kim and his father, national founder Kim Il-sung, in capital Pyongyang; smaller rallies were held nationwide and public markets closed for day. Seoul authorities 21 Dec said North Korean winter military exercises were reportedly under way, indicating monitoring of drills in tandem with U.S.. Kim Jong-un 23 Dec said North Korea-China relationship had entered "fresh heyday" and noted departure of outgoing Chinese ambassador. U.S. 10 Dec imposed first new sanctions on North Korea under Biden administration, blacklisting Central Public Prosecutor's Office and Minister of People's Armed Forces Ri Yong-gil. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, speaking at 13 Dec signing of defence contract with Australia, said South Korea, North Korea, China and U.S. had agreed "in principle" to potential peace treaty to formally end

Korean War, that North Korea however was holding up progress by demanding end to U.S. hostilities first; also said South Korea wouldn't join boycott of Beijing Winter Olympics, highlighting China's role in resolving nuclear standoff with North Korea. South Korean ruling party presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung 30 Dec called acquisition of nuclear subs "absolutely necessary", vowed to "convince the United States" to assist on diplomatic and technological fronts.

➡ **Taiwan Strait China and U.S. traded diplomatic barbs over potential forceful reunification, while Chinese aircraft continued incursions into Taiwan's air defence zone.** U.S. Sec State Blinken 3 Dec warned of "terrible consequences" should China attempt to force reunification across Taiwan Strait; U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin next day said Chinese aerial incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) looked "like rehearsals". Chinese foreign ministry 6 Dec said it "strongly deplores" statements and that challenging "one China" policy "will not stop the progress of history". Taiwanese defence ministry 13 Dec said full Chinese invasion of Taiwan would be extremely difficult to achieve and that Chinese military may use drills as pretence to launch an attack. Chinese foreign ministry 15 Dec voiced opposition to same day arrival of six French legislators in capital Taipei for visit; legislators 17 Dec said France must take bolder action to support Taiwan's democracy. Chinese aircraft flew into south-western corner of Taiwan's ADIZ nearly every day during month, totaling 60 aircraft as of 19 Dec; largest incursion comprising 13 Chinese military aircraft occurred on 10 Dec when Nicaragua announced severing of ties with Taiwan and established official diplomatic relations with China. Chinese media 8 Dec reported that Taiwanese hacking group GreenSpot has been launching cyberattacks on mainland since 2007, mainly targeting govt agencies, aerospace and military organisations. Reuters 20 Dec revealed broad Chinese campaign to undermine Taiwan's military and civilian leadership, said Taiwan had convicted at least 21 Taiwanese officers of espionage in past decade. U.S. and Taiwan 6 Dec agreed to establish stronger tech cooperation, chiefly in semiconductors.

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## South Asia

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➡ **Afghanistan Taliban consolidated their rule across country, launched new offensive in north and faced skirmishes at border with Iran.** Taliban's governing approach of continuing provincial-level policy on some issues, rather than consolidating and centralising all policies, surfaced during month. Notably, social media updates showed group promulgating rules for medical centres and pharmacies in north, banning music in south and issuing price lists to curtail inflating prices for basic commodities in several districts of Kabul province. Taliban 3 Dec issued decree on women's issues, including consent in marriage and inheritance rights, with no mention however of women's education or recent closure of women's schools in parts of country; 26 Dec introduced decree prohibiting women from travelling more than 45 miles unless accompanied by male relative. Taliban sought to appease minority groups, specifically Shia Hazara; notably, govt 25 Dec appointed Abdul Latif Nazari as deputy minister of economy, making him second Hazara to be appointed at deputy ministerial level. Taliban increased operations against remnants of Northern Resistance Front (NRF) in north; Taliban 1 Dec claimed having killed several NRF members in Samangan province (north); 5 Dec raided NRF hideout in Baghlan province (north). Taliban carried out raids in several

cities across country, notably in Helmand province (south) 5 Dec, seizing large quantities of munitions. Islamic State Khorasan Province did not carry out large-scale attacks during Dec; group however showed signs its operations are expanding across country, as with ambush 7 Dec targeting provincial police chief in Nuristan province (east), killing multiple Taliban soldiers. Taliban and Iranian forces 1 Dec clashed at border in Afghanistan's Nimroz province, leaving multiple casualties on both sides, while reports revealed Taliban forces may have entered Iranian territory and captured several Iranian border checkpoints; situation quickly de-escalated through discrete talks between two sides. Relations strained with Pakistan over continued presence of Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan and isolated incidents over border fencing. Taliban 19 Dec attended Organisation of Islamic Cooperation conference to discuss country's humanitarian crisis. UN Security Council 22 Dec adopted Resolution 2615 that offers exemption to sanctions regime to allow greater humanitarian support to Afghanistan.

