

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** Chinese and Japanese FMs met 15 Feb on sidelines of Munich Security Conference in Germany: Beijing reassured Tokyo Chinese President Xi will visit Japan in April as planned despite coronavirus-19 outbreak and amid bilateral tensions in East China Sea.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** U.S.-North Korea stalemate continued while UN report alleged Pyongyang advanced its nuclear and missile programs in 2019, breaching sanctions. U.S. media 10 Feb reported President Trump told advisors he did not want summit with Kim Jong-un before Nov U.S. election. Leaked report to UN Security Council Sanctions Committee on North Korea, due in March, alleged Pyongyang breached UN sanctions by failing to halt “illicit nuclear and ballistic missile program” in 2019, said DPRK illicitly imported refined petroleum, and exported US\$370mn worth of coal aided by Chinese barges; China refused to comment. Study by U.S. company Recorded Future, released 9 Feb, reported Pyongyang increased its internet usage by 300% since 2017, using it “as an instrument for acquiring prohibited knowledge and skills”, enabling development of “nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and cyber operations”. South Korean President Moon reportedly seeking meeting with Trump in March; conservative South Korean lawmakers continued to push Washington against such meeting for fear it could result in unfair elections. U.S.-South Korea tensions continued over stalled negotiations on agreement for sharing cost of maintaining 28,500 U.S. troops on Korean peninsula; South Korean Defence Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo and U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper discussed cost sharing in meeting in Washington 24 Feb, but negotiators failed to agree on new deal; U.S. military 28 Feb gave its South Korean employees one-month notice about impending unpaid leave of absence; Seoul and Washington 27 Feb postponed spring military exercises “until further notice” after Seoul declared its highest “severe” alert level over coronavirus-19. Coronavirus infection rate mid-Feb recorded daily spikes in South Korea’s Daegu city, with Shincheonji religious group members who had just visited China testing positive for virus; President Moon increasingly accused of putting relations with China above public health by allowing Chinese tourists and students inside country; April general elections could become de facto referendum on Moon over virus. In response to Coronavirus-19 threat, DPRK reportedly closed its border with China late Jan, while news reports said country also hit by virus contrary to official announcements; DPRK early Feb informed foreign embassies and tour operators that foreigners will be temporarily blocked from entering, including diplomats.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** Tensions with China continued over military exercises and high-level meetings between U.S. and Taiwanese officials. In what China’s People’s Liberation Army described as military drills aimed at improving combat capabilities, Chinese military jets including J-11 fighters and H-6 bombers 9-10 Feb flew through Bashi Channel, body of water separating Taiwan from Philippines, prompting Taiwanese air force to scramble jets in response and request foreign jets to leave; Beijing 9 Feb claimed it was “safeguarding national sovereignty”; U.S. State

Department 12 Feb said “completely inappropriate of China to take such an aggressive act”. Same day, three U.S. military aircrafts – two B-52 bombers and one MC-130 special mission aircraft – conducted drills in Taiwan Strait; U.S. warship also sailed through Strait 15 Feb. Ministry of National Defence 28 Feb reported that Chinese H-6 bombers same day flew over the sea in Southwest Taiwan and over Bashi Channel, said public should not worry about latest move as military relied on advanced joint surveillance system to monitor situation. Following reports that VP-elect William Lai met with U.S. National Security Council officials in Washington 3 Feb, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson 6 Feb said China “firmly opposes official exchange” between U.S. and Taiwan, urging U.S. to “stop sending wrong signals to Taiwan independence forces to avoid causing serious harm to China-US relations”; Taiwan’s foreign ministry said visit was “private trip”. Parliamentary speaker Yu Shyi-kun 13 Feb called on U.S. to recognise Taiwan and establish formal diplomatic ties during meeting with Brent Christensen, Director of American Institute in Taiwan, at Legislative Yuan in capital Taipei.

