

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** Further signs of improving relations between China and Japan ahead of planned visit by Chinese President Xi to Osaka for G2 summit in June. China's top foreign policy official, State Councillor for foreign affairs Yang Jiechi, visited Tokyo 16-18 May; meeting with PM Abe called for the two countries to "strengthen coordination and collaboration". Japanese and Chinese officials resumed disarmament talks in Beijing 21 May, marking first bilateral security meeting in eight years. Japan, Australia, South Korea and U.S. held first "Pacific Vanguard" naval training exercise in Western Pacific late May. Visiting Japan late May, U.S. President Trump discussed military cooperation with PM Abe; Trump reported Japan agreed to purchase 105 F-35 fighter jets from U.S.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** Amid stalemate in denuclearisation negotiations between U.S. and North Korea, tensions mounted as Pyongyang launched two short-range ballistic missiles 4 May (from south east) and 9 May (from north west), first missile launches in any form since Dec 2017. U.S. President Trump downplayed significance of launches, saying he remains hopeful of a deal with North Korea; U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo noted that tests did not break North Korea's testing moratorium, which he said only covers intercontinental ballistic missiles – prompting speculation that Pyongyang may proceed with a mid-range ballistic missile launch. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton 24 May said there is "no doubt" that launches violate UN Security Council resolutions. Pyongyang same day stated it will not resume negotiations with Washington unless U.S. changes its stance on sequencing of concessions in negotiations. Amid stalled talks, U.S. 9 May legally seized North Korea's second-largest cargo vessel pursuant to civil asset forfeiture case filed in New York over accusations of involvement in money laundering transactions; North Korea demanded return of vessel, which had been physically held for a year, and convened rare press conference at UN 21 May to denounce U.S. over case. Inter-Korean tensions also on display; Pyongyang did not join South Korea in late April celebrations of first anniversary of 2018 Panmunjom inter-Korean summit, and North Korean state media 25 May accused South Korea of participating in military exercise in U.S. in Nov 2018.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** China and Taiwan both held live-fire drills across Taiwan Strait, while ongoing U.S. support to Taipei prompted criticism from China. China 5-10 May conducted exercises north of Taiwan Strait; Taiwan 22 May held major live-fire drills off its east coast, followed by annual military exercise across country 27-31 May including live fire drills and F-16 fighter jets. President Tsai after speech to national security agencies 10 May told reporters China is stepping up infiltration efforts in Taiwan and accused Beijing of "destroying the status quo across the Taiwan Strait". Annual U.S. Defence Department report released 2 May noted China is capable of "amphibious operations short of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan", including use of missile and precision airstrikes to "degrade Taiwan's defenses". U.S. opened new compound of its American Institute in Taiwan 6 May. U.S. House of Representatives 7 May unanimously approved "Taiwan Assurance Act of 2019" reaffirming U.S.

commitment to Taiwan and encouraging U.S. sales of military equipment to support Taipei's self-defence capabilities, prompting China to lodge "stern representations" with Washington. Taiwan foreign ministry 25 May confirmed its national security chief David Lee met with U.S. counterpart John Bolton during visit to Washington mid-May, marking first meeting between national security advisors in four decades. U.S. military sent two navy ships through Taiwan Strait 22 May, prompting Chinese protest.

