

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan Japan held joint military exercise with U.S. and participated in security talks with U.S., Australia and India.** Japan and U.S. 3-7 Feb held joint exercise in sea area from Luzon Strait to Miyako Strait and East China Sea; Chinese state media 10 Feb said army conducted exercises in South China Sea, East China Sea and Yellow Sea in response. U.S., Australian, Indian and Japanese FMs in 11 Feb Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”) meeting issued joint statement reiterating importance of adhering to international law to “meet challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including in the South and East China Seas”. Japan’s Ishigaki City mayor 1 Feb said city employees and Tokai University 31 Jan conducted survey of disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands for conservation efforts and fishing, and indicated potential petitioning of central govt for permission to install sign on disputed islands to indicate Japanese authority; city council opposition said survey would damage relations with China. As of 23 Feb, 60 Chinese coast guard vessels had entered waters surrounding Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands during month.

➔ **Korean Peninsula North Korea conducted late month missile test following weeks-long hiatus amid international concerns about resumption of testing.** In wake of late Jan barrage of missile tests, North Korea saw pause in missile testing for most of month. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un 4 Feb issued congratulations to Chinese President Xi for hosting Winter Olympics 4-20 Feb, in gesture signalling confirmation of missile testing hiatus for duration of games likely aimed at limiting friction with Beijing; 22 Feb congratulated Xi on completion of games, vowed to strengthen cooperation with Beijing to “frustrate” threats from U.S. and its allies. U.S. Defence Secretary 9 Feb met with South Korean and Japanese counterparts to discuss North Korean missile tests, calling them “destabilizing to regional security” and “direct and serious threat”. South Korean President Moon in 10 Feb interview said resumption of nuclear or long-range missile testing would cause Korean Peninsula to “instantly fall back into the state of crisis we faced five years ago” and called for “persistent dialogue”; Moon’s comments come ahead of South Korea’s March elections that could coincide with resumption of North Korean testing. North Korea 27 Feb conducted missile test, prompting condemnation from U.S. and other states. Anniversary of birth of Kim Jong-il – father of Kim Jong-un – 16 Feb passed without notable events in North Korean capital Pyongyang despite rumoured planned military parade, with main event taking place in border city of Samjiyeon, birthplace of Kim according to official state history; move appeared to have been made to limit show of state power and associated risks of regional tensions. Supreme People’s Assembly 8 Feb pledged to develop economy in face of “persevering struggle” against both international sanctions and COVID-19 pandemic.

➔ **Taiwan Strait U.S. maintained posture of support for Taiwan, while China deployed dozens of aircraft into Taiwan’s air defence zone.** U.S. 7 Feb authorised possible sale of military equipment and services worth \$100mn to

help Taiwan “sustain, maintain, and improve” its Patriot missile defence system; Chinese defence ministry 9 Feb said act “grossly interferes” with China’s internal affairs, called on U.S. to revoke sale. U.S. Biden administration 11 Feb unveiled its new Indo-Pacific Strategy, which pledges to deter military aggression in Taiwan Strait. Senior Chinese official Wang Yang in 5 Feb meeting with former leader of Taiwan’s opposition Kuomintang party Hung Hsiu-chu said China was willing to hold dialogue on “democratic consultations” on basis of “one-China” principle; Taiwanese officials next day strongly rejected Chinese offer, calling it bid to “destroy” Taiwan. Meanwhile, Chinese aircraft flew into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone throughout month, totalling 39 aircraft as of 23 Feb. Defence ministry 15 Feb said China flew civilian aircraft into “defence reaction zone” of remote Taiwanese island Dongyin on 5 Feb, speculating China may have been testing military’s response. U.S. warship *USS Ralph Johnson* 26 Feb sailed through Taiwan Strait in “routine” transit that China same day denounced as “provocative”. Taiwan 15 Feb announced it would join U.S., UK and Australia in consultations on EU’s case against China at World Trade Organization, in which Beijing is accused of blocking trade with Lithuania. Somaliland’s FM 9 Feb visited Taiwan and met with President Tsai.