➔ **Bangladesh** **Violent clashes between ruling party factions persisted with fourth phase of local elections, authorities continued to stifle dissent, and U.S. imposed sanctions on security forces.** Election-related clashes between rival ruling Awami League (AL) candidates continued in run-up to fourth phase of local election held on 26 Dec: poll violence 7 Dec injured ten in Bogra district; 8 Dec killed one and injured at least 14 in Comilla district; 17 Dec killed candidate and his aide in Brahmanbaria district; 18 Dec killed AL supporter of "rebel" candidate in Pabna district; 26 Dec left 11 wounded in Feni city. Violent clashes over election results on night of 26 Dec saw one person killed in police firing on two rival groups in Thakurgaon district, and one person killed and 50 injured in police firing on similar clashes in Sylhet district. Meanwhile, authorities continued to stifle dissent. Notably, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 1 Dec arrested AL Mayor of Rajshahi city Abbas Ali for violating Digital Security Act after audio recording surfaced in which he opposed mural of Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rehman on Islamic grounds; 9 Dec arrested five persons for allegedly spreading anti-state propaganda and instigating vandalism in capital Dhaka after suspects 25-30 Nov reportedly sent information about law enforcement agencies to foreign media during student protests about road safety. Washington 10 Dec imposed human rights-related sanctions on six former and current RAB officials; FM Momen next day questioned authenticity of U.S. findings, which reported around 600 people killed at hands of security forces in past ten years. BNP's Sec Gen Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir same day said sanctions were "inevitable consequence" for those responsible of extrajudicial killings and torture. In supposed attempt to pressure Rohingyas to move to flood-prone Bhasan Char island refugee camp, authorities 10 Dec demolished around 1,000 shops of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar's camps. In eighth phase of refugee relocations, 555 Rohingyas were moved 18 Dec to island, bringing total number of Rohingyas living in Bhasan Char to around 19,000.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** **Maoist violence continued, while civilians and army clashed in north east following botched security raid.** Maoist violence continued. In Jharkhand state (east), firefight 6 Dec erupted between police and Maoists in West Singhbhum district; police 16 Dec reportedly killed suspected Maoist commander in West Singhbhum district. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), Maoists 13 Dec killed man suspected of being police informer in Sukma district. Security forces 18 Dec killed two female Maoists in Dantewada district. In Odisha

state (east), firefight 16 Dec broke out between security forces and Maoists. Army 4 Dec shot and killed six coal mine workers returning home from work in pickup truck – reportedly mistaking them for militants belonging to splintered faction of banned armed group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) – in botched security operation in north-eastern Nagaland state’s Mon district; clashes same day between angry locals and army killed seven civilians and one soldier; soldiers next day killed civilian after protesters attacked army camp, leaving at least two locals missing and feared dead. In newly formed centrally administered union territory of Ladakh, carved out of Jammu and Kashmir after govt abrogated Article 370 in Aug 2019, people and political leaders from across political spectrum 13 Dec observed complete shutdown to demand statehood and greater political autonomy in some tribal areas and states in north east. After one year of protests against controversial farm law on the borders of capital Delhi, farmers 11 Dec began leaving camps as govt withdrew law. Meanwhile, relations with China witnessed no improvement as tensions persisted over disputed unofficial border known as Line of Actual Control. Minister of home affairs 7 Dec informed lower house of parliament that there had been no incident of infiltration on border with China and Bhutan in past three years; 128 incidents however recorded along Pakistan border, 1,787 incidents along Bangladesh border, 25 incidents on Nepal border, 133 on Myanmar border. Govt 19 Dec hosted third meeting of India-Central Asia Dialogue in Delhi with FMs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; joint statement emphasised importance of regular consultations to counter terrorism and other regional challenges.

