

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan** Tensions continued amid maritime incidents. Japanese Coast Guard said four Chinese Coast Guard vessels 8 May entered Japanese territorial waters around disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in East China Sea, two Chinese ships briefly chased Japanese fishing boat; Tokyo lodged protest with Beijing over incident, while next day two Chinese vessels re-entered Japanese territorial waters. Also in East China Sea, U.S. B-1B bombers 4 May conducted training flight, and U.S. navy 19 May reported undertaking mine warfare training exercise. Beijing reportedly made diplomatic overtures to Tokyo, including suggesting relaxing rules on Japanese business community traveling to China. Lawmakers from ruling Liberal Democratic party 29 May urged govt to reconsider proposed state visit of Chinese President Xi following concerns over imposition of controversial new Chinese national security law in Hong Kong.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** North Korean leader reappeared in public following speculation about his health, inter-Korean tensions flared at border, and concerns about food shortages inside DPRK surfaced. Following almost three weeks of public absence and widespread speculation about Kim Jong-Un's well-being, DPRK state media released photos and video of North Korean leader at 1 May opening ceremony of Suncheon fertiliser plant north of Pyongyang. Shortly after, tensions flared on inter-Korean border when DPRK 3 May fired multiple gunshots across demilitarised zone and four bullets hit South Korean guard post in border town of Cheorwon; in response Seoul fired warning shots but later called events an "accident"; Pyongyang did not reply to South's request for explanation nor cooperate in UN investigation into incident. South Korea's ministry of unification 19 May warned of food shortages in North, said COVID-19 pandemic and associated shutting of borders hampering food imports; Russia 14 May confirmed it sent 25,000 tonnes of wheat to DPRK. South Korean president Moon Jae-in 10 May reiterated desire for inter-Korean projects starting with quarantine and infectious disease cooperation in response to COVID-19; ministry of unification 14 May said DPRK allowed entry of medical supplies including hand sanitisers from South Korean civic group through Chinese border week of 4 May; Pyongyang continued to deny presence of COVID-19 cases inside country and rejected supplies from American organisations. DPRK military 8 May threatened to respond to Seoul for its "reckless" 6 May military drills near disputed boundary in West Sea; South's defence ministry said drills took place within its boundaries and did not violate 2018 deal establishing buffer zone free from military exercises. U.S.-South Korea tensions continued over agreement for sharing cost of maintaining 28,500 U.S. troops on Korean peninsula; U.S. President Trump 7 May said Seoul had "agreed to pay substantial money". U.S. justice department 28 May charged 28 North Koreans and five Chinese citizens for operating money laundering scheme worth over \$2.5bn to fund Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** As President Tsai started her second term, China-Taiwan tensions remained high, especially regarding Taiwan's lack of membership with

World Health Organization (WHO) amid COVID-19 concerns. Following Jan re-election, President Tsai 20 May attended inauguration in capital Taipei, where she called on China and Taiwan to “find a way to coexist,” saying she opposed Beijing’s “use of ‘one country, two systems’ to downgrade Taiwan and undermine the cross-strait status quo”; in response, China same day said “reunification” is “historical inevitability”, also expressed “strong indignation” that U.S. Sec State Pompeo sent message of congratulations to be read at inauguration. Chairman of main opposition Kuomintang party – currently shaping its cross-strait policy through reform committee established mid-March – 15 May called on China to stop threatening military force and said there was no appetite for “one country, two systems” in Taiwan. Taiwan govt 28 May criticised controversial new Chinese national security legislation for Hong Kong after Chinese parliament approved decision to move forward with drafting legislation. Amid COVID-19 pandemic, tensions continued over Beijing’s apparent blocking of Taipei from accessing information from WHO as it is not a member; Taiwan govt 19 May said it was “disappointed and angry” WHO did not invite it to join its annual assembly as an observer, and share its “experiences” regarding coronavirus response. In continued military drills, U.S. destroyer 13 May sailed through Taiwan Strait. China 15 May urged France to revoke plan to sell arms to Taiwan as part of upgrade to French warship fleet Taiwan bought 30 years ago; Taipei 28 May announced plans to purchase coastal defence missile system from U.S..