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan Taliban continued to consolidate its rule as international actors unfroze country’s financial assets and pressured regime to respect women’s rights.** Taliban continued to fill govt positions with Taliban loyalists. Taliban 2 Feb appointed Qari Salahuddin Ayubi, an ethnic Uzbek, as head of Mansoori army corps, reportedly to appease Uzbek Taliban fighters after arrest of popular Uzbek commander Makhdoom Alam on 12 Jan. Taliban appointed some women in symbolic govt positions, including Dr Malalai Faizi as director of Malalai Maternity Hospital 31 Jan. Taliban information ministry 13 Feb also appointed Nisa Mobarez as women’s representative in Badakhshan province. Some women protesters that were apparently abducted by Taliban authorities were released around 13 Feb following international outrage; Taliban did not officially confirm their arrest or release. Journalists continued to complain of Taliban’s media restrictions including short-term detentions. Taliban authorities also temporarily detained two foreigners working for UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Targeted attacks against former govt figures continued. Unknown assailants 11 Feb attacked former Hizb commander Mohammad Khan’s house, resulting in death of his son, wife and bodyguard; Taliban claimed attack was result of family feud, while Khan rejected claim. Taliban forces 5 Feb arrested at least 24 Baloch separatists from Baloch Liberation Army group, which is waging insurgency against Pakistan (see Pakistan). Attacks by Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) subsided, while attacks by Northern Resistance Front (NRF) appeared to be on the rise; NRF-affiliated fighters clashed with Taliban forces in Balkh and Baghlan provinces (north) during month, and Taliban launched major military operations against NRF forces in Panjshir late Feb. Internationally, U.S. President Biden 11 Feb signed executive order to split \$7 billion of frozen Afghan reserves, with half of money removed from pending legal cases so it can be utilised “for the benefit of the Afghan people”. World Bank 19 Feb considered plan to use \$1 billion in frozen Afghan trust fund for education, agriculture, health and family programs. Meanwhile, Taliban delegation

7 Feb visited Switzerland to discuss humanitarian assistance; 15 Feb visited Qatar's capital Doha to meet Arab Gulf and EU representatives.

➡ **Bangladesh Low-level electoral violence persisted, ruling party pressed for selection of new Election Commission, and clashes erupted in Chittagong Hill Tracts.** Despite an enhanced security presence, infighting within ruling Awami League party continued to fuel low-level violence during local elections, with clashes leaving one killed in Bogra district 1 Feb and two killed in Chittagong district 7 Feb. President Hamid 5 Feb formed new six-member search committee tasked with proposing ten nominees for Election Commission on 24 Feb; President 24 Feb received (as yet undisclosed) ten names by search committee for next five-member election commission. Committee 14 Feb disclosed it had received 322 names from 24 political parties, six professional organisations and civil society groups; main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) however continued to refuse to participate in process. BNP Sec Gen Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir 16 Feb called activities of search committee “meaningless” and reiterated party's opposition to any election held under Awami League's auspices. Month saw clashes between army and tribal militant groups Chittagong Hill Tracts. Clashes 2 Feb left one soldier and three suspected members of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti dead in Chittagong Hill Tracts's Bandarban district. Referring to recent attacks on army, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan 5 Feb referred to “conspiracies” at work aimed at destabilising region; army same day claimed to have destroyed base and training centre of another tribal militant group, United Peoples Democratic Front, in Chittagong Hill Tract's Khagrachhari district. Meanwhile relocation of Rohingya refugees to flood-prone Bhasan Char island continued; another 1,655 refugees 17 Feb relocated from Cox's Bazar camps to island, bringing total refugee population on island to more than 22,000.

➡ **India Maoist-related violence continued, while tensions between govt and China persisted.** Maoist activity and anti-Maoist security operations continued during month. In Odisha state (east), explosive device allegedly planted by Maoists 5 Feb killed journalist in Kalahandi district; Maoists 15 Feb allegedly killed 32-year-old man in Kandhamal district on suspicion that he was police informer. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), clashes with Maoists 12 Feb killed one security forces personnel and injured another in Bijapur district; security forces 16 Feb killed Maoist in security operation in Lohardaga district. In Jharkhand state (east), 12-day security operation 19 Feb led to arrest of ten Maoists in Lohardaga district. Tensions continued with China. Govt 3 Feb announced diplomatic boycott of Beijing Winter Olympic games just ahead of opening ceremony. FM S. Jaishankar 11 Feb said dispute over unofficial border known as Line of Actual Control (LAC) had “arisen due to the disregard by China in 2020 of written agreements with us, not to amass forces at the border”; in response, China's foreign ministry said “responsibility does not rest with China”. Jaishankar 19 Feb said “the state of the border will determine the state of the relationship” and “relations with China right now are going through a very difficult phase”.