South Asia

↑ **Afghanistan** Amid significant drop in violence, U.S. and Taliban signed historic agreement to end long-running conflict, paving way for future intra-Afghan talks. U.S. and Taliban representatives 21 Feb said they had reached deal on gradual U.S. military withdrawal in exchange for Taliban’s assurances to cut links with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups and join intra-Afghan negotiations; agreement contingent on successful completion of seven-day period of “reduction in violence”, which started 22 Feb. Agreement signed 29 Feb in Doha presaging expected mass prisoner exchange, and start of intra-Afghan negotiations, although basic aspects of talks including date, location and facilitator remained undecided while neither govt nor Taliban announced representatives. Conflict activity significantly dropped countrywide during reduction in violence period. Taliban-related violence continued up to 22 Feb especially in northern rural areas: govt blamed Taliban for 11 Feb suicide attack in Charah-e-Qambar area of capital Kabul, which left four members of security forces and two civilians dead, insurgents denied responsibility; Taliban 3 Feb ambushed pro-govt militia in provincial capital Sar-i-Pul (north), killing its commander and five others; Taliban 10 Feb ambushed convoy of security forces travelling north from Kabul, killing three police officers and wounding 33 members of security forces in twelve-hour clash; Taliban abducted and then killed a govt employee and a former jihadi commander in Kunduz province (north) 2 Feb and a police officer in Faryab province (north) 7 Feb. Member of govt security forces 9 Feb killed two U.S. special forces soldiers in Nangarhar province (east). Prior to reduction in violence, U.S. airstrikes continued to cause numerous civilian casualties including 14 Feb airstrike on moving vehicle in Nangarhar, reportedly killing eight. Independent Election Commission 18 Feb announced final results of contested Sept 2019 presidential election, declaring President Ghani winner with 50.64% of vote, thereby avoiding run-off; same day, main opponent Abdullah Abdullah – officially declared runner-up with 39.52% – rejected result and vowed to form parallel govt, publicly encouraged by VP Rashid Dostum; opposition supporters end-Feb carried out protests in provincial capitals in north while govt deployed increased security forces in Kabul.

➡ **Bangladesh** Security forces continued to arrest alleged members of banned militant groups while incidents of violence accompanied local election in capital Dhaka. Counter-terrorism police in Dhaka 4 Feb arrested 28-year-old woman, allegedly head of Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) women's branch, on charges of recruiting female members through social media. Paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 5 Feb arrested suspected JMB member in Dhaka, next day arrested two suspected Allahr Dal members in Kulna city. Police 10 Feb arrested five suspected members of Ansar-al Islam (formerly Ansarullah Bangla Team) in Dhaka accused of planning attack on Hindu temple in city. RAB 12 Feb arrested student and suspected Ansar-al Islam member in Sylhet's Sagor Dighirpar area, next day detained alleged Allahr Dal member in Meherpur district. FM Momen 15 Feb told media that security forces had started construction of barbed wire fences around Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district to prevent refugees from leaving site. Sporadic violence accompanied 1 Feb Dhaka city corporation polls in which ruling-Awami League (AL) won both mayoral seats; in lead up to vote supporters of AL and opposition Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP) clashed while local media reported that on voting day activists of AL's student wing allegedly attacked four journalists covering the elections. Chief Election Commissioner said turnout likely below 30%; BNP's losing mayoral candidates 5 Feb called results "fabricated" and claimed turnout was under 10%, called for fresh elections and alleged mass rigging included intimidation and misuse of electronic voting machines.

↓ **India (non-Kashmir)** Major Hindu-Muslim violence erupted in capital New Delhi following attack on protest by Muslims over controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA); at least 46 people killed. Violence and rioting 23-26 Feb broke out in several areas of north east Delhi leaving dozens dead and hundreds injured. Incidents started after statement 23 Feb made by leader of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) calling for removal of sit-in by anti-CAA protesters blocking a road; Hindu-Muslim clashes and rioting quickly ensued across multiple districts in north east Delhi with shops, houses and vehicles burnt in several locations, Hindu mobs 24-25 Feb torching four mosques in Ashok Nagar, Golakpuri and Mustafabad districts; many videos online show police standing idle and, in some cases, siding with the Hindu mobs. Authorities 24 Feb started banning gatherings of more than four people; over 7000 paramilitary troops deployed over several days in affected areas. Delhi High Court judge 26 Feb called on govt and police to do more to combat violence, govt same day transferred judge as part of "routine transfer". PM Narendra Modi 26 Feb called for "peace and brotherhood". By 29 Feb, 885 people arrested for their alleged role in Hindu-Muslim violence. Incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) 8 Feb defeated BJP in state assembly election in New Delhi; AAP won 62 of 70 seats allowing Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to retain his post for third successive term. U.S. President Trump 24 Feb met PM Modi during first official visit to country; Trump same day announced planned \$3bn defence deal with India including provision of U.S. military helicopters. In Chhattisgarh, Maoists 10 Feb killed three members of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and injured five others in Bijapur district; Maoists 18 Feb killed a CPRF commando in gun battle in Sukma district; Police 19 Feb announced deaths of two suspected Maoists during clashes with security forces in Bastar region.

