

# Asia

---

## North East Asia

---

➔ **China/Japan Tensions continued between Japan and China over contested island chain in East China Sea.** At foreign minister G7 meeting in UK, Japanese FM Motegi 4 May raised “grave concerns” over Chinese attempts to change status quo in East and South China Seas. Defence Minister Kishi 20 May said Japan must increase defence capabilities, citing China’s increased capabilities. Draft Japanese defence white paper 13 May referred to Chinese patrols in zone around Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as “violation of international law” and stated that stability of Taiwan Strait was important to Japan’s security; in response, China 14 May lodged diplomatic complaint. Japanese govt identified 104 Chinese coast guard vessels in contiguous zone and ten in territorial sea of Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands during month; Japan 16 May reported three Chinese navy vessels sailing through Miyako Strait. Japanese, U.S. and French military forces 11-17 May attended first joint exercise on Japanese territory; Australia 15 May participated in expanded naval exercise in East China Sea.

➔ **Korean Peninsula Pyongyang lambasted U.S. diplomacy following President Biden’s critical statement, while U.S. and South Korean leaders pledged to strengthen ties to guarantee regional security.** In response to U.S. President Biden’s statement late April to U.S. Congress characterising North Korea’s (DPRK) nuclear program as a threat, North Korean foreign ministry 1-2 May said Biden had made “big blunder” and called U.S. diplomacy “spurious signboard” to “cover up its hostile acts”. At G7 meeting in UK, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken and South Korean FM Chung Eui-yong 3 May reaffirmed their alliance’s role in Indo-Pacific peace and security, while Blinken said DPRK needs to take opportunity to engage diplomatically to move forward toward denuclearisation of Korean Peninsula. Chinese Envoy to UN Zhang Jun same day expressed hopes that U.S. review of North Korea policy will place more emphasis on dialogue, rather than on provocative and confrontational actions. South Korean President Moon 20-23 May visited Washington D.C. for meeting with President Biden to reaffirm security and economic ties; after summit, Biden said both leaders remained “deeply concerned” about ongoing nuclear threat from DPRK and announced appointment of new envoy to open diplomatic channels with Pyongyang. Moon same day announced joint decision with U.S. to end flight range guidelines signed in 1979 limiting Seoul’s missile development program, and called denuclearisation of Korean Peninsula “matter of survival”, affirming that main aim of meeting was to bring North Korea back on “path of dialogue”; Pyongyang 31 May criticised U.S. for ending restrictions on South Korea’s missile development, warning it could lead to “instable situation”. Chinese FM Wang Yi 28 May met North Korean Ambassador Ri Ryong-nam in China’s capital Beijing where pair pledged to “strengthen coordination and cooperation”. South Korean police 6 May raided office of anti-North Korea activist group that had stated it had released balloons into North carrying dollar bills and leaflets denouncing Pyongyang.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** **Cross-strait tensions decreased as Taipei focused on containing COVID-19 outbreak.** Taiwanese defence ministry claimed at least 28 Chinese military aircraft entered its Air Defence Identification Zone during month. U.S. guided-missile destroyer *Curtis Wilbur* 18 May transited through Taiwan Strait; in response, China 19 May accused U.S. of threatening Strait's peace and stability. Taiwan saw worst COVID-19 outbreak since start of pandemic during May. Chinese officials 17 May offered Chinese vaccines to Taiwan, blaming ruling Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party for creating "political obstacles" that prevented vaccines from arriving; Taiwan 18 May called offer "false sympathy" and President Tsai Ing-wen 27 May said China interfered with Taiwan's efforts to procure vaccines from Germany's BioNTech. Despite growing international support throughout month for Taiwan's participation in 74th World Health Assembly 24-31 May, Taiwan not invited by end of month; Taipei 24 May criticised alleged "indifference" from World Health Organization. At G7 foreign ministers summit in UK, participants 5 May opposed "any unilateral actions that could escalate tensions" in Taiwan Strait; in response, China next day condemned statement as gross interference in internal affairs. Hong Kong authorities 18 May halted operations at its representative office in Taiwan.

