

Asia

North East Asia

➡ **China/Japan Tokyo linked for first time stability in Taiwan Strait to Japan's security, while tensions with China over disputed islands in East China Sea continued.** In notable shift in public tone, several Japanese officials openly expressed support for Taiwan and tied Japan's security to stability in Taiwan Strait throughout month. After Japanese deputy defence minister late June called Taiwan "democratic country" during U.S. think-tank event, remarks which China 30 June called "erroneous", Japanese Deputy PM Tarō Asō 6 July suggested Tokyo would join U.S. in defence of Taiwan in event of attack on Taiwan; China 6 July called comments "extremely wrong and dangerous". In Defence White Paper, Japan 13 July linked stability in Taiwan Strait to Japan's security for first time and emphasised concerns over China's actions in East China Sea; China called paper gross interference in internal affairs. Meanwhile, U.S. and Japanese military forces 1 July conducted exercises on Japan's Amami Ōshima island. Chinese navy 17-21 July conducted live-fire exercise in East China Sea, alongside exercises in Yellow Sea, Bohai Strait, and off coasts of China's Fujian and Guangdong provinces. As of 28 July, 80 Chinese vessels entered into contiguous zone around disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and ten Chinese vessels entered into territorial Japan's waters during month.

➡ **Korean Peninsula Pyongyang and Beijing reaffirmed their mutual ties while U.S. confirmed plans to hold joint military exercises with South Korea in August.** After Pyongyang and Beijing late June arranged series of events to commemorate past reciprocal summits in 2018 and 2019, including joint symposium hosted by Chinese Communist Party in Chinese capital Beijing, Chinese President Xi and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un 11 July exchanged letters to commemorate and reaffirm 60th anniversary of their Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. U.S. 15 July confirmed that it would hold joint military exercises with South Korea in August without yet specifying scale; in response, North Korean propaganda website Uriminzokkiri 20 July called exercises "scheme to invade the North" that violates 2000 and 2018 inter-Korean agreements. Two Koreas 27 July announced restoration of cross-border hotlines, indicating possible return to dialogue if/when South Korea-U.S. military drills pass uneventfully.

➡ **Taiwan Strait Cross-strait relations between Beijing and Taipei remained tense amid heated diplomatic exchanges, while Taiwan remained point of friction between U.S. and China.** During speech at centenary celebrations of Chinese Communist Party, President Xi Jinping 1 July raised "peaceful reunification" in reference to Taiwan. Taiwan officials same day issued statement on celebrations, criticising Communist Party for its "one-party dictatorship" and "interference with international order"; in turn, Beijing officials said Taiwan had "spoken outrageously". U.S. military transport plane 15 July landed briefly in Taiwan's capital Taipei, reportedly to deliver packages to U.S. diplomats, prompting China to rebuke U.S. for "aggravating dangerous tensions" in

strait; separate U.S. military transport plane 19 July landed briefly in Taipei. China 16 July held joint amphibious landing exercises in strait. Taiwan next day conducted live-fire artillery drill, simulating response to enemy invasion. According to Taiwan's defence ministry, total number of Chinese military aircraft that entered into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone in July reached 16, showing significant decline compared to previous months. President Tsai Ing-wen 20 July announced Taiwan would open representative office in Lithuania in "important diplomatic breakthrough"; China same day warned Lithuania against move. Earlier in month, U.S. National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell 6 July said U.S. does not support Taiwan's independence, but rather "strong unofficial relationship" with island. Japanese Deputy PM Tarō Asō 6 July suggested that attack on Taiwan would be interpreted as threat to Japan and would prompt Japanese military support (see Japan).

