

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➡ **China/Japan** Japanese coast guard 10 and 15 July spotted four Chinese coast guard ships around contested Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. International tensions increased over Chinese and Russian planes' incursion of airspace over islands contested by Japan and South Korea; joint air exercise 23 July saw three Russian and two Chinese military planes fly over Dokdo islands in East Sea/Sea of Japan, claimed by both South Korea and Japan; Russia denied violation of airspace but confirmed it took part in joint patrol with Chinese aircraft. Japan's ministry of defence said it had scrambled fighters to intercept planes (see Korean Peninsula).

➡ **Korean Peninsula** U.S. and North Korea denuclearisation talks remained stalled while North Korea tested projectiles. Despite end June agreement to restart negotiations following meeting between U.S. President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in demilitarised zone between North and South Korea, stalemate in denuclearisation talks ongoing with no talks announced. North Korea 24 July conducted test of two short-range missiles and 31 July fired two more. U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton 23 July met with Korean officials in Seoul to discuss stalled talks as well as strengthening of South Korea-U.S. alliance. World Food Programme 24 July announced it had learned that North Korea intended to reject South Korea's food aid program, announced in June and due to be delivered through UN agencies. Joint air exercise 23 July saw three Russian and two Chinese military planes fly over Dokdo islands in East Sea/Sea of Japan, claimed by both South Korea and Japan; South Korea scrambled jets and fired hundreds of warning shots after one of Russian planes violated its sovereign airspace. Russia denied violation of airspace but confirmed it took part in joint patrol with Chinese aircraft (see China/Japan). Exercise came amid deterioration in Japanese-South Korean relations, with National Security Advisor Chung Eui-yong 18 July saying govt could even reconsider sharing intelligence with Japan if bilateral situation worsens.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Tensions continued amid military drills and Chinese condemnation of U.S. sale of weapons to Taiwan. China ministry of defence 14 July held military drills involving navy and air force near Taiwan Strait. China 28 July began military drills near both ends of Taiwan Strait, due to conclude 2 Aug. In response, Taiwan 29-30 July held live-fire drills. Earlier in month, U.S. State Department 8 July announced it had approved estimated \$2.2bn sale of tanks, missiles and related equipment to Taiwan; China's foreign ministry expressed anger and urged U.S. to revoke sale. Next day, China foreign ministry spokesperson said sale "harms China's sovereignty and security interests", followed by 12 July claim it would sanction U.S. companies selling weapons to Taiwan. President Tsai mid-July visited U.S. including 12 July meeting with UN representatives, where she said Taiwan "facing threat and penetration of overseas forces". China 24 July released national defence white paper accusing Taiwan of "pursuing path of separatism" and warning China "must and will be reunited". U.S. warship 24-25 July sailed through Taiwan Strait; in response, China foreign ministry 25 July expressed "deep concern".

China's culture and tourism ministry 31 July announced it will temporarily restrict individual travel permits from China to Taiwan starting 1 Aug.

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## South Asia

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➡ 🇦🇫 **Afghanistan** Amid continued violence causing a high civilian toll, peace process saw signs of progress in latest rounds of talks and could lead to finalisation of U.S.-Taliban agreement in coming month. During seventh round of U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha (28 June-9 July) U.S. Special Envoy Khalilzad 6 July said round was “most productive session” to date, with progress made on all four fronts: counter-terrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue and permanent and comprehensive ceasefire; talks resumed late July. Taliban and Afghan representatives, including govt officials, met in Doha 7-8 July to discuss roadmap for initiation of formal intra-Afghan talks; in joint-declaration both parties called for reduction of civilian casualties and respect of women's rights. Violence continued: in Kabul, Taliban truck bomb 1 July reportedly killed 40 people; security forces said they killed five militants in subsequent gunfight. In Ab Kamari, Baghdis province, Taliban killed at least eighteen commandos and captured eleven during security forces operation to capture senior Taliban leader 17 July. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) stepped up attacks: 6 July killed two in attack on Shiite mosque in southern Ghazni province; child-suicide bomber 12 July killed five at wedding party in Pachheragam district, Nangarhar province in attack widely attributed to IS-KP. In Kabul, three separate explosions 25 July killed fifteen; Taliban claimed one and IS-KP claimed others; unidentified suicide bomber and gunmen 28 July attacked VP candidate Amrullah Saleh's office, killing twenty and injuring Saleh. High level of civilian deaths continued; in Jaghatu district of Wardak province, airstrike killed seventeen civilians 14 July, prompting protests from local residents accusing govt of overlooking incidents and saying casualties rose sharply since spring. NGO Human Rights Watch 12 July said Afghan special forces raided medical clinic in Wardak province and executed four civilians 8-9 July, calling on govt to investigate attack. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 30 July released report documenting 3,812 civilian casualties, including 1,366 deaths, 1 Jan-30 June 2019, and stating that “civilian deaths attributed to pro-govt forces exceeded those caused by anti-govt elements” for second quarter in succession.