➡ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Tensions between India and Pakistan ran high, while opposition rejected proposed delimitations for new electoral constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir.** Indian army chief 3 Feb said ceasefire along Kashmir's Line of Control (LoC) was holding because India had

“negotiated from a position of strength”; Pakistani army next day said claim was “misleading” and Islamabad only agreed to ceasefire due to “concerns for the safety of the people of Kashmir living on both sides of the LoC”. Following PM Khan’s visit to China 3-6 Feb, China and Pakistan 6 Feb stated that Kashmir dispute “should be properly and peacefully resolved based on the UN Charter”. In response, India’s external affairs ministry 9 Feb said that Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh “have been, are, and will always remain integral and inalienable parts of India” and expressed concern regarding China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects “that were in India’s territory that has been illegally occupied by Pakistan”. Speaking at annual meeting of UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, Pakistan’s UN Representative Umer Siddique 15 Feb urged UN Security Council to hold accountable “masterminds” who supported, financed and sponsored cross-border terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, political tensions rose in J&K when delimitation commission tasked with carving out new constituencies 4 Feb submitted new interim report, which proposed allocating seven new seats to Jammu region and only one to Kashmir, thus tilting power balance against Muslim-majority region. Opposition parties, including Kashmir’s National Conference party and People’s Democratic Party, immediately rejected report on grounds that it was unfair to Kashmir and Muslim minority. Authorities continued to harass journalists; notably, court 1 Feb directed police to arrest journalist Gowhar Geelani for endangering lives through social media activity; police 4 Feb arrested Kashmiri journalist Fahad Shah for “anti-national” social media posts. Meanwhile, security operations and militant attacks including trend of targeted attacks on policemen persisted. Notably, Hizbul Mujahideen militant 1 Feb shot Kashmiri police officer in Shopian district. Security forces 12 Feb arrested four alleged Al Badr militants and three associates in Baramulla district. State Investigation Agency 16 Feb arrested ten alleged supporters of Jaish-e-Muhammad in raids throughout Kashmir.

➡ **Nepal Disagreement among parties over long-delayed U.S. development grant triggered fresh political tensions, threatening to split ruling alliance, while parliament impeached chief justice.** Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), U.S. foreign aid agency, 3 Feb notified govt that \$500mn infrastructure grant agreed in 2017 would have to be ratified by Nepal’s parliament by 28 Feb or risk being cancelled; implementation of MCC projects – mostly installing electricity transmission lines and upgrading highways – have been delayed for years due to allegations that some provisions in grant undermined Nepal’s sovereignty. Announcement of 28 Feb deadline accelerated political manoeuvring among parties, as ruling coalition member Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) 16 Feb opposed deal’s ratification absent broader consensus and threatened to quit coalition if compact was tabled in parliament. Ruling Nepali Congress, however, 20 Feb tabled MCC compact in parliament. Following 24 Feb discussions between PM Sher Bahadur Deuba and opposition Unified Marxist-Leninist party leader and former PM KP Oli on potentially forming new alliance that would ensure passage of grant through lower house, Maoists agreed to ratify deal to salvage ruling coalition paving way for parliament 27 Feb to approve compact. Meanwhile, Chief Justice Cholendra Rana was suspended 13 Feb after 98 MPs registered impeachment motion against him over corruption allegations.

➡ **Pakistan Pakistani Taliban and Baloch militants launched deadly attacks on military, mob incidents erupted in Punjab, and authorities**

increased prison sentences for defamation crime. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistani Taliban 6 Feb launched cross-border attack which killed five soldiers in Kurram district; military same day condemned use of Afghan territory “for activities against Pakistan”, stated that Islamabad “expects that the interim Afghan government will not allow conduct of such activities against Pakistan in future”. In Balochistan, attacks by Baloch militants on security forces spiked late Jan-early Feb; in high-profile attack, Baloch militants 2 Feb killed five soldiers in two military camps in Nuskhi and Panjgur districts. In “clearing operation”, military 5 Feb claimed to have killed 20 Baloch militants in both districts; military 3 Feb attributed surge in Baloch militant attacks on elements based in Afghanistan. In apparent recognition that Baloch militants benefit from local support, army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa 12 Feb emphasised importance of “breaking the nexus between terrorists and their sympathisers and support base” while visiting Panjgur district. Punjab province, main constituency of banned Sunni hardline Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), saw several violent mob incidents. Notably, violent mobs 14 and 15 Feb stoned men in Khanewal and Faisalabad districts, accusing them of desecrating Quran, killing one. In Muzaffargarh district, mob 15 Feb attempted to lynch man accused of burning pages of Quran until police intervened. President Alvi 20 Feb issued ordinance amending Prevention of Electronics Crimes Act, broadening definition of defamation from “a person” to include any institution, authority or organisation, and making offense non-bailable with prison sentences increasing from three to five years; opposition politicians and media organisations immediately condemned move, said ordinance a bid to silence dissent. Islamabad High Court 24 Feb called ordinance “oppressive and draconian”. Anti-terrorism court in Karachi city 14 Feb called for arrest of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement leader and federal parliamentarian Ali Wazir (who is already detained in case related to defaming state institutions). Meanwhile, PM Khan 24 Feb met President Putin in Russia’s capital Moscow, day Russia invaded Ukraine; Pakistani foreign ministry said Khan regretted “the latest situation” between Russia and Ukraine and called for diplomatic solution.