➡ **Kashmir** Amid continued clashes between Indian and Pakistani forces along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir), tensions

remained high. Pakistan claimed Indian cross-LoC shelling killed two civilians 9 Feb, reportedly killed Indian soldier in retaliatory fire next day. Indian officials 25 Feb reported that Pakistani shelling along LoC same day injured two civilians; Pakistan 26 Feb claimed that India 25 Feb had violated ceasefire along LoC, injuring one civilian. Following heightened rhetoric between Islamabad and New Delhi over territory in late Jan, Turkish President Erdoğan 14 Feb expressed concern about India's "unilateral steps" during trip to Islamabad, called for resolution through justice instead of "conflict or oppression"; in response, Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar next day rejected statement, called on Turkey "to not interfere in India's internal affairs and develop proper understanding". In press conference with Pakistani FM Qureshi in Islamabad, UN Sec Gen Guterres 16 Feb expressed "deep concern" at heightened tensions, calling on India to respect "human rights and fundamental freedoms" inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and reiterating offer to mediate; New Delhi rejected offer with Kumar stating "there is no role or scope for third-party mediation". Within J&K, authorities 6 Feb charged former Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti under controversial Public Safety Act, which allows detention for up to two years without charges, trials or judicial review; Abdullah's family 10 Feb petitioned Supreme Court against decision. Kashmir Valley and parts of Jammu observed complete shutdown following separatist Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)'s call for strike. The first such strike call by a separatist group since India's 5 Aug actions in Kashmir marked anniversaries of 9 Feb 2013 execution of Kashmiri militant accused of attacking the Indian parliament in 2001, and 11 Feb 1984 hanging of JKLF founder Maqbool Bhat for 1966 alleged killing of Indian intelligence officer.

➡ **Nepal** Fractures within ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) over disputes surrounding senior leader Bam Dev Gautam dominated political discussions, fuelling growing tensions between PM KP Oli and his fellow party co-chair and former Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and adding to uncertainty about stability of current govt. Differences centered over a series of decisions potentially paving way for Gautam to ascend to prime ministership with Dahal's backing. NCP central committee meeting 2 Feb appointed Gautam party vice-chairperson and party leaders 22 Feb formed task force led by former PM Madhav Kumar Nepal to work toward amending 2015 constitution to allow members of upper parliamentary house to be appointed PM; currently only lower house members can become PM. NCP secretariat meeting 26 Feb nominated Gautam for seat in upper house where 19 of 59 total members are due to be replaced by 3 Mar, Gautam had lost his parliamentary election contest in 2017 and is currently not an MP; Oli rejected Gautam's nomination hours later, underscoring divisions within NCP leadership. Seventeen editors of Nepal's leading news agencies issued statement 19 Feb defending press freedoms and condemning Chinese embassy for issuing threats in its 18 Feb communiqué, Chinese embassy had expressed dissatisfaction with op-ed printed in *The Kathmandu Post* criticising China's response to Coronavirus outbreak, and threatened further action against paper's chief editor.

➡ **Pakistan** Political tensions remained high amid concerns over govt's anti-terrorism measures and crackdown on civil society-led Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) from former Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Financial Action Task Force (FATF) 21 Feb gave govt four-month extension to implement anti-terrorism financing measures with FATF keeping country on "grey-list" until new June