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan** Govt-sponsored assembly on peace process failed to push the process forward and U.S.-Taliban talks continued, while Taliban launched attack on civilian targets in Kabul. President Ghani 29 April-3 May met with 3,200 delegates in national assembly (Loya Jirga) seeking common approach on peace talks with Taliban; notable opposition figures did not join and Taliban rejected process. Jirga declaration called on all sides to agree on ceasefire and prisoner exchange. U.S. Special Envoy Khalilzad met with Taliban representatives for sixth round of talks in Doha 1-9 May; Taliban called discussions on full withdrawal of foreign forces "positive"; Khalilzad noted "steady but slow progress"; Doha talks followed late April trilateral meeting between Khalilzad and Russian and Chinese counterparts, agreeing on goal of withdrawing foreign forces and "inclusive Afghan-led" peace process. In Moscow, intra-Afghan talks 28-30 May failed to reach breakthrough, despite Taliban saying "decent progress" had been made with senior Afghan politicians. Taliban 8 May launched attack on Kabul office of NGO Counterpart International, killing nine including three civilians, in group's first major attack in capital in over a year. Taliban stepped up military operations: 4-7 May killed at least 28 security forces in attacks in Bagdhis, Baghlan and Takhar provinces. Taliban 15 May captured Shamulzayi district centre in southern Zabul province, killing at least thirteen soldiers and overrunning govt intelligence agency offices; 27-28 May killed some 56 soldiers in attacks in Farah, Khost, Sari Pul, Ghor and Samangan provinces. Near Lashkar Gah, Helmand province, media reported U.S. airstrike 17 May mistakenly killed seventeen Afghan security forces. Security operations continued to exert toll on civilians: in Bakwa district, Farah province, coalition airstrikes targeting Taliban drug labs reportedly killed at least 45 civilian workers and eighteen insurgents; UN 23 May reported fourteen civilians dead in coalition airstrikes in Helmand and Kunar provinces; in Nangarhar province, governor's spokesman said security forces 24 May "mistakenly" killed six civilians during raid targeting Taliban forces. Domestic political tensions remained high: coalition of opposition candidates 22 May said it would lead protests countrywide following end of Ghani's legal mandate.

➔ **Bangladesh** Following govt order to intensify anti-militancy operations in wake of terror attacks in Sri Lanka, security forces 5 May arrested Islamic State (ISIS) militant who had returned to Bangladesh after attempting to join fighting in Syria, and 9 May arrested suspected recruiter of banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in Dhaka. Minister of Home Affairs 5 May said govt would provide security to civil society members threatened by militants following reports of potential attacks against activists and journalists. Police Inspector General 16 May denied foreign militant groups such as ISIS were active in Bangladesh but said they may have

“communicated their ideology” to homegrown groups. In continued political tensions, Bangladesh Jatiya Party 6 May quit opposition alliance Jatiya Oikya Front (United National Front, led by Bangladesh National Party (BNP)); move came after BNP late April ended parliamentary boycott, held since Dec general elections, reportedly in effort to secure bail for imprisoned BNP leader Khaleda Zia. Ruling Awami League continued crackdown on media and political dissidents, arresting journalist Henry Sawpon 15 May and lawyer Imtiaz Mahmood 16 May. In Cox’s Bazar in south east, police 14 May reportedly clashed with suspected smugglers attempting to traffic Myanmar Rohingya refugees to Malaysia, killing two traffickers.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Maoist insurgents continued attacks around general election which ended 19 May. In Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra state, suspected Maoist landmine 1 May killed fifteen police and one civilian. In Chhattisgarh state, Dantewada police killed Maoist commander Madavi Muiya, suspected of involvement in 9 April assassination of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politician Bhima Mandavi and four police. In north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh state, suspected National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) militants 20 May killed eleven people in ambush, including state legislator Tirong Aboh.

➡ **Kashmir** Exchanges of fire between Indian and Pakistani forces continued 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), while international pressure increased on Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups. UN 1267 Sanctions Committee 1 May placed Masood Azhar, leader of Jaish-e-Mohammad (Jaish which claimed Feb Pulwama attack) on global terrorist blacklist after China withdrew its objections to his inclusion; U.S. welcomed addition, and appealed for “further and sustained actions” from Pakistan against militant and terrorist groups on its territory. Pakistan 11 May banned eleven groups under Anti-Terrorism Act, due to affiliation with UN-sanctioned jihadist organisations like Jaish and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (formerly Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT)). In cross-LoC clashes, Islamabad claimed Indian cross-border fire killed one civilian 2 May and two others 6 May. In J&K, separatists launched attacks and security forces stepped up counter-terrorism efforts, as final phase of voting for general elections began 6 May. In Anantnag district, militants 6 May killed local leader of Bharatiya Janata Party. In southern Shopian district, police 10 May claimed to have killed militant belonging to Islamic State in Jammu and Kashmir; 12 May killed two LeT militants; police also reported eight people killed in two separate clashes 16 May in Shopian and Pulwama, including six Jaish militants. In capital Srinagar, thousands protested during funeral procession of Al-Qaeda-affiliated rebel commander Zakir Musa, killed by security forces in Pulwama district 23 May.