South Asia

↓ **Afghanistan Taliban forces continued nationwide offensive, launching first assault on Kandahar city since Western intervention in 2001 and seizing more international border crossings.** Taliban continued to make territorial advances throughout month, mostly in north and north west, and gained strategically important border crossings. Taliban attacks 5 July killed 16 security forces in Herat province (west), which saw all but two districts fall under Taliban control during month, and 6 July killed 65 security forces in Badghis (north west). Taliban 12 July killed 25 security forces in Kandahar province (south), in which group had encircled Kandahar city, and fighting remained ongoing in its outskirts by end of month; assault on city, largest in southern Afghanistan and de facto capital of former Taliban regime in 1990s, is first since Western intervention in 2001 and could mark moment of strategic importance in conflict; govt poured resources into defence of city. Taliban 14 July killed 11 security forces in Takhar province (north). In addition to seizing 26 of 28 districts in Badakhshan province (north east), Taliban fighters 5 July seized control of border crossing with Iran in Herat province (west) and 14 July took over border crossing with Pakistan in Kandahar province. Govt forces rebounded slightly by shoring up defence of provincial capitals. Govt 8 July briefly drove back Taliban after they entered capital of Badghis province (north west). Govt defences also held in other provinces, such as Ghazni (centre), Helmand (south) and Kandahar (south) during month. Anti-Taliban militia also rallied in urban centres, such as northern city Mazar-e Sharif. Meanwhile, peace process remained stalled despite high-level meetings between govt and Taliban's political office in Iran's capital Tehran (7-8 July) and Qatar's capital Doha (17-18 July); further high-level talks expected in August. Internationally, tensions heightened with Islamabad. Afghan VP Amrullah Saleh 15 July alleged Pakistani air force requested Afghan govt not to attack Taliban positions on border, which Pakistan's MFA denied. Kabul 18 July withdrew its ambassador and senior diplomats from Islamabad, alleging kidnapping of ambassador's daughter.

➡ **Bangladesh Govt arrested thousands for allegedly violating COVID-19 restrictions amid surge in infections nationwide and inside Rohingya refugee camps.** Govt 1 July extended nationwide lockdown as numbers of COVID-19 infections and deaths spiked, deploying police, border forces and army to patrol streets, leading to some 5,800 people arrested throughout month for breaching restrictions. Coronavirus cases surged inside congested Cox's Bazar Rohingya refugee camps, with over 2,350 cases and at least 27 deaths during month. Floods and landslides caused by heavy monsoon rain in camps 25-27 July also killed at least 11 Rohingya refugees, and left more than 12,000 homeless. Authorities continued to detain Rohingya refugees fleeing Bhasan Char camp situated on flood-prone island throughout month; notably, police 11 and 17 July arrested 38 Rohingyas in Chittagong City's Mirsarai sub-district. Police 17 July also detained 21 Rohingyas refugees near Moulvibazar district, who had reportedly entered country from India. Authorities 28 July detained nine refugees in Kurigram district for allegedly flouting COVID-19 rules. Forty-seventh session of UN Human Rights Council 11 July adopted resolution calling on Myanmar to ensure safe return of Rohingya refugees to country; Bangladesh's envoy Mustafizur Rahman at session blamed lack of repatriation on "continued non-cooperation and reluctance of Myanmar". Concerns over authorities stifling dissent persisted. UK 8 July reported that political and media freedoms remained restricted throughout 2020 and highlighted govt's use of Digital Security Act to suppress criticism; Bangladesh foreign ministry 11 July summoned UK's envoy to express its "disappointment" with report. Meanwhile, clashes between armed groups in Chittagong Hill Tracts' Rangamati district 8 July killed one person, and counter-terrorism operations continued. Authorities 11 July arrested suspected New Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh militant in Narayanganj district; 26 July arrested 19 Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh leaders in Chittagong, accused of planning attack on govt installations. Internal Awami League clashes 26-27 July left two activists dead in Khulna and Bogra cities in lead-up to local govt polls.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir) Maoist violence continued in centre and east while Indian and Chinese FMs met to discuss disengagement along disputed border.** Maoist violence continued. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), Maoists killed civilian and worker of mining site in Narayanpur district; security forces 13 July killed one Maoist in Bijapur district; security forces 15 July killed three Maoists in Dantewada district; Maoists 16 July killed suspected police informer in Gariabandh district; exchange of fire with Maoists 20 July killed one member of security forces in Narayanpur district; security forces 25 July killed one Maoist in Sukma district. In Jharkhand state (east), security forces 15 July killed one Maoist in Gumla district and another 16 July in West Singhbhum district. In Odisha state (east), security forces 22 July killed one Maoist in Nuapada district. FM Subrahmanyam Jaishankar 14 July met Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi, after which India's FMA emphasised that disengagement along Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh was not yet complete and situation was "still unresolved"; in contrast, China's FMA claimed "overall situation in the border area was de-escalated". Military commanders from both sides 31 July held 12th round of talks on de-escalation. Meanwhile, hostilities 26 July erupted along border of Assam and Mizoram states in north east of country between state police forces, reportedly killing six policemen; fighting follows mutual accusations of territorial encroachment. Farmers continued to protest against controversial agriculture laws.