---

## **South Asia**

---

↓ **Afghanistan** **Taliban intensified coordinated assaults on Afghan military positions, with govt forces losing more district centres; terror attacks killed over 100 civilians.** Deadly Taliban attacks escalated in nature and intensity throughout month as part of annual Spring offensive, especially from 1 May – start of symbolic U.S./NATO troop withdrawal. Notably, Taliban 2 May attacked security post, killing 12 security forces in Badakhshan province (north east); 3 May seized positions around Helmand's capital (south) with 18 security forces killed or wounded; 4 May killed nine security forces in Baghlan province (north), followed by the surrender of 100 more on 6 May; 4 May killed 20 soldiers in Farah province (south west); and 7-8 May killed 23 soldiers in Ghazni and Wardak provinces (centre). Taliban offensive led to militants gaining control of district centres in Laghman, Wardak and Baghlan by end of month. Month also saw heavy toll on civilians: triple bombing 8 May targeted school in Hazara neighbourhood in capital Kabul, killing at least 90 civilians, mostly women and girls, and wounding 240 more; govt blamed Taliban for attack but group denied responsibility. IEDs on bus 10 May killed 11 civilians in Zabul province (South); bomb 14 May exploded in mosque, killing 12 civilians in capital Kabul, Islamic State later claimed responsibility for attack. Roadside bomb 16 May also killed three civilians in Ghanzi province (East). Large Uzbek ethnic community in Faryab province (north) demonstrated angrily against govt's attempt to appoint new governor with no ties to province or Uzbek community. U.S. and UK continued high-level diplomatic efforts to support peace process by engaging with senior Pakistani officials and Taliban representatives; moves resulted in resumption of Taliban-govt peace discussions in Qatar's capital Doha 13 and 24 May and statement of willingness from Taliban to attend high-level peace conference in Turkey in future, with conditions. Australia withdrew embassy from Kabul amid increasing international concerns about security environment.

➔ **Bangladesh Political tensions continued in aftermath of anti-India unrest, and authorities revealed rise in number of Rohingyas attempting to enter Bangladesh since 1 Feb coup in Myanmar.**

Protesters in capital Dhaka 3 May called for release of student leaders arrested for protesting March visit of Indian PM Modi; delegation of six Hefazat-e-Islam leaders next day met with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to request release of activists detained following anti-India protests, also asked for ongoing arrests to stop. Police 15 May arrested Jamaat-e-Islami leader and former member of parliament on charges of instigating Hefazat-sponsored violence during anti-Modi protests in Chittagong city. Following charges filed by health ministry, senior journalist Rozina Islam 17 May arrested for violating Official Secrets Act; Islam, who had been reporting on institutional corruption and COVID-19, released on bail 22 May; local and international rights organisations called for all charges to be dropped. Nationalist Party (BNP) opposition leader and former PM Khaleda Zia 3 May hospitalised for post-COVID-19 health complications; law minister 9 May rejected Zia's demand to seek medical treatment abroad. Paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion 2 May arrested four alleged members of banned Ansar al-Islam in Khulna district. Counter-terrorism police 4 May arrested two alleged members of banned New Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh; also in Dhaka, authorities 2, 5 and 20 May detained at least six alleged Ansar al-Islam members, and 19 May arrested alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir member in Cox's Bazar district. High profile Islamist preacher 26 May arrested for inciting militancy. Border security officials 2 May said number of Rohingyas refugees trying to enter country more than tripled since 1 Feb military coup in Myanmar, revealed they had pushed back some 133 Rohingyas to Myanmar this year, including over 100 in March-April. State minister for foreign affairs 17 May stated around 20,000 Rohingyas so far relocated to Bhasan Char, low-lying flood-prone island in Bay of Bengal; during UN High Commissioner for Refugees officials' inspection of island, several thousand Rohingyas 31 May staged protest against dire living conditions.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir) COVID-19 crisis continued to grip country as Maoist violence persisted in centre and west, and tens of thousands of farmers marked six months of protest movement.**