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## **South Asia**

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➔ **Afghanistan** Amid concerns for peace process, Eid al-Fitr holiday brought some respite, with brief ceasefire between Taliban and Afghan govt forces and periods of reduced violence after initial spike in deadly attacks and sharp increase in civilian casualties mid-month. Afghan forces early May resumed high-intensity operations against Taliban in several provinces including Balkh (north), Ghanzi and Laghman (both east). Following 12 May terrorist attacks on hospital in capital Kabul that killed at least 24 and on funeral in Nangarhar (east) that killed some 32, President Ghani same day said govt forces would resume offensive operations against all insurgent groups; Taliban denied responsibility for attacks while Islamic State-Khorasan Province claimed funeral bombing. Taliban 14 May exploded suicide car bomb in Gardez city, Paktia (east), killing at least five, making it first Taliban-claimed suicide attack in a provincial capital since Sept 2019. Taliban night of 19 May attacked Kunduz provincial capital (north), assaulting at least seventeen security posts around strategic city, at least one soldier and eleven militants killed; hours after attack, Afghan air force bombed hospital in nearby Taliban territory. Unidentified armed groups 20 May attacked mosques in areas with Taliban presence including in Paktia and Khost (east), killing over a dozen. U.S. military action remained at low-level, while U.S. officials publicly reiterated commitment to draw down to 8,600 troops by 15 July as per U.S.-Taliban Feb agreement. Conflict reportedly dipped in some areas, including north east and north west, during Ramadan that ended 23 May. In surprising move, Taliban 24 May announced three-day ceasefire to mark Eid al-Fitr holiday; govt responded they would observe ceasefire and Ghani pledged to release up to 2,000 Taliban prisoners; both gestures

appeared spurred by U.S. diplomatic pressure. Both sides followed Eid ceasefire with unannounced periods of reduced violence, increasing speculation intra-Afghan negotiations may soon be possible. Ghani and main opponent Abdullah Abdullah 17 May signed deal to form inclusive govt that will see Ghani remain president, both to choose equal number of ministers and Abdullah to lead any peace talks with Taliban.

➡ **Bangladesh** Govt continued to use COVID-19 crisis to silence critics, while security forces carried out further operations against alleged members of banned militant groups. Awami League (AL) govt appeared to use COVID-19 to crackdown on dissenting voices, especially targeting journalists; officials said police 3 May detained prominent journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol, who had been missing for three months, when he allegedly attempted to enter illegally from India. Police used controversial Digital Security Act: 5 May detained journalist for “spreading rumours” about AL lawmaker on Facebook, and two journalists and nine others for provoking anti-govt sentiments and “rumours” about COVID-19; 6 May detained three journalists accused of defaming woman on YouTube. In response, seven ambassadors, including EU and U.S., 8 May individually tweeted about importance of upholding free speech and press freedoms; FM Momen next day said statements “very unfortunate”, not in line with diplomatic norm. Workers from remaining closed factories in export-orientated garment industry continued mass protest rallies countrywide demanding owed wages, leading to clashes with police in capital Dhaka 20 May which left a dozen injured. First confirmed COVID-19 case in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar reported 14 May. Coast Guard rescued some 60 Rohingya refugees 2 May and 280 more 7 May in Bay of Bengal; majority of refugees sent to Bhashan Char despite longstanding concerns island is flood-prone and lacks services; UN Sec Gen Guterres 15 May sent govt letter appealing to move refugees to existing camps; FM Momen 17 May rejected demand, said if place not suitable other countries should take refugees or they should return to Myanmar. In Dhaka, as part of anti-militancy efforts, police arrested alleged online recruiter for Ansar-al Islam (formerly Ansarullah Bangla Team), who 1 May appeared before court, and 4 May detained seventeen alleged Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants charged with attempting to travel to Saudi Arabia to join Bangladeshi jihadist leader Syed Mostaq bin Arman; in Chittagong, police 3 May arrested three alleged members of Neo-JMB, offshoot of main group; paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion 23 May detained alleged JMB member in Madaripur district.