Notably, farmers 8 July held nationwide protests against fuel price hike and vowed to hold rallies outside federal parliament from 19 July. Amid widespread criticism of mishandling COVID-19 crisis after official death toll surpassed 400,000 in early July, and ahead of state and general elections due to be held before May 2024, PM Modi 7 July removed 12 members of his cabinet, including minister of health.

➡ **Kashmir Tensions remained elevated between Pakistan and India, while opposition parties in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) called for restoration of statehood ahead of local assembly elections.** Pakistani National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf 4 July said backchannel contacts had been abandoned due to New Delhi's refusal to reverse Aug 2019 revoking of J&K's special status; Yusuf same day blamed Indian intelligence for 23 June car bombing in Pakistan's Lahore city. India External Affairs Minister Jaishankar 18 July said India was responsible for keeping Pakistan "under the lens" of inter-govt agency Financial Action Task Force (FATF); Pakistani FM Shah Mahmood Qureshi 19 July accused India of "manipulating" FATF for "narrow political designs". Meanwhile, counter-insurgency operations and militant attacks continued in J&K. Notably, security forces 2 July killed five militants in Pulwama district; 7 July killed alleged Hizbul Mujahideen commander in Kupwara district; 8 July killed four militants in separate operations in Kulgram and Pulwama districts; 10 July killed three militants in Anantnag district; 14 July killed three militants in Pulwama district; 16 July killed two militants in Srinagar regional capital. Indian army 8 July claimed it killed two suspected Pakistani terrorists during alleged infiltration bid in Rajouri district that left two soldiers dead. Security forces 16-31 July killed at least ten militants in Srinagar city and Baramulla, Bandipora, Pulwama and Kulgam districts; militants 27 July killed civilian in Srinagar. Tensions persisted over J&K's statehood leading up to assembly elections. People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration, J&K opposition coalition which includes National Conference and People's Democratic Party, 5 July demanded restoration of J&K's statehood before assembly elections. Delimitation Commission, tasked with carving out new constituencies in J&K, 6-9 July visited J&K and indicated that New Delhi planned to go ahead with elections, set to take place within 6-8 months. In Pakistan-administered Kashmir, PM Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party 25 July won Azad Jammu and Kashmir elections; poll violence left two PTI workers dead.

➡ **Nepal Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba appointed new PM after Supreme Court blocked K.P. Oli's second attempt to dissolve parliament and ruled out prospects of early elections.** Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench 12 July overturned Oli's 21 May bid to dissolve House of Representatives, ruling it unconstitutional; court also ruled that President Bhandari's rejection of Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba's attempt to form new govt in May contravened statute and ordered Deuba be appointed PM; Deuba was sworn into office 13 July. Court's verdict was criticised by Oli, with his supporters 12 July staging protests against ruling party and Oli's party 16 July deciding to campaign against decision. Supreme Court Bar Association 15 July expressed serious concern over Oli's remarks as well as burning of effigies representing chief justice by his supporters. Deuba 18 July received vote of confidence in reinstated House of Representatives, preventing early general election and confirming his mandate to govern until next elections, due to be held in winter 2022.