➡ 🇬🇩 **Bangladesh** Security forces continued anti-militancy operations while political tensions arose over death sentences for members of opposition. In continued operations, police 1 July arrested member of banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in Sylhet district; 9 July arrested suspected members of Ansar al-Islam in Barisal town and Dhaka for allegedly attempting to recruit new members online, particularly women; 11 July arrested three alleged Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants in Chittagong district. Inspector General of Police 1 July warned home-grown JMB militants could join Islamic State, stressing use of social media in recruitment. Pabna district court 3 July sentenced to death nine leaders and activists of opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), 25 to life imprisonment, and thirteen to ten years in jail over 1994 bomb attack on train carrying then-opposition Awami League leader and current PM Hasina; BNP's Sec Gen 6 July called charges fabricated and said verdict was part of govt's attempt to “eliminate BNP using the court”. BNP continued to campaign for release of imprisoned BNP leader Khaleda

Zia, holding rallies in Barishal 18 July, Chittagong 20 July and Khulna 25 July. Monsoons caused heavy flooding since early July in Rohingya refugee camps, leading to at least five deaths and deterioration of living conditions. Prosecutor of International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda 4 July requested court's judges authorise investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and persecution committed against Rohingya Muslims (in which at least one element occurred in Bangladesh – a State Party to the Rome Statute) (see Myanmar).

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Govt announced new campaign against Maoists amid ongoing insurgents' clashes with security forces, abductions and targeted killings of civilians. Ministry of Home Affairs officials 4 July announced increase of Central Reserve Police Force operations in "decisive push" against "weakened" Maoist insurgents. In Chhattisgarh state (east), security forces 6 July killed four militants in Dhamtaru district; in Sukma district, Maoists 12 July killed regional party Telangana Rashtra Samithi leader Srinivas Rao, after kidnapping him 8 July; in Bastar district, security forces 27 July killed seven insurgents. In Jharkhand state (east), police 19 July arrested four Maoists allegedly involved in 14 June killing of five policemen in Tiruldih in Seraikela-Kharsawan district. In Kerala state (south), govt 29 July approved amnesty scheme for Maoists cadres, on condition of insurgents revealing details of crimes, collaborationists and source of arms.

➡ **Kashmir** Indian and Pakistani forces continued to exchange fire along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) and separatists clashed with security forces in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In cross-LoC clashes, explosion 3 July killed five Pakistani soldiers in Bhimber district of Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Pakistani military statement accusing India of "state sponsored terrorism"; India defence spokesperson 6 July said Pakistani cross-border firing killed two soldiers in Rajouri district. International Court of Justice 17 July ruled Pakistan must grant consular access to Indian naval officer sentenced to death in April 2017 on spying charges, while calling for "effective review" of case. UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights 8 July released update report into May 2018-April 2019 situation in Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, expressing concern that past rights concerns raised in June 2018 report had yet to be addressed, and reiterating need that govts address past and ongoing human rights violations; India criticised report, Pakistan said it confirmed accusations of Indian rights abuses in Kashmir. In J&K, Indian home minister 10 July reported 93 militants killed since Feb 2019 Pulwama terrorist attack as clashes between security forces and militants continued. In Shopian district, police 5 July killed militant allegedly affiliated with Hizbul Mujahideen and 17 July killed militant allegedly affiliated with Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyaba; police 27 July killed Jaish-e-Mohammed commander Munna Bhai and associate. In Pulwama district, unidentified gunmen 30 July injured People's Democratic Party (PDP) local leader Lateef Ahmed.