➡ **Kashmir** Militant attacks and counter-insurgency operations inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued at high intensity, while clashes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) persisted. Security forces 2 May killed two militants in Pulwama district; five security forces next day killed during operation which also left two militants dead in Handwara area, Kupwara district; grenade attack injured paramilitary soldier in Srinagar city 4 May. After security forces 6 May killed Riyaz Naikoo, top commander of Hizbul Mujahideen militant group, and three other militants in Pulwama district, protesters clashed with police, and mobile phone and internet services cut for three days in region. Soldier and another Hizbul Mujahideen commander 17 May killed in gunfight in Doda district. Militant commander and son of separatist Tehreek-e-Hurriyat chairperson next day killed in Srinagar along with another militant; 22

houses burnt down during encounter, with local residents accusing security forces of using them as “human shields” and looting their belongings; security forces 24 May detained four alleged Lashkar-e-Tayyaba-linked militants in Budgam district and 30 May three in Baramulla district. Govt continued crackdown on political leaders in J&K; authorities 5 May extended for three months detention under controversial Public Safety Act (PSA) of former Kashmiri Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, of former Minister Mohammad Sagar, and of Mufti’s uncle, Sartaj Madani; former Kashmiri Chief Minister Omar Abdullah same day said PM Modi “single handedly pushed J&K back decades”. Detention of Shah Faesal, who founded J&K People’s Movement party last year, also extended for three months under PSA on 13 May. Cross-LoC fire continued amid hostile rhetoric on both sides; Indian army claimed Pakistani fire 1 May killed two soldiers and injured three civilians; Islamabad 7 May accused India of “deliberately targeting” civilians, said fire had injured total of ten civilians on 7, 18, and 20 May. Indian army chief 4 May accused Pakistan of “limited agenda” of sending terrorists into J&K, warning of “proportionate response to all acts of infringement”; Pakistani foreign ministry 7 May rejected “baseless Indian claims”, said allegations were attempt to create “false flag” military operation against Pakistan.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Tensions flared at border with China, security forces continued to confront Maoists, and COVID-19 measures continued to spark social unrest. At disputed Indo-China border, Indian and Chinese soldiers 5-6 May clashed leaving dozens injured on banks of Pangong lake in Ladakh union territory (north); 9 May clashed again leaving several soldiers injured in Naku La area in Sikkim state (northeast). China 15 May denied any wrongdoing, while Indian foreign ministry 21 May said: “All Indian activities are entirely on the Indian side of the LAC [Line of Actual control]. In fact, it is the Chinese side that has recently undertaken activity hindering India’s normal patrolling patterns.” Despite diplomatic and local talks to ease tensions, military build-up reported in multiple locations on both sides of border until end of month, particularly near Pangong lake and in Galwan valley, where China apparently objects to India building new road. Chinese foreign ministry 27 May said border situation “overall stable and controllable”; India’s defense minister 30 May said border row would be resolved through diplomacy. In Uttarakhand state (north), defense minister 8 May inaugurated road linking India and China, and crossing Nepal-claimed Lipulekh pass, triggering strong protests from Kathmandu (see Nepal entry). In Chhattisgarh state (centre), clashes between Maoists and police 8 May left four Maoists and one policeman dead near Pardhoni village; Maoists 11 May opened fire on security forces killing one in Bastar district; security forces 23 May shot and killed two Maoists near Mankapal village. In Maharashtra state (west), security forces 2 May killed senior Maoist commander during search operation near Jaravandi village; clashes between Maoists and police 17 May left two policemen dead in Poyerkothi-Koparshi forest. In Jharkhand state (east), security operations 17-28 May left four Maoists dead in Simdega and West Singhbhum districts. COVID-19 measures continued to fuel tensions across country: notably, the return home of tens of thousands of jobless migrant workers amid lockdown restrictions fuelled protests, including clashes with security forces.

➡ **Nepal** Amid rapid spread of COVID-19 and growing pressures on country's limited health care system, bilateral tensions with India rose over disputed territory along north-western border. After Indian defense minister 8 May inaugurated new road traversing Nepal-claimed Lipulekh pass, FM Pradeep Gyawali 11 May delivered note verbale to Indian ambassador urging Delhi to stop unilateral construction in disputed territory. Despite widespread support from opposition on Lipulekh dispute, govt faced fresh criticism for sluggish reaction to India's Nov 2019 issuance of new political map which included Kalapani – another disputed area adjacent to Lipulekh – within India's territory. Nepalese cabinet 18 May endorsed new political map including 335 sq km of disputed territories in north west border region; govt 22 May registered constitutional amendment proposal in parliament to update national emblem to reflect new map. In response, India's ministry of external affairs said map was “artificial enlargement of territorial claims” and Indian Army Chief MM Naravane drew criticism from Nepali leaders after suggesting Kathmandu's reaction was at behest of China. PM KP Oli raised tensions further during 19 May parliamentary address by blaming Nepal's increasing COVID-19 cases on individuals arriving illegally from India. Upper house 20 May endorsed controversial proposed bill granting national intelligence agency sweeping surveillance authority; lower house approval required before bill adopted as law.