deadline; previously, anti-terrorism court 12 Feb sentenced Jamaat-ud-Dawa (formerly Laskhar-e-Tayyaba) chief Hafiz Saeed and his aide to five and a half years imprisonment on two cases relating to terrorism financing, both plan to appeal. Govt's anti-terrorism efforts questioned following 6 Feb release to local media of audio message in which former Pakistani Taliban spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan claimed to have escaped from custody of security forces in Jan; Ehsan claimed he surrendered to security services in 2017 under agreement that included large financial reward and complete immunity from detention and prosecution, Ehsan reportedly stayed in security safe house in Peshawar city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK). Family of children killed in 2014 terror attack on army school in Peshawar – which killed some 150 and Ehsan accepted responsibility on Pakistani Taliban faction's behalf – 8 Feb brought proceedings to Peshawar High court against senior govt and military officials for failing to prosecute Ehsan, while opposition leaders 10 Feb called for explanation of “mysterious escape”; interior minister 17 Feb confirmed Ehsan no longer in custody but gave no further details. Following 27 Jan arrest of PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen in Peshawar on charges ranging from sedition to hate speech in five separate cases and 28 Jan detention of some thirty PTM supporters and activists demonstrating in capital Islamabad against arrest, Islamabad High Court's chief justice 3 Feb granted bail to detainees and questioned charges of sedition and terrorism brought against peaceful protesters, while district court in KPK 15 Feb granted bail to Pashteen. Militant-related violence continued including attacks on health workers; in KPK's Dera Ismail Khan district, police officer guarding polio vaccination team killed 18 Feb. In Balochistan's capital Quetta, terror attack on mosque killed police officer 5 Feb and suicide attack reportedly near rally of banned sectarian group Alhe Sunnat Wal Jamaat killed at least ten 17 Feb, including two police officers.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Govt of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa continued efforts to reverse previous govt's modest efforts to investigate past abuses and strengthen independence of police, judiciary and oversight commissions. In media interview PM Mahinda Rajapaksa 9 Feb reiterated plans to strengthen presidential powers by removing 19th amendment of constitution. FM Dinesh Gunawardena 26 Feb informed UN Human Rights Council govt was withdrawing its co-sponsorship of Oct 2015 council resolution on “Reconciliation and Accountability in Sri Lanka”, stated resolution had not received cabinet or parliamentary approval and certain clauses contravened Sri Lankan constitution; promised govt would establish “an inclusive, domestically designed and executed reconciliation and accountability process”. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 14 Feb announced travel ban on Army Commander Lt Gen Shavendra Silva and his immediate family for his alleged role in “gross violations of human rights” during final phases of civil war; Foreign Ministry 16 Feb rejected allegations during meeting with U.S. Ambassador. Police 4 Feb arrested former Sri Lankan Airlines Chief Executive Officer Kapila Chandrasena and his wife following new evidence of alleged bribes by Airbus to Sri Lankan Airlines officials under previous Rajapaksa govt; evidence emerged from British court proceedings following 4-year investigation into allegations of bribery and corruption. Police 14 Feb arrested former ambassador to Russia and Rajapaksa relative, Udayanga Weerathunga, for alleged role in fraudulent purchase of Ukrainian MiG fighter jets for Sri Lankan Air Force in 2006; magistrate 16 Feb denied bail after criticising police for apparent attempt to weaken prosecution case. Opposition United National Party parliamentarian Eran Wickremaratne 20 Feb criticised police questioning of several

journalists and seizure of their phone records without warrant, accusing govt and police of attempting to frame prominent journalists and officials over Nov 2019 diplomatic incident. Parliamentary Oversight Committee on National Security 20 Feb issued report on potential security reforms to address shortcomings related to 2019 Easter bombings, recommendations include ban of face veils, suspension of registration of political parties on ethnic or religious bases, amendments to Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, and incorporation of madrassas into normal school system under Ministry of Education.

South East Asia

➡ **Indonesia** Coordinating Minister for Legal, Political and Security Affairs Mahfud 11 Feb said President Joko Widodo and cabinet decided not to repatriate 689 citizens who had joined Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq, due to potential security threat to public; Presidential Chief of Staff Moeldoko 13 Feb said their citizenship “had been automatically lost following their decision to join the terrorist movement in Syria” fuelling concerns about leaving them effectively stateless.

➡ **Myanmar** Clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and military continued, further rendering unlikely Rohingya refugee repatriation. In Rakhine State, AA and military confrontation resulted in several incidents; in most serious clash, village school 13 Feb hit by mortar fire, reportedly injuring twenty children in Buthidaung township, in Maungdaw district; military spokesman next day denied responsibility and blamed AA, who in turn blamed military; in early Feb, some 1,100 villagers also fled from twenty villages in same area due to shelling. Govt 3 Feb re-imposed ban lifted on 31 Aug 2019 on mobile internet services for three months in five townships in Rakhine and southern Chin States – Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Myebon and Paletwa – due to “security requirements and public interest”; four other townships in Rakhine State have been under internet shutdown since June 2019.