➡ **Pakistan** Top officials expressed concerns over possible spillover effects of intensifying conflict in Afghanistan, while militant attacks and counter-insurgency operations continued. Senior military and political leaders expressed concern about impact on security of Afghanistan's conflict and tensions heightened with Kabul (see Afghanistan). Army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa and intelligence chief Faiz Hameed 1 July warned victory by Afghan Taliban would rejuvenate Pakistani Taliban and voiced concerns about potential additional influx of up to 700,000 Afghan refugees. Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed 6 July said Pakistan would not allow Afghan refugees to enter but would establish refugee camps along border if situation required. Govt same day announced closure of Torkham – key border crossing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province – citing COVID-19 concerns. Authorities 14 July closed border crossing in Balochistan's Chaman district after Afghan Taliban captured bordering district, but 26 July reopened it for trade after reportedly consulting Taliban officials. FM Qureshi and National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf 9 July warned that Pakistani Taliban fighters could enter Pakistan disguised as Afghan refugees; Army spokesperson Major General Babar Iftikhar 11 July emphasised “Pakistan is only a facilitator of the Afghan peace process – not a guarantor”. Yusuf 30 July met U.S. counterpart Jake Sullivan in Washington; Sullivan said pair discussed “urgent need” for negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, militant attacks and security operations continued. Notably, in Balochistan province, counter-terrorism police 6 July killed five suspected Baloch militants on outskirts of Quetta district; militant attack 15 July killed two soldiers in coastal Pasni town in Gwadar district. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police operation 3 July reportedly killed two Pakistani Taliban militants in Dera Ismail Khan district. Militant attack 5 July killed three soldiers in North Waziristan district. Security operation 13 July killed three militants and two soldiers in Kurram district. In South Waziristan district, security operation against militants 18 July killed one soldier. In major attack on Chinese workers, suspected car bomb 14 July killed nine Chinese engineers as well as two civilians and two soldiers in Upper Kohistan district capital in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province; unidentified gunmen 28 July shot and wounded Chinese national in Karachi city.

➡ **Sri Lanka** Economy remained under great pressure, while authorities used repressive practices to control growing protests. Govt continued to focus on increasingly dire economic situation as prices of staples rose, trade deficit grew, currency reserves fell and concerns persisted over potential international debt default; Money, Capital Markets and Public Enterprise Reforms Minister Ajith Nivard Cabraal 2 July rejected opposition calls for deal with International Monetary Fund to restructure debt. Basil Rajapaksa, brother of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and PM Mahinda Rajapaksa, 8 July sworn in as finance minister, promising new economic policies. Meanwhile, police 6 July announced ban on public gatherings amid growing number of protests by unions, students and farmers. Police 8 July used unusually aggressive measures to end protest outside parliament against controversial Kotelawala Defence University Act that critics say could end free higher education; police same day arrested general secretary of Ceylon Teachers Union and more than dozen trade union and student activists for violating COVID-19 health regulations; suspects sent to military-run COVID-19 quarantine centre despite being granted bail by court; all released 16 July. Former Parliamentary Speaker Karu Jayasuriya 11 July accused govt of

“systematic repression” with “aim to eradicate democracy” and 17 July convened almost all opposition parties to chart strategy of resistance against govt practices. Govt 7 July appointed three-judge special court for trial of ex-Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando and ex-police chief Pujith Jayasundara accused of negligence for failing to prevent 2019 Easter bombings. In 12 July letter to President Rajapaksa, Catholic bishops, including Cardinal Malcolm Rogers, criticised “lethargic pace” of investigations into bombings and called on govt to prosecute “main culprits” and investigate evidence of possible larger “conspiracy”. Cabinet 19 July approved legal changes – still to be endorsed by parliament – that would allow Muslim couples to marry under ordinary marriage registration law, rather than Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, in line with longstanding demand of women activists. COVID-19 case numbers and death rates levelled off during month but latter remained high at 40-50 per day; vaccination programme progressed significantly with substantial new supplies from abroad.