➡ **Sri Lanka Economic strains worsened, pressure rose to repeal controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), and new allegations surfaced of intelligence agencies’ involvement in 2019 Easter bombings.**

On economic front, hard currency shortages limited importers’ ability to buy goods and contributed to inflation; foreign reserves fell to \$2.3bn during month, with \$1.8bn due to be repaid between Feb and April and \$1bn in July. Power cuts grew longer and more frequent amid growing fuel shortages. President Rajapaksa 12 Feb invoked emergency powers to ban strikes in health and electricity sectors, ending nearly week-long strike by health workers. FM GL Peiris 6-8 Feb visited Indian capital New Delhi to secure additional emergency financial support; visit followed 2 Feb signing of \$500mn line of credit for gasoline purchases from Indian Oil Corporation, latest in series of Indian loans totalling \$1.4bn designed to keep economy afloat; further \$1bn under negotiation. Ahead of March session of UN Human Rights Council, Court of Appeal 7 Feb agreed to release on bail Muslim lawyer Hejaaz Hisbullah, held under PTA for almost two years. After cabinet late Jan approved draft bill to amend PTA, EU 8 Feb welcomed amendments but “noted that important elements had not been included in the Amendment Bill”. Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka 15 Feb announced support for complete abolition of PTA, while Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, 17 Feb signed petition for act’s repeal. Meanwhile, former most senior police investigator Shani Abeysekera 17

Feb filed petition in Supreme Court that appeared to confirm claims made by opposition parliamentarians in 2021 that intelligence services loyal to Rajapaksa had actively obstructed and misdirected pre- and post-attack police investigations into jihadist network responsible for 2019 Easter bombings. Three-judge High Court panel 18 Feb unanimously dismissed all 855 charges against Hemasiri Fernando, then secretary to ministry of defence, and Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara, on trial for allegedly failing to act on early warnings of the bombings from Indian intelligence agency.

South East Asia

➡ **Myanmar** **Regime forces' ongoing battles against resistance forces and ethnic armed groups fuelled uptick in fighting, while nationwide strike and sanctions marked coup's first anniversary.** Violence rose in Sagaing region (north west) as regime forces continued counter-insurgency campaign and local resistance groups retaliated. Notably, military 6-7 Feb deployed air support during raid on village in Ye-U township, detaining over 70 people and forcing some 10,000 to flee. In Pale township, regime and paramilitary forces from pro-military Pyusawhti networks 4 Feb allegedly raided two villages, burning some 700 homes in total; combined forces of 14 resistance groups next day reportedly attacked police station and General Administration Department in Pale with "heavy weapons", claiming to have killed eight, including district administrator. Similarly, at least six resistance groups 9 Feb attacked police station in Taze township. Clashes also persisted with some ethnic armed groups. Notably, Arakan Army (AA) 4-8 Feb clashed with military in Maungdaw township, near Bangladesh border, in heaviest fighting since Nov 2020 informal ceasefire. Both sides, however, appeared keen to de-escalate, with regime releasing several dozen AA-linked detainees and AA 12 Feb sending delegation to regime's Union Day ceremony. In Chin State, military destroyed over 90 homes in Thantlang town in early Feb in retaliation for clashes with Chinland Defence Force. Kachin Independence Army early month launched several attacks on regime targets, upending relative lull in fighting in northern Myanmar. To mark one-year anniversary of 1 Feb coup, resistance called for "silent strike" that was widely observed across country. In Tachileik township (Shan state) unknown assailants same day threw grenade at pro-military rally, reportedly killing two and injuring 20. U.S., Canada and UK marked 1 Feb anniversary with additional sanctions against regime officials and businesspeople helping to arm military. Cambodia next day confirmed it would not invite junta FM Wunna Maung Lwin to rescheduled regional body ASEAN's meeting on 16-17 Feb, citing regime's lack of progress on five-point consensus. EU 21 Feb issued new sanctions, including against state-owned oil and gas company. U.S., Japanese, Indian and Australian FMs 11 Feb called for "an end to violence" and reaffirmed support for ASEAN's efforts.