Country continued to reel under COVID-19 crisis as official tallies surpassed 300,000 deaths and 25mn cases, with unofficial cases and mortality rate possibly reaching far greater numbers; hundreds of corpses mid-month were spotted floating in river Ganges and washing up on embankments in various northern states. Maoist violence persisted. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), Maoists 11 May killed police constable in Sukma district, and next day killed civilian suspected of being police informer in Narayanpur district; IED 18 May killed police head constable in Bijapur district. Police 14 May killed Maoist in Dantewada district; exchanges of fire between police and Maoists 17 May killed three suspected Maoists in Sukma district; police 22 and 31 May killed Maoist in Dantewada district. In Maharashtra state (west), security forces 13 May killed two Maoists and 21 May killed 13 Maoists in Gadchiroli district. Ahead of six-month anniversary of farmer protests on 26 May, leaders of protest movement 21 May called on PM Modi to resume talks on their key demands, threatening intensification of protests if govt declines to engage; tens of thousands of farmers 26 May demonstrated across country. At border dispute with China, reports 10 May surfaced that China had equipped troops on Indian border

with modified truck-mounted rocket, affording military greater mobility and flexibility. Indian army chief general 20 May said India will continue enhanced troop presence along border until de-escalation takes place and denied that talks with Beijing had reached impasse, saying trust had increased following disengagement deal in Feb.

➡ **Kashmir Pakistan and India traded blame for breaking ceasefire along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir); militant attacks continued in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).** Pakistan and India held each other responsible for first violation of 25 Feb agreement reaffirming support for 2003 ceasefire along Kashmir's LoC and international border; Pakistani PM Imran Khan 30 May said normalising ties with India would be "major betrayal" to people of Kashmir. According to Indian Border Security (BSF), Pakistan troops 3 May opened fire along international border in J&K's Samba district; Pakistan's foreign ministry same day lodged protest with India over BSF troops crossing and firing mortars along LoC in Sialkot's Charwa Sector; no casualties reported on either side. India's BSF 6 May killed alleged intruder and 18 May arrested another in alleged infiltration attempt across international border in Samba district. India 15 May accused Islamabad of using drones to deliver weapons into J&K. UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkır 27 May said India and Pakistan should "refrain" from altering status of Kashmir; Indian foreign ministry next day called remarks "misleading and prejudiced". Counter-insurgency operations and militant attacks continued in J&K throughout month. Security forces 4 and 6 May killed five suspected militants in Baramulla and Shopian districts in separate incidents; 11 and 17 May killed five alleged militants in separate incidents in Anantnag district and on outskirts of regional capital Srinagar. Grenade attack 7 May wounded three paramilitary soldiers and civilian in Srinagar. Kashmiri separatist leader and Tehreek-i-Hurriyat chairman Muhammad Ashraf Khan Sehrai 5 May died in custody; Sehrai, 78, had been jailed since his arrest in July 2020 under Public Safety Act; umbrella group of separatist parties, All Parties Hurriyat Conference, 5 May accused prison authorities of denying him timely medical assistance; police 15 May detained two of Sehrai's sons in Srinagar after participants at his funeral in Kupwara district raised pro-separatist slogans on 6 May. Amid COVID-19 spread, local authorities 6 May requested doctors no longer speak with media, and directed oxygen manufacturing units to stop deliveries to NGOs and private users on account of shortages in hospitals.

➡ **Maldives Terror attack targeted former President Mohamed Nasheed.** Alleged Muslim extremists 6 May detonated homemade explosive outside home of former president and current parliament speaker, Mohamed Nasheed, in capital Malé, critically wounding Nasheed, two of his bodyguards and two bystanders; Nasheed 13 May flown to Germany for further medical treatment; police by 21 May had arrested four suspects. While attack has yet to be claimed, Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party reportedly said religious extremists and political interests could be involved.