➡ **Pakistan** Militant violence continued while govt handling of COVID-19 pandemic came under heavy criticism from opposition. Opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari 1 May questioned Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt's handling of COVID-19 crisis, asked PM Khan to resign if he could not perform; govt continued to focus on negative economic effect of lockdown and Khan 7 May announced end of lockdown in phases starting 9 May, citing responsibility to protect poor. National Assembly 12 May discussed for first time federal govt's COVID-19 response; opposition attacked PTI govt with Zardari holding it responsible for undermining PPP-led Sindh provincial govt's stringent response, while Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz lawmaker and former FM Asif criticised Khan for easing lockdown at time of “dangerous spike in infections”; in response Khan 15 May said Pakistan's economy could not afford indefinite lockdown. Govt mid-May reopened two main borders with Afghanistan: Torkham in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and Chaman in Balochistan province. Militant violence continued, particularly in KPK: in Wana, South Waziristan district, unidentified gunmen 1 May shot Arif Wazir, leader of Pashtun rights group Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, who died following day; militants 7 May killed two soldiers in attack on security checkpoint in North Waziristan district; militants 22 May killed police officer in Kohat district and senior bureaucrat and two relatives 24 May in North Waziristan. Punjab's counter-terrorism police said four Islamic State (ISIS)-linked militants who were planning attack on religious minority killed during 17 May clash in Bahawalpur district, Punjab province. Karachi police 30 May arrested alleged ISIS militant. Insurgents targeted security forces in Balochistan; Balochistan Liberation Army claimed 8 May attack that killed six members of paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) in Kech district on Iran border; six soldiers killed in bomb explosion in Mach targeting FC jeep and soldier killed in gunfight in Kech 19 May; Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa 11 May reportedly spoke to Iranian counterpart calling for cooperation in countering

Baloch militants on Pakistan-Iran border. Top police official 27 May said two police officers killed by terrorists in Islamabad.

► **Sri Lanka** President Gotabaya Rajapaksa continued to reject opposition and civil society demands to reconvene parliament by 2 June, raising prospect of major constitutional crisis. Throughout month President Rajapaksa and PM Mahinda Rajapaksa rejected appeals to recall parliament, said there was no need or power to call it back into session. Supreme Court (SC) last two weeks of May heard arguments in eight “fundamental rights petitions” filed by opposition and civil society challenging constitutionality of parliamentary polls scheduled for 20 June – almost three weeks beyond 2 June deadline prescribed in constitution – and requesting parliament be reconvened. Elections Commission 20 May informed SC that arranging elections would require “nine to eleven weeks after receiving the green light from health authorities that the country is safe [from COVID-19 virus]”, placing earliest possible election in late July. Responding to false accusations of Muslims spreading COVID-19 and policy of cremating all COVID-19 victims, including Muslims, in contravention of Islamic burial practices, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 6 May expressed deep concern over “escalating hate speech and hostility towards Muslims in Sri Lanka” and called on authorities to ensure safety of Muslim community and respect for religious practices and rituals. Prominent Muslim leader of opposition party All Ceylon Makkal Congress Rishad Bathiudeen 14 May filed petition with SC challenging govt’s cremation policy. Defense Secretary Kamal Gunaratne 15 May ordered navy to establish unit in Eastern province to “protect” Buddhist temple and its land from “other parties” following years of unsubstantiated claims Muslims were taking temple lands. Family of prominent Muslim lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah 5 May filed petition with SC challenging his arrest for alleged involvement in 2019 Easter bombings. On 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of civil war end, PM Mahinda Rajapaksa 18 May praised sacrifices of “war heroes” and challenged opposition criticism of militarisation of civilian administration; President Rajapaksa next day promoted record number of military officers and warned that he would withdraw country from any international organisation that “targets” military for human rights abuses during civil war. Meanwhile, Tamil National People’s Front 18 May said police prevented its members from holding commemoration events.