➡ **Nepal** Four Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) cadres killed in Kathmandu 26 May during accidental explosions while rigging IEDs; two further individuals injured during another IED explosion in Nawalparasi district same day. Explosions preceded 27 May CPN-called nationwide strike which caused partial shutdown of schools and transportation, with several IEDs defused in a number of districts during strike; security experts pointed to intelligence failure in govt’s response to CPN’s series of IED attacks since Feb; PM KP Oli called the party a terrorist group following explosions; human rights experts criticised Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa for terming deceased CPN cadres as “non-citizens.” Nepal Communist Party (NCP) govt

widely criticised for new legislation tabled in parliament 10 May which would replace existing media regulatory body with new entity staffed by political appointees; critics claimed govt attempting to undermine media regulatory body's autonomy, notably with proposed fines and termination of journalists' credentials if found in violation of regulations. Several civil society experts described legislation as latest govt attempt to curtail civil liberties and weaken key state institutions.

➡ **Pakistan** Militant groups carried out high-profile terror attacks and authorities focused on countering dissent. Suicide bomber from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 8 May killed at least thirteen at major Sufi shrine in Punjab provincial capital Lahore; in Balochistan's capital Quetta, TTP claimed 13 May attack killing four police officers guarding mosque. Unknown assailants killed polio worker in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur tribal district in north west 5 May. International pressure grew on govt to crack down on terrorist groups. India 2 May called on Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to blacklist Pakistan for failing to combat terrorist financing, prompting Pakistan to accuse India of politicising FATF; Pakistan 11 May banned eleven groups under Anti-Terrorism Act, due to affiliation with UN-sanctioned jihadist organisations (see also Kashmir). Five people killed in attack claimed by Balochistan Liberation Army on luxury hotel in Gwadar 11 May; earlier, Baloch separatists 9 May killed three security personnel and two coal miners in Harnai district. In Islamabad, govt focused on countering Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), civil rights movement from former Federally Administered Tribal Areas: FM Mahmood 4 May reiterated accusation that group is being funded by hostile regional intelligence agencies. Authorities 5 May brought charges against PTM's co-leader and member of National Assembly Ali Wazir for instigating mutiny and anti-military activities; Peshawar High Court 9 May dismissed case. In North Waziristan, military 26 May killed at least eight Pashtun protestors, led by MPs and PTM co-leaders Wazir and Mohsin Dawar; authorities arrested Wazir; Dawar 29 May accused military of firing indiscriminately and denied attacking checkpoint, saying he was in hiding due to "extreme danger". National Assembly 13 May unanimously approved 26th constitutional amendment, tabled by PTM co-leader Dawar, increasing number of seats for former FATA from six to twelve in National Assembly and from sixteen to 24 in KPK's provincial assembly. Afghan-Pakistan relations saw some improvement following 25 April Pakistan's statement pledging neutrality, although tensions increased after 2 May attack in North Waziristan by militants across Afghan border killing three soldiers. Khan 5 May spoke with Afghan President Ghani, both vowing to work together to restore peace in Afghanistan.

↓ **Sri Lanka** Fallout from country's deadliest terror attack 21 April continued as intercommunal tensions and anti-Muslim violence rose. Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups 13-14 May launched major attack on Muslim businesses, homes and mosques in Minuwangoda and other towns in Northwest Province, burning or damaging hundreds of buildings in riots killing one; govt imposed nationwide curfew and arrested some 70 people, although security forces initially failed to prevent Sinhalese attackers and in some cases reportedly assisted rioters. Earlier, Catholics and Muslims clashed in Negombo (north west) 5 May, with Muslim-owned shops and houses damaged. Govt continued securitised response to April attacks; Chief of Defence Staff presented five-point plan to tackle "violent extremism" 7 May, including: "restoring security and intelligence services"; "regulating religious space to prevent radical preachers"; managing online extremist content and holding

service providers accountable; “deradicalisation” efforts; and ending religiously-based schools. Security forces 23-26 May carried out raids in Colombo and other major towns, arresting over 100 and discovering multiple caches of weapons and equipment. Former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, declaring his candidacy for Nov presidential elections, used series of interviews to promise improved security and “eradication” of terrorism, accusing govt of contributing to April attacks by “dismantling” intelligence networks Gotabaya built as defence secretary. Army Commander 16 May defended decision to reinstate senior army intelligence official – one of some three dozen intelligence operatives suspended following arrest on suspicion of involvement in abductions and murders during govt of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa – to assist with investigations into April attacks. President Sirisena 22 May pardoned Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, leader of radical Buddhist organisation Bodu Bala Sena, who rights activists previously accused of inciting anti-Muslim violence; Gnanasara had served nine months of six-year sentence for contempt of court.