➡ **Philippines** Violence between Islamic State militants and military continued while clashes involving communist rebels occurred in the north and south. In the south, gunshot 7 Feb wounded one military personnel in suspected attack of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao province; Abu Sayyaf militants 11 Feb kidnapped a doctor allegedly to treat a sick leader in Sulu province; suspected bomb expert working for BIFF killed following 12 Feb clash with security forces in Pikit village, North Cotabato province; two BIFF members 21 Feb killed in firefight with military in Maguindanao province; two suspected Abu Sayyaf militants 23 Feb killed by military in Patikul, in Sulu province. Amidst stagnant peace talks with communist rebels, several clashes between military and communist insurgents took place in Luzon and Mindanao throughout month: seven New People’s Army (NPA) suspected rebels 14 Feb killed in clashes with military in Isabela and Ilocos Sur provinces; exchange of fire between local police officers and communist rebels same day in San Narciso, in Quezon province, left two police wounded. Decommissioning process of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) members continued with 10,000 combatants successfully decommissioned and more than 1,500 out of 2,000 firearms turned over between late Sept 2019 and Feb 2020. Govt 24 Feb arrested 38 alleged MILF members in possession of weapons in Talakag city, Bukidnon province in Northern Mindanao; most have now been

released. Cotabato City Mayor Guiani-Sayadi 7 Feb submitted position paper to President Duterte requesting that Cotabato City be excluded from Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) until end of transition period on 30 June 2022, initial government position stipulated turnover of city will occur in Dec 2020. President Duterte 11 Feb announced termination of 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) which provides for procedures over treatment of U.S. forces inside country.

➡ **South China Sea** Following China's incursion in Jan into Indonesian exclusive economic zone, Japanese govt 14 Feb announced provision of \$20 million in funding to Indonesia in order to upgrade its national coast guard, along with fishery patrol vessel, in effort to promote Japan's "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy". Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Philip Davidson 13 Feb said at meeting in Sydney, Australia, that China is "seek[ing] to control the flow of trade, finance, communications, politics and the way of life in the Indo-Pacific". Malaysian Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu 15 Feb called on U.S. and Europe "to not bring proxy wars to Asia, especially in the South China Sea" during Munich Security Conference in Germany. U.S. and India 25 Feb issued joint statement noting "efforts toward a meaningful Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, and solemnly urged that it not prejudice the legitimate rights and interests of all nations according to international law".

➡ **Thailand** Domestic political tensions continued with ban of opposition Future Forward Party (FFP) and controversies over role of military in commercial activities. Constitutional Court 21 Feb ruled that opposition party FFP illegally accepted loan from party founder Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit in violation of Political Parties Organic Law; court 21 Feb dissolved FFP, imposing 10-year ban from political activity for sixteen party executives, including Thanathorn and Secretary General Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, giving 60 days to remaining 65 MPs to join another party. University and high school students staged series of demonstrations on campuses and elsewhere to protest FFP dissolution and called for govt to step down. In Nakhon Ratchasima city, north east Thailand, non-commissioned army officer 8-9 Feb staged mass shooting, killing commanding officer, mother-in-law, soldier and 29 people, before 9 Feb being killed by police. Incident raised questions among observers about army's professionalism and involvement in commercial activities; Army Chief General Apirat Kongsompong 11 Feb vowed to eliminate officers' financial links with subordinates and transfer control of a range of profit-seeking enterprises, including golf courses and boxing venues, to Treasury Department; Thanathorn 16 Feb urged Gen Apirat to end military involvement in all commercial operations. Following Jan controversy over reported proxy voting during parliamentary vote on budget bill, Constitutional Court 7 Feb ruled 5-4 that parliament should conduct new vote on bill; budget passed 13 Feb. Incidents of violence continued in deep south with series of militant attacks. Motorcycle-borne gunmen 10 Feb killed Malay-Muslim in Muang district, in Yala; gunman 13 Feb killed Malay-Muslim man in Sungai Kolok district, in Narathiwat; small bomb 17 Feb exploded in front of school with no casualties in Nong Chik district, in Pattani; gunmen same day killed Malay-Muslim civilian enrolled in army-sponsored jobs project in drive-by shooting in Khok Pho district, in Pattani; security forces 22-23 Feb killed six militants and seized seven small arms and improvised explosive device rigged to motorcycle after gun battle in Cho Airong district, Narathiwat.