➡ **Nepal** Govt campaign against hardline Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) continued; CPN and police 10 July clashed in eastern Bhojpur district, killing one cadre and one police official. Amid concerns over govt's use of force against CPN individuals, govt rejected opposition parties' repeated calls for formation of parliamentary panel to investigate 20 June killing of CPN cadre Kumar Paudel in Sarlahi district; National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) 19 July launched

investigation into 20 June incident following preliminary probe suggesting police killed Paudel under suspicious circumstances. Opposition continued to criticise govt for failing to make progress on talks with CPN; CPN has set three preconditions for talks – official invitation from govt, lifting ban on its activities, release of arrested cadres. Tensions between federal and provincial govts continued with Supreme Court 1 July ruling federal Public Service Commission can fill over 9,000 vacant civil service positions at provincial level; provincial officials claimed recruitment initiative undermines their jurisdiction and violates principles of inclusion by ignoring quotas for marginalised groups. NGOs Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurists, Human Rights Watch, and TRIAL International 29 July expressed concerns about govt's commitment to transitional justice and raised questions about selection of new leadership for Nepal's two main transitional justice mechanisms.

➡ **Pakistan** Authorities arrested leader of militant group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) amid continued militant attacks while govt continued push for criminal prosecution of opposition's leadership. Following international pressure and possibility of Financial Action Task Force blacklisting govt, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) 17 July arrested Hafiz Saeed, leader of LeT (renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa) on terrorism financing charges; U.S. President Trump 17 July commended arrest of "mastermind" of 2008 Mumbai attacks. During four-country consultation on Afghan peace process in Beijing 10-11 July, U.S., China and Russia recognised Pakistan's role in facilitating negotiations and political settlement in Afghanistan. In meeting with PM Khan 22 July, Trump also praised Islamabad's role in facilitating U.S.-Taliban talks while downplaying political disagreements between the two govts. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf govt pursued confrontation with opposition: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) 1 July arrested Punjab President of Muslim League-Nawaz party (PML-N) Rana Sanaullah; military-led ANF claimed to have found heroin in Sanaullah's car, prompting opposition and media outlets to accuse agency of planting drugs. Former PM Sharif's daughter 6 July released video allegedly showing judge confessing having been blackmailed to convict Sharif in Dec 2018 on corruption charge; Supreme Court 16 July allowed the opening of a probe into controversy; govt regulator 8 July blocked three TV channel's live broadcast of daughter's news conference in incident Reporters Without Borders called "brazen censorship". National Accountability Bureau 18 July ordered arrest of former PML-N PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi while next day former PML-N Finance Minister Mitfah Ismail obtained pre-arrest bail, both on alleged charges of corruption. Militant-related violence continued; in Punjab's Gujrat district, CTD 1 July raided militant hideout, killing three. In Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 21 July conducted twin attacks: four gunmen killed two policemen followed by suicide bomber attack on hospital, killing at least seven. Military 27 July reported attack by suspected TTP militants killed six soldiers on patrol along Afghanistan-Pakistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and same day said unidentified militants killed four soldiers in Balochistan.

➡ **Sri Lanka** Fallout from April terror attacks continued with arrests of high-level security officials amid ongoing anti-Muslim campaigns. Police 2 July arrested former defence secretary and suspended chief of police, on charges of murder and criminal negligence over failure to prevent attacks. Catholic Archbishop of Colombo 21 July claimed attacks were foreign conspiracy to destabilise country and happened