➡ **Philippines** **Violence continued in south with greater lethality, while clashes between gov't forces and communist rebels persisted.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, month witnessed slight uptick in both clashes between militants and authorities and clan violence. Notably, in Sulu province, military 3 Feb clashed with members of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group in Patikul town, killing one soldier and one militant. In Lanao del Sur province, marines 3 Feb clashed with Maute militants in Balabagan

town. With regard to clan-related relations, armed group members 11 Feb ambushed Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commander and his relatives, killing nine and injuring three. Militant surrenders continued through month. Three members associated with armed group in Maute 1 Feb surrendered in Marawi province, while two Abu Sayyaf members 3 Feb surrendered in Patikul town, Sulu province; 14 Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) combatants from Karialan faction 15 Feb surrendered in Midsayap town, Cotabato province. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist New People's Army persisted at broadly similar levels to Jan; violence in Mindanao Island in south, Visayas Islands in centre and Luzon Island in north killed at least eight combatants and civilians and injured three during Feb. In Marawi city, housing officials 15 Feb cast doubt on progress of reconstruction, saying major housing projects in Marawi may not be completed by the time President Duterte steps down in June.

➡ **South China Sea U.S. and its allies reiterated commitment to international law in South China Sea (SCS), calling on China to follow suit.** U.S., Australian, Indian and Japanese FMs in 11 Feb Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad") meeting reaffirmed commitment to "free, open and inclusive rules-based order" and "adherence to international law" in East and South China Seas. U.S. State Dept 12 Feb released study concluding that China "asserts unlawful maritime claims in most of the South China Sea, including an unlawful historic rights claim" and called on Beijing to "conform its maritime claims to international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention" and "to cease its unlawful and coercive activities in the South China Sea". Chinese naval vessel 17 Feb shone military-grade laser at Australian air force plane in Arafura Sea, within Australia's exclusive economic zone; Australia's defence ministry 19 Feb described action as "unprofessional and unsafe military conduct" while Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton called it "aggressive bullying". U.S. House of Representatives 3 Feb passed non-binding resolution asserting that U.S. interest would be served by ratifying UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Following crash of F-35C fighter jet on deck of *USS Carl Vinson* operating in SCS last month, carrier 14 Feb returned to U.S.; as of 20 Feb, U.S. navy had not recovered jet in region.

➡ **Thailand Court released several political activists under strict conditions, while insecurity persisted in deep south amid spate of IED attacks and deadly encounters between military and security forces.** Similar to last month, Feb saw no anti-govt protests. Thai Criminal Court 9 Feb agreed to temporarily release political activists Jatupat "Pai Dao Din" Boonpatharaksa and Panupong "Mike Rayong" Jadnok held on multiple charges, including lèse-majesté. Activist Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, also charged with lèse-majesté, received bail on 24 Feb to continue his university studies; their release is conditional on abstaining from political activities, observing curfew, and wearing ankle monitors. Seksakol Atthawong, vice minister attached to PM's Office, 17 Feb led group of royalists to submit petition allegedly carrying 1.2mn signatures to interior ministry to expel Amnesty International from country, accusing NGO of interfering with internal affairs and threatening national security. Minister of Digital Economy and Society Chaiwut Thanakamanusorn next day said his ministry is considering introducing single internet gateway, ostensibly to protect Thais from online crime; move could give authorities tighter grip on access to information inside country. In deep south, insecurity persisted with several IED attacks. In Songkhla

province, security forces 3 Feb killed three militants attempting to break through perimeter around Koran learning centre at Khok Khet mosque, Ban-na sub-district, Chana district; IED same day detonated near railway bridge 5km from mosque, wounding villager; another IED 4 Feb exploded in same area, wounding two police officers. In Bangnang Sata district, Yala province, unidentified gunmen 10 Feb wounded Muslim man; IED same day exploded at Bang La dam power plant, wounding Muslim security guard. IED 18 Feb targeted two police vehicles in Raman district, with officers suffering no serious wounds. IED at railway crossing 23 Feb wounded two police officers in Muang district, Yala. In Pattani province, unidentified gunmen on motorcycles 18 Feb shot dead assistant village headman in Talor Kraithong subdistrict, Mai Kaen district; gunmen 21 Feb shot and killed former assistant village chief in Nong Chik district, Pattani.