➡ **Nepal** **President Bhandari dissolved lower house of parliament for second time in six months and announced elections for mid-November, sparking widespread criticism that move undermines 2015 constitution.** PM KP Oli 10 May lost vote of confidence, prompting Bhandari same day to call on opposition parties to form new majority govt within three days; after failure of parties to secure majority, Bhandari 13 May reappointed Oli as premier. Following political maneuvering among opposition parties in House of Representatives, 149 MPs from Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and dissenting factions of Janata Samajbadi Party and Unified Marxist-Leninist parties 21 May presented signatures to Bhandari requesting that head of Nepali Congress party Sher Bahadur Deuba be appointed PM; later same day, Oli also presented his candidacy, claiming support of 153 parliamentarians, including several backing Deuba. After declaring that she could not appoint either candidate due to insufficient support, Bhandari 21 May dissolved parliament for second time since Dec 2020. Bhandari's ongoing support for Oli – who had consistently sought elections in recent months – was widely criticised as undermining 2015 constitution; 146 MPs 24 May filed joint petition at Supreme Court challenging dissolution of parliament's lower chamber and demanding its reinstatement.

➡ **Pakistan** **Political tensions continued to run high, and militants killed more than a dozen security forces in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.** Opposition remained divided over results of last month's by-election in Karachi city, where Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) rejected victory of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) despite 8 May vote recount. PML-N and PPP however same day jointly opposed presidential ordinance authorising Election Commission to procure electronic voting machines and enable overseas Pakistanis to vote in 2023 parliamentary elections. Tensions between ruling party and opposition increased when govt 8 May refused to allow opposition PML-N leader Shahbaz Sharif to leave for UK for medical treatment, despite previous day's decision by Lahore High Court to allow for one-time visit. Following Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan's violent April anti-govt protests, Punjab counter-terrorism authorities 8 May registered four cases against senior TLP leaders for instigating new protests to oust French ambassador. In response to European Parliament's resolution condemning blasphemy laws in late April, govt 3 May agreed to introduce new legislation to address rights issues in line with EU agreements. Militant attacks in May left more than a dozen security forces dead. In Balochistan province, road bomb blast 3 May killed two police officers in Arawan district; Pakistani Taliban 5 May killed four soldiers in cross-border attack in Zhob district; 8 May killed three soldiers in Quetta and Turbat districts; drive-by shooting 10 May killed two police in Mastung district. Seven killed in 21 May bomb explosion at Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam's Palestine solidarity rally in Chaman town. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistani Taliban attack 4 May left two soldiers dead in Bajaur district. Operation against Pakistani Taliban in North Waziristan district 5 May killed four soldiers and two militants, while one soldier killed in cross-border militant attack 22 May; militants 9 May also killed police in Lakki Marwat district. Afghan President Ghani 11 May accused Pakistan of "operating an organised system of support" for Taliban and said "question of peace or hostility is now in Pakistani hands"; Pakistan 14 May summoned Afghan ambassador reportedly to protest comments.

➡ **Sri Lanka Amid rapidly worsening COVID-19 crisis, country marked twelfth anniversary of end of civil war while parliament approved controversial govt bill on Colombo megaproject.** Authorities prevented public commemorations in northern and eastern provinces to mark 12 years since end of civil war on 18 May; police same day arrested ten Tamil activists under Prevention of Terrorism Act for holding commemoration in eastern Batticaloa district. Well-known memorial to civilian Tamil dead in Mullivaikkal 13 May discovered vandalised while under army control. Tamil MPs, local officials and members of diaspora in Canada, UK and other European countries 18 May also recognised “Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day”, while PM Rajapaksa same day promised parliament that govt would never “betray” “war heroes” who sacrificed their lives to defeat terrorism. Govt next day held 12th National War Heroes’ Day events attended by President Rajapaksa and other govt and military officials. Parliament 20 May approved by nearly two-thirds majority govt’s landmark bill to establish legal and administrative framework for Chinese-built Colombo Port City megaproject, which provides for unprecedented legal autonomy to Port City Commission; opposition and civil society had previously expressed criticisms that project will facilitate money laundering and further increase Chinese influence over Sri Lankan economy and politics. Law 18 May rushed through parliament after speaker same day announced Supreme Court due to assess constitutionality of more than two dozen of bill’s provisions, following numerous petitions; govt immediately introduced amended bill after removing controversial provisions. Meanwhile, country faced rapidly worsening COVID-19 situation as hospital capacity appeared to reach its limit during month, and delays along with shortages in COVID-19 testing limited govt’s ability to track and control disease, fuelling criticism of govt’s handling of crisis. Public and health officials also protested politicised distribution of scarce vaccines.