South East Asia

➡ **Indonesia Parliament renewed Special Autonomy Law for Papua, sparking protests that led to dozens of arrests.** Parliament 15 July extended by 20 years Special Autonomy Law for Papua and West Papua provinces first adopted in 2001; international rights groups TAPOL and CIVICUS 16 July said parliament amended 18 articles, added two, including on ability of central govt to create new regencies and districts, and omitted provision granting right to form local political parties. Home Affairs Minister Tito Karnavian same day said: “We hope the law will accelerate development in Papua”, but law’s opponents claimed it increases Jakarta’s control over region and criticised central govt for lack of consultation. Law sparked series of protests. Authorities 14 July arrested 23 students protesting law in Papua province’s capital Jayapura; 15 July arrested 40 protesters at rally in front of House of Representatives in capital Jakarta. In West Papua province, authorities 15 July arrested 20 protesters in Kaimana town, while reportedly blocking protest in Manokwari town; 19 July arrested 36 protesters in Sorong town. Papuan People’s Assembly 20 July filed constitutional challenge against law.

➡ **Myanmar Authorities struggled to bring rising COVID-19 infections under control, while unidentified armed groups staged attacks against state electricity corporation in response to power cuts.** Ruling State Administration Council throughout month faced rapidly worsening COVID-19 crisis across country, as number of confirmed cases more than doubled each week, with unofficial tallies expected to be far higher; authorities initially blamed victims for hoarding oxygen, before belatedly moving to secure consignments from China and Thailand. In response to large outbreaks of virus in northern Shan State, China continued to shutter trade crossings and 8 July closed last two crossing points near border town of Muse – cutting off around half of Myanmar’s overland trade. Meanwhile, officials in several townships began cutting power to households that have refused to pay bills either to avoid giving funds to regime or due to financial difficulties. After firing and replacing electricity workers on strike in April, State Administration Council issued outstanding bills, attempting to force residents to pay them; in response, resistance groups launched

series of targeted attacks against Yangon and Mandalay electricity offices, including bomb explosions at two Yangon offices 7 July, and Mandalay office 16 July, latter killing two people – staffer and customer. Karenni Nationalities Defence Force 13 July bombed electricity offices in Kayah State capital Loikaw; in Mandalay city, resistance groups 11 July shot two electricity workers, killing one. Anti-military forces also continued to stage assassinations of regime officials and sympathisers at similar levels as June, including members of counter-resistance Pyusawhti network. Notably, resistance group in Sagaing region 14 July shot dead former MP from military-established Union Solidarity and Development Party as well as his assistant; military-appointed village administrator next day killed in Sagaing region. Amid ongoing clashes since June between rival armed groups in Shan state, main Shan political party 26 July released statement blaming both groups for violence, calling for end to hostilities and warning that behaviour of groups was undermining “Shan political struggle”. Internationally, U.S. 2 July announced additional sanctions against State Administration Council members and their immediate families, as well as military-linked companies.

➡ **Philippines Clashes in south between militant groups and security forces continued, while fighting between govt and communist militants left dozens killed.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, clashes between insurgents and security forces took place at relatively low levels throughout month. Military 17 July clashed with elements of Daulah Islamiya-inspired armed group under Salahuddin Hassan in village of Nabundas, in Maguindanao province, killing one militant; three Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters combatants 5 July surrendered to govt in Lanao del Sur province. Military operations against elements of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continued; clashes between ASG members and military 10 July killed one militant on Basilan island. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist New People’s Army (NPA) continued at relatively higher levels than June: violence in Luzon Island in north, Visayas Islands in centre and Mindanao Island in south killed at least 12 combatants and civilians and injured three throughout month. Govt 19 July declared National Democratic Front, umbrella of leftist organisations, as terrorist organisation, while Secretary of Defence Delfin Lorenzana 1 July confirmed that main spokesperson of counter-insurgency task force against communist rebels General Antonio Parlade resigned. Regarding ongoing govt efforts to rehabilitate Marawi city, Task Force Bangon Marawi Chairman Del Rosario 27 July urged member agencies to speed up work. Lorenzana 30 July announced in joint news conference with visiting U.S. counterpart Lloyd Austin in capital Manila that President Duterte retracted 2020 termination of Visiting Forces Agreement, and confirmed that two nations could continue military exercises.