➡ **Kashmir In Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), militants increasingly targeted police while plans to change number of constituencies sparked controversy.** In J&K, security operations and militant attacks showed no signs of abating despite coming winter. Security forces 8 Dec killed three militants in Shopian district; 12 Dec killed alleged Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) militant in Awantipora district; next day killed two militants in regional capital Srinagar; 15-16 Dec killed militant in Pulwama district and two in Kulgam district; 19 Dec killed alleged Pakistani Lashkar-e-Tayyaba militant on outskirts of Srinagar. Security forces 29 Dec claimed to have killed six JeM militants in Anantang and Kulgram districts. Gunfight 31 Dec killed three JeM militants and injured four security personnel in Pantha Chowk area. Militants launched various attacks; notably, militants 10 Dec killed two police officers in Bandipora district; 13 Dec killed three police officers and injured 14 more during attack on police bus on outskirts of Srinagar; 22 Dec killed policer officer in Anantang district. Latest incidents reflect police most targeted force during 2021 with official data released mid-Dec noting that half of 40 security personnel killed in J&K this year were police officers; data shows major increase in proportion of police killed compared to previous years – in 2020 just 16 police officers out of 60 security personnel killed that year, reflecting deepening Kashmiri alienation. Meanwhile, delimitation commission, tasked with carving out new constituencies in J&K, 20 Dec proposed increasing number of constituencies by six seats in Jammu and one in Kashmir, which would bring them to a total of 43 and 47 respectively; main local parties, National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), strongly opposed draft recommendations. PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti 18 Dec said she has “no faith in the fairness of the Commission. The Commission is [ruling party] BJP’s Commission”, adding: “They want to carve out constituencies to suit their political interests”, reflecting broader

Kashmiri fears that planned changes aim at making Jammu more powerful. Security situation at Line of Control was relatively calm during month; landmine blast 20 Dec however severely injured border security personnel in Poonch district, Jammu region.

➡ **Nepal Supreme Court resumed its functions after month-long pause over controversy involving chief justice, while political parties continued preparations for next year's general elections.** Supreme Court 1 Dec resumed hearing cases for first time following 18 justices' unsuccessful efforts since 25 Oct to pressure Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana to resign; deal resuming Court's functions dented Rana's authority by adopting lottery system to assign cases instead of selecting them at his discretion. Ruling Nepali Congress 10-15 Dec held its general convention; PM Sher Bahadur Deuba 14 Dec re-elected party president in run-off contest after striking last-minute deal with two of other four contestants; Deuba had faced serious threats to his leadership with other candidates previously announcing their intention to oppose him in run-off. Ruling coalition member Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) 26 Dec began its general convention. Former Deputy PM Kamal Thapa 5 Dec suffered shock defeat, losing leadership of pro-monarchy and anti-secular Rastriya Prajatantra Party; Thapa blamed loss on interference of former King Gyanendra Shah, fuelling concerns about efforts to restore Hindu monarchy deposed in 2008.

➡ **Pakistan Ceasefire agreement between govt and Pakistani Taliban ended, while militant, religious and sectarian violence ran high, notably in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).** Pakistani Taliban Chief Nur Wali Mehsud 9 Dec refused to extend month long ceasefire, said attacks would resume; TTP accused Islamabad of violating ceasefire, including by not releasing 102 "imprisoned mujahideen" and continuing operations in KP province. Authorities same day said they had released more than 100 Pakistani Taliban prisoners in past weeks. As deal collapsed, violence surged in KP. Notably, Pakistani Taliban claimed attack in Tank district, which killed two police officers 11-12 Dec; unidentified assailants 12 Dec shot and injured police officer guarding polio vaccination team in Lakki Marwat district; bomb blast 17 Dec injured two in Bannu district. Meanwhile, military 18 Dec claimed three Pakistani Taliban militants killed and one soldier injured in KP's Bajaur and North Waziristan districts. Authorities 31 Dec said two Pakistani Taliban militants killed during raids in Tank and North Waziristan districts; four soldiers also killed during operation. In Kunar province, missile attack on Pakistani Taliban commander Maulvi Faqir Mohammad's home 16 Dec injured two militants. In Balochistan province, militants 14 Dec killed soldier close to Iranian border; bomb blast 18 Dec killed one in Quetta city; grenade at checkpoint 24 Dec killed two soldiers in Kech district. Also in KP, attacks on polling stations 19 Dec erupted during first phase of local elections, leaving three dead in Karak and Kohat districts. In Sialkot city, Punjab province, hundreds of protesters 3 Dec beat Sri Lankan to death and set his body on fire, accusing him of blasphemy for having reportedly removed Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) religious poster. PM Khan same day decried attack, apologised to Sri Lanka; incident sparked controversy as it erupted shortly after federal cabinet's Nov decision to revoke TLP ban. Pakistan 19 Dec hosted Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to discuss Afghanistan's humanitarian situation; OIC member states concluded that they would seek to help UN unfreeze Afghan assets. Afghan Taliban soldiers same day stopped Pakistani military from

erecting security fence on disputed border along Nangarhar district; Taliban defence minister reportedly resolved dispute.