due to President Sirisena and PM Wickremesinghe's power struggle and neglect of national security, calling on both to resign and new govt to form. Head of Criminal Investigation Department 24 July said April's attackers inspired by but not directly linked to Islamic State (ISIS). Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, leader of hardline Buddhist organisation Bodu Bala Sena released from prison by presidential pardon in May, held rally in Kandy 7 July decrying Muslim threat and calling for Sinhalese to unite and elect all-Sinhala govt. Police 25 July released on bail after two months detention a Muslim doctor accused by Buddhist militants of mass sterilisation of Sinhalese women, following police investigations revealing allegations false and politically motivated. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 3 July said it remained concerned about rise in "intimidation, anti-Muslim rhetoric and hate speech", calling on authorities to counter hate speech and ensure Muslims' safety. UN special rapporteur on rights to freedom of assembly and association, concluding country visit 18-26 July, said hate speech laws "not applied with even hand" and "discriminatory and violent rhetoric, particularly by members of majority community, frequently goes unpunished" and exacerbated by social media. Supreme Court 5 July delayed Sirisena's plans to carry out execution of four convicted drug dealers in first executions since 1976, amid opposition from all political parties except for Sirisena's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, with parliamentarian from ruling-United National Party 2 July introducing bill to abolish death penalty.

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## South East Asia

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➡ **Indonesia** Anti-militant operations continued, amid low-level violence in Papua. Anti-terror police Densus 88 reported they had foiled plot to carry out Independence Day bombing on 17 August, arresting suspected militant in West Sumatra province 18 July; police stated suspect believed to be member of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jemaah Ansharut Daulah. Police 23 July said deadly cathedral bombing which killed over 22 in Jan was carried out by Indonesian couple who attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Counter-terrorism agency chief 8 July said govt set up task force to decide whether it will take back families of Indonesian ISIS fighters stranded in Syria. Military 30 July announced new military unit to fight terrorism, reportedly consisting of 500 personnel. In Papua province, suspected separatist rebels 20 July killed soldier guarding construction of bridge in Nduga district. NGO Solidarity Team for Nduga 18 July claimed around 5,200 people displaced by fighting between soldiers and separatists since Dec 2018, alleging some 139 had died from malnutrition and disease; military spokesman disputed figures.

➡ **Myanmar** Clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military in Rakhine state continued amid protests over deaths of AA suspects in military custody. AA used new tactic of attacking navy vessels in Rakhine state three times since late-June, including 19 July rocket attack on two ships on river in Myebon Township which killed army captain and two navy personnel. Local media 5 July reported govt had charged in absentia four AA leaders under Counter Terrorism Law for organising and participating in militant group, alongside charging numerous villagers for harbouring AA members. At govt's request, Singapore police 10 July arrested and deported seven politically-prominent Rakhine individuals, including

brother of AA leader, on charges of using country as platform to organise support for anti-govt violence by raising funds and seeking diaspora support for AA; Myanmar police arrested all seven on arrival in Myanmar or shortly after. Amid demonstrations in Rakhine over deaths of AA suspects in military custody, military 12 July announced formation of investigative team to probe incidents; since early 2019 some fifteen civilians held on suspicion of AA ties reportedly died in military custody or shortly after release. Lull in fighting in Kachin and Shan states continued following military's late-June extension of unilateral ceasefire until 31 Aug. Amid monsoons causing heavy flooding since early July in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh and leading to at least five deaths and deterioration of living conditions, Rohingya Muslims continued attempts to cross Bay of Bengal to Malaysia; over 60 people from Bangladesh camps and displacement camps around Sittwe in Rakhine state found on coast of southern Maungdaw township 7 July after boat difficulties. Prosecutor of International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda 4 July requested court's judges authorise an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity, namely deportation, other inhumane acts and persecution committed against Rohingya Muslims (in which at least one element occurred in Bangladesh – a State Party to the Rome Statute) during the period since 9 October 2016.