South East Asia

➡ **Cambodia** Reports emerged of renewed crackdown by authorities against individuals linked with banned opposition party Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), including calling 25 former party officials to appear for questioning at Battambang provincial court, accused of violating 2017 Supreme Court ruling dissolving party. Rights groups called for investigation into death in police custody of son of a CNRP activist in April.

➡ **Indonesia** Several people killed in protests against victory of incumbent President Widodo in presidential elections, which were also overshadowed by threats of terrorist attacks. After Election Commission 22 May proclaimed President Widodo winner with 55% of vote, supporters of failed candidate Prabowo Subianto, who continued to declare himself rightful winner, took to streets in protests that turned violent as police pushed them back with tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons. Eight reported killed and hundreds injured; police reported over 250 arrests; authorities launched investigation into deaths. Chief security minister 22 May announced partial block on social media to prevent “spread of fake news”. Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu warned of more riots in June as Constitutional Court hears case lodged by Subianto to annul Widodo’s victory; court scheduled to issue ruling on annulment 28 June. Govt 17 May claimed it foiled terrorist plot to detonate explosives during election results announcement; police arrested several suspects in raids in Java early-to-mid May, believed to be members of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD); several reportedly returned from fighting in Syria. Police reported anti-terrorism squad had killed two suspected JAD members 4 May during raid in West Java. Violence continued in Papua province, where military reported one soldier killed in clashes with some 20 members of West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) in Nduga regency 13 May.

➡ **Myanmar** Significant clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military in Rakhine state continued and spread further south. AA claimed to have clashed 33 times with military 1-12 May, including 12 May ambush of military convoy near Western Command headquarters in Ann township. Tensions in Rakhine

increased following deaths of civilians in military custody, after army rounded up some 275 Rakhine men and boys aged 15-50 in Buthidaung township (north) 30 April, and 2 May shot dead six and wounded eight. Local villagers disputed military's claim that men were attempting to riot; military announced internal investigation into incident and released some of those detained, but 83 still under interrogation or facing prosecution for links to AA; UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern for their safety. NGO Amnesty International 29 May released report detailing Myanmar military "war crimes" in Rakhine since Jan, also finding evidence of AA abuses against civilians. Malaysian police 13 May said they had disrupted Islamic State (ISIS) cell plotting attacks in Malaysia and other countries, with two Rohingya among those arrested, one reportedly a supporter of militant group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) intending to target Myanmar embassy and targets in Rakhine state. Following talks between govt's peace team and Northern Alliance of ethnic armed groups, military 30 April declared two-month extension to unilateral ceasefire in Kachin and Shan States originally announced in Dec 2018. UN Fact-Finding Mission 14 May urged international community to cut off all financial and other support to military in effort to hold army accountable for "atrocities against many of the ethnic groups living within borders of Myanmar". Govt 7 May released on humanitarian grounds two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, jailed in 2017 for breaking Official Secrets Act in their reporting on massacre of Rohingya men, as part of presidential amnesty; civil society groups welcomed decision but warned of ongoing media restrictions. EU late April announced extension of sanctions until 30 April 2020, including arms embargo as well as visa bans and asset freezes for fourteen members of police and military associated with human rights violations.

➔ **Philippines** Legislative and local elections accompanied by some incidents of violence in Mindanao and elsewhere, while clashes involving militant groups and communist rebels continued. NGO International Alert 22 May reported 144 election-related incidents involving violence in Mindanao 11-13 May, most involving rival clans, including use of grenades and IEDs as well as fights between rival supporters, although with less gun violence than past; warned of potential for revenge killings. Nationally, police reported overall significant decline in election-related violence compared with previous votes, citing shift to vote-buying by rival candidates; police reported 33 election-related killings nationwide between mid-April and 13 May; in results, President Duterte secured firm majority in Senate and held lower house. Govt and MILF implementing panels 21 May handed over Proposed Transition Plan (PTP) to Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), including codes for BTA to legislate on electoral, local govt, education, administrative, revenue and civil services procedures; BTA chief Murad Ebrahim called handover another milestone in Bangsamoro peace process. Clashes continued between military and Abu Sayyaf in Sulu where military killed one suspected militant 5 May; six militants killed and fifteen wounded on 26 May in fighting in Patikul; two children killed and six civilians wounded in clash. Military said Dutch national held captive for over seven years by Abu Sayyaf was killed by militant group 31 May while trying to escape. Military reported continued fighting between govt troops and New People's Army leading to several suspected rebels killed, including: one in Las Navas, Northern Samar (north) 5 May; five in Caraga region (north east) 19 May; at least three in Occidental Mindoro province (centre) 22 May.