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## **South East Asia**

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► **Indonesia** Govt deployed over 300,000 security forces members across four provinces to enforce COVID-19 measures, and small-scale attacks continued in Papua. Amid COVID-19 pandemic, President Joko Widodo 4 May signed govt regulation postponing Sept regional elections until at least Dec; authorities 26 May deployed some 340,000 soldiers and police personnel to Jakarta, West Java, West Sumatra and Gorontalo provinces to enforce COVID-19 restrictions. In Papua province, police 16 May reported that members of armed separatist group, West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA), previous day launched attack on police post in Paniai regency, seriously injuring one police officer; WPLA said attack carried out to retrieve weapons. Also in Papua province, unidentified gunmen 22 May opened

fire on local COVID-19 response team, killing one health worker and seriously injuring another in Intan Jaya regency; security forces and separatists blamed each other for attack. Indonesian Maritime and Air Police 15 May reported that at least 500 Rohingya refugees were en route from Myanmar to Aceh province, prompting calls from religious leaders, scholars, and activists for govt to launch rescue operation. President Widodo 11 May submitted to House of Representatives presidential regulation proposing involvement of military in fight against terrorism; National Human Rights Commission and human rights activists criticised move, said military would not be subjected to general justice under new regulation.

➔ **Myanmar** Military announced unilateral ceasefire across country but excluded areas where clashes between security forces and Arakan Army (AA) continued to exact heavy civilian toll. In response to COVID-19 threat, Tatmadaw 9 May announced unilateral ceasefire from 10 May to 31 Aug, while excluding Rakhine State and areas of southern Chin State where heavy fighting with AA is ongoing; Brotherhood Alliance – coalition of armed groups AA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army – called ceasefire “a sham”, urged govt and army to include all parts of country. Clashes between AA and military continued throughout month. In two ethnic Rakhine villages, 325 houses destroyed by fire 16 and 26 May, in manner reminiscent of destruction of Rohingya villages in 2016-17; AA blamed military for recent incidents, who in turn accused AA, saying they did so to discredit military. In south Rakhine, official of ruling party National League for Democracy (NLD) 6 May claimed that AA had intimidated and attempted to kidnap NLD officials in Toungup township, AA said accusations were fabrications to damage its reputation; bomb 8 May exploded in Kyaukpyu township, govt blamed AA. After video of soldiers violently questioning detainees suspected of links with AA emerged, military 12 May said that soldiers had acted inappropriately and would be under military investigation; NGO Human Rights Watch expressed concerns about due accountability under military-led process. Mine explosion 13 May killed two children in Buthidaung township (northern Rakhine), govt and AA blamed each other. About 100 AA fighters 29 May launched attack on police outpost in Rathedaung township, killing four police officers. Radio Free Asia mid-May reported fighting between govt forces and AA had killed 47 civilians since April. Myanmar's Union Election Commission 18 May stripped Aye Maung, former chairman of Arakan National Party, who was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for high treason in 2019, of his MP status and barred him from running in future elections. Pursuant to Jan request by International Court of Justice, Myanmar 23 May submitted to court first six-monthly report detailing measures it has taken to prevent and punish acts of genocide against Rohingya.

➔ **Philippines** Despite ongoing COVID-19 concerns, fighting between security forces and communist rebels resumed; meanwhile, violence in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) persisted in south. After ceasefire between govt and New People's Army (NPA) fell apart late April, counter-insurgency operations and rebel ambushes on military presence resurfaced in Mindanao, Visayas and Luzon, leaving at least 30 combatants and civilians dead; at least 26 communist rebels 13-19 May killed in clashes in Surigao del Sur and Agusan del Norte following military offensives. In south, implementation of peace

agreement with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) progressed slowly as main focus was on fighting COVID-19. At local level, clashes between clans reignited in Pikit municipality (part of BARMM) and in Matalam municipality (Cotabato province), leaving several houses burned and displacing hundreds. Clashes between soldiers and elements of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continued, leaving 3 May two ASG dead in Tandubas, Tawi-Tawi province, and 16 May three militants dead in Patikul, Sulu province. In Maguindanao province, members of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) 3 May killed two soldiers in Datu Hoffer town; clash between BIFF and military 18-19 May also left one soldier and two militants dead in Datu Saudi-Ampatuan. Nationwide, National Telecommunications Commission 5 May ordered largest Philippine broadcaster ABS-CBN to halt operations after govt 4 May refused to renew 25-year legislative franchise upon expiration; govt critics condemned decision, calling it illegal and “clampdown of the freedom of the press”; govt’s imposed COVID-19 lockdown in COVID-affected areas extended until 31 May.