➡ **Philippines** Clashes involving militants and communist rebels continued. In Negros Oriental province (centre), communist New People's Army (NPA) 18 July killed four police officers; in subsequent days unidentified assailants killed at least ten people, including a total of seven in separate incidents on 25 July. Police arrested four suspected NPA members during operations 26 and 29 July. Govt 29 July announced deployment of over 300 Special Action Force troops to province. Military reported clashes with Abu Sayyaf on southern island Basilan including suspected Abu Sayyaf militants 15 July killing one and wounding four members of security forces during attack on military auxiliary forces, next day military reportedly killed mid-level commander during raid and arrested two other militants. Civilian killed and two others injured during 25 July military air and ground assault in North Cotabato targeted at splinter group of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) militants, at least one militant reported killed. Military 30 July reported it killed at least nine suspected members of BIFF in late-July clashes in Mindanao province, local media reported one soldier dead. Military 23 July reported at least seven foreign militants running training camp for suicide bombers in southern provinces of Sulu, Maguindanao, and Basilan; foreign suspects supposedly "embedded" with Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Abu Sayyaf and BIFF militant groups. Authorities 12 and 17 July arrested two suspected members of Abu Sayyaf in separate raids in Manila and Quezon City respectively. Authorities 23 July arrested two alleged ISIS sympathisers in General Santos City, recovering explosives and bomb-making materials. Numerous militants surrendered to authorities between 15 and 22 July, including over 200 former NPA rebels along borders of North Cotabato, Bukidnon, and Davao del Sur provinces. Govt 31 July filed protest with China over maritime disputes (see South China Sea).

➡ **South China Sea** Tensions continued over Chinese anti-ship ballistic missile tests in South China Sea (SCS) and over presence of Chinese ships in disputed waters. U.S. Defense Department 3 July condemned China's anti-ship ballistic missile tests that began late-June, first over open water and including DF-21Ds missiles, known for capability to target ships at range of 1,500km. Chinese oil exploration ship and

escorting vessels 4-15 July embarked on survey of waters around disputed Spratly islands, in area claimed by Vietnam; Vietnamese vessels closely followed flotilla. Events saw two Chinese and four Vietnamese armed coast guard vessels involved in standoff. Vietnam 19 July called on China to remove oil exploration ship from area, demanding China stop “unlawful activities” and 25 July reiterated demands. Philippines foreign ministry 31 July filed protest with China after spotting 113 Chinese fishing vessels near Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in Spratly archipelago 24-25 July, where Philippines has been refurbishing facilities and repairing airstrip since late 2018. Amid ongoing U.S.-China tensions, U.S. State Department 20 July said China’s “repeated provocative actions” aimed at other countries’ offshore energy projects “threaten regional energy security”; China’s foreign ministry 22 July called U.S. comments “slander”. During bilateral talks, Philippines and U.S. 16 July agreed to safeguard freedom of navigation and overflight over SCS. Malaysian navy 1-18 July conducted rare military exercises in SCS including tests of anti-ship missiles.

➡ **Thailand** Violence continued in deep south, while new govt cabinet under PM Prayuth Chan-ocha was sworn in. Insurgents launched series of attacks on security forces in Southern Thailand: bomb 12 July targeted four defence volunteers on two motorcycles in Muang district, Yala province, wounding three. In Bacho district, Narathiwat IED explosion 15 July targeted convoy of ranger trucks in district, causing no injuries and improvised mine 17 July wounded three rangers. IED 21 July wounded four rangers in Bannang Satar district, Yala province. Army 22 July announced investigation after suspected insurgent found unconscious in army camp in Pattani province 21 July, day after his arrest; family members claimed he was tortured. Suspected insurgents 23 July killed two soldiers and two defence volunteers in bombing and shooting at military outpost in Pattani province. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 1 July publicly apologised for delays in forming cabinet and seating new govt, threatening to use the “old method that nobody wants to see”, provoking widespread criticism for allegedly implying threat of staging coup. King Maha Vajiralongkorn 16 July swore in new cabinet, with ruling National Council for Peace and Order party filling finance and interior ministries, and PM serving as defence minister. Constitutional Court (CC) 19 July accepted petition to evaluate PM’s qualifications as PM to determine if being junta leader made Prayuth a “state official”, which would disqualify him from standing as PM candidate. Same day, CC accepted petition accusing Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, his party and its executives of trying to end constitutional monarchy.

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## **Pacific**

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➡ **Papua New Guinea** Inter-tribal violence in mountainous Hela Province early July left dozens dead. Following incidents of violence in June, tribesmen 6 July ambushed and killed six women and children near Peta village which prompted revenge attack by rival tribe 8 July, killing nine women and seven children in Karida village; in days following attacks, govt announced deployment of joint military-police taskforce to Hela province while PM Marape sent police minister to region to assess situation.