---

## **South East Asia**

---

↓ **Indonesia Following series of violent attacks, authorities signalled major crackdown on Papuan separatists with deployment of more military troops to country’s easternmost region.** Following last month’s series of deadly attacks in Papua’s Puncak district, and designation of Papuan armed groups as “terrorists”, military 6 May announced deployment of 400 additional troops to Papua; United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) leader Benny Wenda 4 May claimed deployment was part of “biggest military operation in West Papua since the late 1970s” amid reports of internet shutdown and displacement of locals. Chief Security Minister Mahfud MD 19 May said armed assailants previous day killed two Indonesian soldiers in Dekai district in Yahukimo regency and injured four others in separate attack in Serambakon district in Bintang regency. Police 9 May arrested spokesperson for West Papua National Committee Victor Yeimo in Papua’s provincial capital Jayapura for his alleged role in August 2019 protests and prior statement calling for referendum on independence; NGO Human Rights Watch 12 May called on authorities to “drop politically motivated treason charges and unconditionally release” Yeimo; over 30 civil society groups, including Amnesty International, 19 May also demanded his immediate release.

➡ **Myanmar Civil disobedience actions continued as Tatmadaw and civil defence groups clashed, opposition govt launched armed wing and fighting persisted between ethnic armed groups and military.** Strikes against coup and other civil disobedience activities continued across country; protests launched daily, with most small-scale and brief in order to avoid crackdowns from security forces. Amid ongoing arrests of anti-coup supporters, country witnessed fewer protest-related killings, although at least 68 reported during month. Spate of bombings and unclaimed arson attacks continued in Yangon, Mandalay and other cities, and at least dozen local govt officials reported killed. Armed clashes between military and locally organised civil defence groups persisted throughout May in north west Myanmar, including Chin State and Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay regions, as well as Kayah State in south east, killing dozens of military troops and police and enabling civil defence groups to seize assault weapons. In Mindat town, in southern Chin State, Chin Defence Force 12-14 May ambushed military vehicles; junta 13 May responded by imposing martial law in township and 15 May unleashed artillery barrage and airborne assault, re-taking town and forcing thousands of townspeople to flee. National Unity Government, which was set up in April in opposition to junta, 5 May announced founding of armed wing – People’s Defence Force – in attempt to unify resistance groups, specifically locally organised defence forces and disparate groups of several hundred protesters undergoing military training in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups. In northern Shan State, armed groups Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Ta-ang National Liberation Army 4-5 May staged joint attacks on military base in Kutkai township, seizing large cache of weapons. In Kachin State, military 8 May retook key communications base in Momauk township from Kachin Independence Army (KIO) armed group; KIO 4 May attacked police station in Mansi township, killing head of police force and injuring station chief. In Kayin State, Karen National Union (KNU) armed group continued attacks on military outposts, while junta continued artillery barrages and airstrikes on KNU targets – including civilian areas. G7 foreign ministers 5 May issued communiqué condemning military coup in “strongest terms”, committing to tightening sanctions on regime and preventing sale of weapons to junta.