↓ **Sri Lanka President suspended parliament for one month amid growing tensions within ruling coalition, as debt crisis, inflation and looming food shortages led to rising popular discontent.** President Rajapaksa 12 Dec prorogued parliament until 18 Jan 2022 without giving clear reasons, triggering claims from opposition suspension was designed to prevent publication of reports by parliamentary corruption oversight committees; move comes after parliament 10 Dec approved govt's budget with two-thirds majority, despite signs of increasing tensions within ruling coalition. Economic hardship deepened. Fitch Ratings 17 Dec became latest credit ratings agency to downgrade country, citing "increased probability of default"; agency downgraded govt's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating to 'CC' from 'CCC', lowest tier before default. Inflation hit record level of 11%; vegetable prices continued to rise sharply during month, as key food items, especially imports, proved increasingly hard to find and beyond large numbers of citizens' income, raising concerns about rising malnutrition. Concerns also persisted over size of upcoming rice harvest and future yields on tea, following six-month ban on import of chemical fertiliser. President Rajapaksa 22 Dec replaced chief civil servant in agriculture ministry, one day after he warned publicly of impending food crisis. Sinhalese prisoners in Badulla 17 Dec attacked four Muslim detainees held on suspicion of links to network behind 2019 Easter bombings. In effort to placate concerns among European states about continued use of Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), govt took series of actions. Following green light from attorney general, Puttalam High Court 15 Dec granted bail to Muslim poet Ahnaf Jazeem, detained under PTA for seven months on spurious reading of one of his poems. Colombo High Court 2 Dec acquitted prominent Muslim politician Azath Salley, who had been detained under the PTA, based on edited copy of speech he gave. Court during month gave bail to ten Tamil youth, arrested in May 2021 for publicly commemorating deaths of Tamils during war in violation of court order. Govt expressed outrage following 3 Dec mob lynching of Sinhalese manager of factory in Pakistani town of Sialkot (see Pakistan), but voiced appreciation for PM Imran Khan's promised of swift justice.

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## **South East Asia**

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➔ **Myanmar Regime violence against civilians continued, triggering protests and international condemnation, while court convicted deposed leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi.** In Yangon city, military vehicle 5 Dec accelerated into demonstrators and bystanders in Kyeemyindaing township, with soldiers firing on fleeing protesters, reportedly killing at least five; residents same day resumed banging pots and pans in protest as soldiers responded by breaking windows, vandalising parked cars and firing slingshots at residents on balconies. In grievous human rights abuse in Sagaing region, security forces 7 Dec implicated in killing and incinerating 11 civilians, including six teenagers, in Done Taw village, Salingyi township; authorities previous day reportedly detained villagers after suspected members of local People's Defence Force attacked military convoys with IEDs. U.S. described incident as "sickening" while UN human rights office warned of "alarming escalation of grave human rights abuses in Myanmar".

Protesters 10 Dec organised “silent strike” with high participation across country as streets were deserted and businesses shuttered despite regime threats. U.S., U.K. and Canada same day announced further targeted sanctions, including against several chief ministers, directorates of defence industries and procurement, and Myanmar War Veterans’ Organisation. In Kayin State, regime forces 14 Dec raided Karen National Union (KNU)-administered Lay Kay Kaw village, Myawaddy township, arresting some 60 political dissidents, National League for Democracy MP and members of Civil Disobedience Movement. Regime forces next day clashed with KNU, displacing thousands and sparking tensions with neighbouring Thailand after shells landed across border (see Thailand). Military forces 24 Dec killed at least 35 civilians outside Moso village, Kayah State; in response, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 30 Dec called for “international preventive action...including an arms embargo”. Naypyitaw court 6 Dec sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint to four years imprisonment for incitement and violation of COVID-19 rules; regime same day reduced sentences to two years house arrest. UN General Assembly’s Credentials Committee 1 Dec deferred decision on whether to accredit regime’s nominee, maintaining incumbent permanent representative, National Unity Govt-affiliated Kyaw Moe Tun, likely until Sept 2022 General Assembly session.

➡ **Philippines** **Violence persisted at low levels in south, while deadly clashes between govt forces and communists continued.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, clashes between militants and military forces were rare during month, notwithstanding relative insecurity. In Maguindanao province, Philippine security forces 2 Dec killed son of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) militant Hassan Indal in Ganta village; killing may suggest change in govt tactics to target top militant leaders instead of large-scale offensives. Unidentified gunmen same day shot off-duty policeman in Kauran village, Ampatuan town. In Sulu province, members of Radullan Sahiron’s faction of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group 8 Dec clashed with military forces, killing one soldier and two militants. In Marawi city, rehabilitation efforts continued. Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) 8 Dec said more internally displaced people affected by 2017 siege could start rebuilding houses inside Marawi city’s ground zero by third week of Jan 2022; TFBM head Eduardo del Rosario and Mayor of Marawi Majul Gandamra 8 Dec agreed to expedite release of building permits for some 1,500 applicants. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist group New People’s Army (NPA) persisted with greater lethality compared to last month: govt security operations or rebel ambushes in Mindanao Island in south, Visayas Islands in centre and Luzon Island in north killed at least 20 combatants and civilians and injured six. Over 150 members of NPA-affiliated organisations 10 Dec surrendered to authorities. Typhoon Rai (Odette) as of 21 Dec left at least 378 dead in Siargao Island, Surigao del Norte province, Mindanao, and parts of Visayas, with authorities warning that without urgent humanitarian assistance, lack of food and water could lead to looting; NPA fighters in Negros Island, Visayas, committed to aid rehabilitation efforts.