➔ **South China Sea** Amid ongoing U.S.-China tensions, U.S. navy conducted two freedom of navigation operations in South China Sea (SCS) and U.S. Senate proposed SCS-related sanctions targeted at China. Two U.S. missile destroyers sailed near Gaven and Johnson Reefs in contested Spratly Islands 6 May, prompting China to accuse U.S. of violating its sovereignty. Later in month, U.S. warship 20 May sailed near contested Scarborough Shoal claimed by China and Philippines, passing within twelve nautical miles of Scarborough Reef; China called move “provocative”. U.S. Senate submitted legislation 23 May to sanction Chinese individuals and entities involved in “illegal and dangerous” activities in SCS and East China Sea, prompting rebuke from Chinese foreign ministry. Following request from Washington that its Pacific allies boost their presence in SCS, U.S., India, Japan and Philippines held joint naval exercises through SCS 2-8 May. U.S. coast guard accompanied Philippine coast guard vessels in joint exercise 14 May in Luzon island in Philippines. Month after flare-up in confrontation between Philippines and China over Beijing’s deployment of vessels near disputed islands, Philippines Supreme Court 3 May ordered govt take steps to protect environment in disputed areas of SCS, after petitioners alleged govt inaction over illegal activities by China; spokesman of President Duterte 6 May said he will enforce ruling. Senior officials from China and ASEAN member states met 18 May to discuss implementation of Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS, and consultation on Code of Conduct for SCS.

➔ **Thailand** Govt formation underway after officials 9 May released controversial final results of 24 March general election, while violence in Deep South continued. Final results of constituency and party-list seats put anti-junta coalition at 246 seats, and pro-junta coalition 147 seats; followed Election Commission’s change in allocation of party-list seats helping eleven small pro-junta parties each gain one gain seat, cutting anti-junta coalition’s lead. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 27 May invited Democrat Party (53 seats) and Bhumjai Thai Party (51 seats) to join new govt; negotiations ongoing, but both parties expected to join. Ruling National Council for Peace and Order continued efforts to disqualify anti-junta Future Forward Party leader. Govt published names of 250-member junta-appointed Senate 14 May. Letter from UN to govt surfaced early May expressing concern about abduction, killing and disappearance of Thais living in Laos who had expressed republican political views; reports also emerged of arrests of activists in Vietnam and Malaysia. Insurgent violence continued in southernmost provinces: in Pattani province, police killed suspected insurgent in Nong Chik district 2 May; IED attack wounded five border patrol police in Thepha district, Songkhla province 5 May; bomb at security checkpoint in Chana district, Songkhla, killed one police officer and wounded three others and a civilian on 27 May; same day, gunmen shot and killed two rangers at market in Bacho district, Narathiwat. Bomb hidden in motorcycle exploded at market in Nong Chik district, Pattani, 28 May, killing two civilians and wounding 23. MARA Patani chief negotiator Sukri Hari resigned 17 May, reportedly for health reasons.

Pacific

➔ **Papua New Guinea** Political tensions continued amid opposition’s successful attempts to oust PM O’Neill. Opposition 6 May launched no confidence vote after finance minister James Marape and other senior ministers resigned from govt citing

lack of trust in O'Neill, including alleged lack of consultation over controversial \$16bn gas deal signed in April. Three days ahead of scheduled no confidence vote, O'Neill 26 May announced resignation citing "need for change", but did not formally resign and next day appealed to Supreme Court to block vote. PM's supporters and opponents physically clashed in parliament 28 May. O'Neill 29 May formally resigned in front of parliament; MPs elected Marape as new PM next day.