➡ **Philippines Low-level violence persisted in south between militant groups and security forces, while military clashed with communist rebels in centre, south and north.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, low-level violence between insurgents and security forces continued throughout May, while communal violence and clan conflict reduced. In Maguindanao, suspected combatants of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) 9 May fought with military near town market of Datu Paglas; elements of BIFF 12 and 16 May clashed again with military. In town of Piagapo, in Lanao del Sur province, Islamic State (ISIS)-linked rebels 6 May clashed with armed forces, killing one rebel and injuring three. In Sulu province, clashes between elements of ISIS-linked Abu Sayyaf Group and army 14 May killed three rebels and injured one soldier. Bangsamoro Transition Authority continued parliamentary sessions and 19 May passed Education Code, third element of priority legislation. Clashes between communist New People’s Army and armed forces throughout May continued at relatively lower levels than April in Visayas Islands in centre, Mindanao Island in south and Luzon Island in north, killing at least 12 combatants and civilians; clashes mainly resulted from security forces’

operations or rebel ambushes. In south, implementation of peace agreement with Moro Islamic Liberation Front remained delayed as main focus was on fighting COVID-19; govt 19 May launched Bangsamoro Normalization Trust Fund.

➡ **South China Sea Tensions persisted between Philippines and China over Chinese maritime presence at disputed reef in South China Sea (SCS).** Following heated exchanges in April over incursion by Chinese vessels at disputed Whitsun Reef, Philippines 3 May confirmed it had lodged diplomatic protest over Chinese Coast Guard harassment of Philippine Coast Guard ships 24-25 April; Philippines 29 May confirmed it had filed 100 protest notes against China's maritime presence in SCS since 2016. Philippine FM Teodoro Locsin 3 May tweeted that Chinese vessels should leave Manila's Exclusive Economic Zone. Manila 5 May rejected annual summer fishing ban imposed by China in northern SCS. Philippine Navy 12 May reported that 287 Chinese maritime militia vessels were in Philippine waters as of 9 May. At 27th Southeast Asia Regional Group (ASEAN)-China Senior Officials' Consultation, Philippine Acting Undersecretary for Bilateral Relations and ASEAN Affairs Elizabeth Buensuceso 18 May called on member states and China to comply with 1982 UN Convention on Law of Sea and to uphold 2002 Declaration on Conduct of Parties. Meanwhile, Chinese Navy 2 May said that its *Shandong* aircraft carrier task group conducted routine training exercises in SCS. U.S. guided-missile destroyer USS *Curtis Wilbur* 20 May conducted Freedom of Navigation operation in vicinity of Paracel Islands; Beijing same day said U.S. warship had illegally entered its territorial waters. Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga 11 May said Japan "strongly opposes" China's growing maritime assertiveness in region during phone call with Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 27 May spoke with Vietnam's FM Bui Thanh Son, affirming "shared commitment to protecting and preserving the rules-based order in the South China Sea".

➡ **Thailand Protesters held small-scale pro-democracy rallies and maintained online activism, while sporadic violence continued in deep south.** Around 200 protesters with Restart Democracy (ReDem) group 2 May marched from Victory Monument to Criminal Court in capital Bangkok to protest no-bail imprisonments of protest leaders and others; protesters dispersed later same day but police clashed in evening with stragglers, firing rubber bullets; police arrested one of two ReDem leaders, Hathairat Kaewseekram, to whom Appeals Court 10 May granted bail. Core leader of Ratsadon pro-democracy group Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak 1 May transferred from prison to hospital after 46 days on hunger strike; authorities 11 May granted him bail. Authorities 6 May released on bail prominent protest leader Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul who faces charges that include lèse-majesté and sedition. Resurgent COVID-19 cases throughout month saw anti-govt movement turn to social media platforms. Protesters 2 May established Facebook page entitled "Let's Move Abroad", which gained several hundred thousand followers; Digital Economy and Society Minister Chaiwut Thanakhamanusorn 4 May said his ministry was monitoring Facebook page. Violence in deep south continued. In Yala province, security forces 4 May clashed with suspected insurgents in Krong Pinang district as they attempted to arrest suspected militant, leaving one ranger and two insurgents dead. In Narathiwat province, ranger patrol 11 May clashed with suspected militants in



Bacho district, arresting two and killing one. Authorities 18 May found that 28 assault rifles were missing from armoury in Muang district, Narathiwat.