➡ **South China Sea Maritime tensions continued amid regional military activity, while Canada, Germany and U.S. voiced support for 2016 international court ruling.** Maritime activity continued in region. U.S. navy 12 July announced that destroyer USS Benfold conducted freedom of navigation operation near Paracel Islands “to uphold rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of sea recognised in international law”; in response, China’s Southern Theatre Command same day claimed its forces “drove away” USS Benfold from waters and urged U.S. to stop “provocative actions”. China’s Southern Theatre Command 18 July announced it had recently conducted exercise in SCS that included planes,

ships, submarines and land-based missiles. Philippines' Coast Guard 13 July issued verbal challenge to Chinese naval vessel near Marie Louise Bank; Chinese vessel eventually moved away from area. UK aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth 30 July arrived in SCS to conduct freedom of navigation operations alongside U.S. navy. Earlier in month, think-tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative 8 July reported China Coast Guard had regularly challenged Malaysian pipe-laying vessel contracted to Malaysian oil company Petronas at Kasawari gas field, off of Sarawak state coast, since its arrival in area early June. On diplomatic front, German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer 6 July met with Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe via video conference and discussed SCS; Kramp-Karrenbauer raised importance of upholding 2016 arbitration decision by Permanent Court of Arbitration that limited China's claims to some sea areas, which China has called null and void. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 11 July issued statement to mark fifth anniversary of court's ruling and reaffirmed U.S. support for verdict; Blinken also stated that "armed attack on Philippines armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft in South China Sea would invoke U.S. mutual defence commitments". Canada's foreign ministry 11 July issued statement expressing concern at "China's escalatory and destabilising actions in the East and South China Seas" and support for 2016 arbitral tribunal award. U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin 26-30 July visited Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam; in Singapore, Austin 27 July said China's SCS claims have "no basis in international law".

➡ **Thailand Pro-democracy activists held large-scale rally in capital Bangkok, while govt faced criticism for insufficient vaccine supplies as COVID-19 cases reached record highs.** Over 1,000 protesters 18 July assembled in Bangkok to oppose govt's handling of COVID-19 pandemic; as protesters attempted to reach Government House, security forces responded with water cannons, rubber bullets and tear gas; eight police officers and unknown number of demonstrators were injured. Police arrested at least 16 demonstrators. As daily COVID-19 infection rates hit record high daily tallies during month, govt faced growing public criticism for tardy, insufficient and non-transparent efforts to secure effective vaccines; Siam Bioscience, contracted by govt to produce AstraZeneca vaccine, 14 July advised public health ministry that 61mn doses scheduled for delivery by 31 Dec would be delayed until May 2022. Leaked document 18 July showed that in Sept 2020 govt ordered only six million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine per month, rather than ten million previously announced by health minister. Authorities continued to silence critics. Following pro forma apologies, state-backed Govt Pharmaceutical Organisation 14 July registered defamation complaints against two critics of govt's slow response to pandemic; former ruling party MP 21 July asked police to investigate comments critical of govt made by over 20 celebrities; 18-year-old rapper next day reported to police to answer defamation charges related to tweets critical of PM Prayuth. Six professional media associations 28 July issued joint statement condemning govt use of emergency decree to curb free speech. Violence continued in deep south. Improvised bomb 6 July killed one soldier and wounded three more in Chana district, Songkhla province. IED attack and ambush 19 July wounded five police officers in Sai Buri district, Pattani province.

Pacific

➔ **Papua New Guinea Bougainville govt and national govt of PNG pledged to conclude final political settlement by 2027.** Following Dec 2019 non-binding referendum in which Bougainville electorate overwhelmingly voted for independence from PNG, PM Marape and president of Autonomous Region of Bougainville Ishmael Toroama 6 July reportedly agreed timetable for process related to transfer of powers to Bougainville authorities by 2023; in joint statement, both sides pledged support for final political settlement “no earlier than 2025 and no later than 2027”.