➡ **South China Sea** Amid heated diplomatic exchanges between U.S., China and claimant states, U.S. military forces intensified activity in South China Sea (SCS), and reports emerged that China had deployed military aircraft to Spratly Islands. Following rising tensions in April after reported Chinese incursion into Malaysian exclusive economic zone, U.S. military forces increased their activity in SCS, including U.S. bombers 7-8 May flying over maritime area; U.S. Navy 2-8 May conducting reconnaissance and surveillance exercises; and U.S. Submarine Forces Pacific 8 May announcing that all of its forward-deployed submarines were underway in Western Pacific, including Philippine Sea. Meanwhile, China 1 May started campaign for enforcing unilateral fishing ban for all in waters north of 12 degrees latitude in SCS; fishermen’s groups in Philippines and Vietnam 4 May protested against China’s summer fishing moratorium; Vietnamese ministry of agriculture and rural development 13 May rejected “unilateral decision”, said Vietnam has sovereignty over its waters. Indonesian FM Retno Marsudi 6 May expressed concern over escalating tensions between U.S., China and claimant parties and urged all to exercise restraint and abide by international law; Indonesia 26 May sent diplomatic note to UN Sec Gen Guterres reiterating support for compliance with international law, and particularly UN Convention for Law of the Sea, and expressed support for 2016 ruling by Permanent Court of Arbitration in favour of Philippines against China over SCS territorial dispute. Chinese vessel 15 May left Malaysian area according to shipping data after exploration vessel from Malaysia’s state oil company Petronas 12 May withdrew from same zone; Philippine Navy 19 May announced docking of landing craft at Thitu Island as work on a port nears completion. A defence intelligence group 11 May disclosed that satellite imagery showed two kinds of surveillance aircraft on Fiery (Yongshu) Reef in the Spratly islands; Chinese media 14 May reported that China had deployed KJ-500 airborne early warning and control system and KQ-200 maritime patrol aircraft on the reef’s base; Chinese FM Wang Yi 24 May stated there is “nothing to support the claim that China is using COVID-19 to expand its presence in the South China Sea”.

➡ **Thailand** Series of pro-democracy activities commemorating deadly military crackdown of 2010 Red Shirt protests took place, while insurgent violence in deep south resumed at low intensity. Main insurgent group Barisan Revolusi



Nasional (BRN) 1 May condemned govt's late April deadly security operation which killed three insurgents and breached group's unilateral ceasefire; BRN denied allegations that slain insurgent suspects were planning attacks and called on govt to "reciprocate" ceasefire. Suspected insurgents 3 May opened fire on two rangers riding motorcycle, killing one in Saiburi district, Pattani. Amid easing of COVID-19 lockdown, pro-democracy activists launched protests commemorating military crackdown of 2010 Red Shirt movement, which left 99 dead. In capital Bangkok, anonymous group night of 10 May launched campaign projecting slogan "#SeekTheTruth" on several Bangkok landmarks; new Progressive Movement, founded by Thanathorn Jungrungrangkit, disqualified MP and former leader of Future Forward Party, next day claimed credit for projections, decrying lack of accountability for loss of life at hands of army ten years ago. Several dozen Red Shirts 13 May attended memorial in Bangkok of pro-Red Shirt military official killed during 2010 protests, police arrested one for organising protest despite COVID-19 emergency decree; Red Shirt leaders and activists 19 May also held commemoration ceremonies in Bangkok and Chiang Mai city; and student and other activists 22 May gathered in Bangkok to mark sixth anniversary of 2014 military coup, police arrested two demonstrators for violating emergency decree. Govt 26 May extended state of emergency until 30 June; opposition and human rights activists denounced move as means to curb protests and stifle dissent, main opposition party Pheu Thai described it as "a consolidation of power". Royal Gazette 4 May announced that former head of Constitutional Court, Dr Nurak Marpraneet, had been appointed to Privy Council; in previous role, Nurak oversaw removal of three PMs (including Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014), dissolution of 29 political parties (including most recently of the Future Forward Party), and ruling to nullify 2014 elections.

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## **Pacific**

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➔ **Papua New Guinea** Tensions mid-month flared between police and military following deadly attack on senior police officer. In capital Port Moresby, hours after imposition of COVID-19 restrictions on sale and consumption of alcohol, off-duty military personnel 8 May attacked senior police inspector investigating illegal alcohol sale at black market; police officer next day died from injuries. Police 23 May arrested former PM Peter O'Neill following allegations of corruption and abuse of office during premiership. Supreme Court 29 May ratified Feb vote by Bougainville regional authorities rejecting proposed change to Bougainville constitution that would have allowed presidents to hold third term in office.