➡ **South China Sea** **China conducted live-fire military drills, U.S. and EU voiced concern over Chinese actions, and South Korea and Australia reaffirmed commitment to international law.** Chinese media 7 Dec reported that Chinese military practiced dropping live bombs and laying sea mines on South

China Sea (SCS) islands using H-6J strategic bombers. Beijing think-tank South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative 14 Dec claimed U.S. Air Force sent spy plane on reconnaissance mission along Chinese coast, near locations of Chinese live-fire drills; at least two drills concluded 17 Dec near Hainan Island and in Beibu Gulf between China and Vietnam. Chinese media 19 Dec reported Chinese aircraft carrier set out for combat drills in SCS; 29 Dec reported exercises of amphibious assault ship *Hainan* in SCS. U.S. Deputy Sec State Wendy Sherman and EU European External Action Service Sec Gen Stefano Sannino 3 Dec said China's actions in SCS, East China Seas and Taiwan Strait "undermine peace and security in the region", expressing "strong concern" over China's "problematic and unilateral actions" in disputed seas in Indo-Pacific that "run counter to the shared values and interests of the United States and the EU". U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in 14 Dec visit to Indonesia said U.S. is "determined to ensure freedom of navigation in the South China Sea". Australian PM Scott Morrison and South Korean President Moon Jae-in 13 Dec adopted joint statement recognising "stability of the Indo-Pacific depends on adherence to international law in the maritime domain, including in the South China Sea". Indonesian House of Representatives member Muhammad Farhan 1 Dec said China demanded Jakarta stop oil and gas drilling at sea, claiming drills took place in waters claimed by China, and that Beijing protested joint military exercises with U.S. held in Aug.

➔ **Thailand Small-scale anti-govt protests continued in capital Bangkok, while insecurity persisted in deep south, which saw series of bomb attacks.** In capital Bangkok, police 6 Dec arrested some 36 protesters camped in front of Government House, protesting govt's planned industrial estate development in Songkhla province's Chana district. Small, silent vigils, dubbed "Stand Against Imprisonment", continued to be staged outside courts in Bangkok two or three times per week, to demand bail for anti-govt protest leaders. Small group of activists 7 Dec gathered in Bangkok to call for repeal of lèse-majesté law. Anti-govt protest group Taluh Fah next day organised "car mob" to call for release of jailed pro-democracy protest leaders and show solidarity with anti-industrial estate protesters. Larger-scale protest 12 Dec saw demonstrators gather in capital to demand abolition of lèse-majesté law; at main protest site Ratchaprasong Intersection, police scuffled with crowd; although anti-govt protests have decreased significantly in scale and frequency since their 2020 peak, rally demonstrated both intent and capacity to continue. In deep south, in Narathiwat province, Islamic insurgent group Runda Kumpulan Kecil (RKK) 6 Dec exchanged fire with soldiers of 49th Ranger Regiment in forest near Srisakorn district, killing civilian and RKK leader. Vehicle carrying six officers of Budo Mountain National Park Protection Unit same day drove over roadside bomb in Marue Botok subdistrict; no serious injuries reported. Bomb 11 Dec exploded in Rueso district close to two monks and two rangers. Bomb 14 Dec exploded on road in Su-ngai Padi district, damaging six-vehicle convoy carrying rangers, with no casualties reported. In Songkhla province, security forces 8 Dec clashed with RKK militants in Tae Pha district, with no known casualties. In Pattani province, bomb on train tracks 13 Dec damaged train in Khok Pho district, injuring one passenger and two railway staff. At least 1,000 refugees 17 Dec reportedly crossed into Thailand following fighting in Myanmar's Kayin State; Thai authorities 19 Dec sent over 600 refugees back across border (see Myanmar). Meanwhile, all political parties continued to prepare for 2022 election despite PM



Prayut Chan-o-cha denying possibility of early election several times throughout month.