

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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↓ **Korean Peninsula** North Korea increased tensions with another round of what Japan said appeared to be missile launches 28 Nov, and threatened further launches, while relations between U.S. and South Korea grew more strained over negotiations on cost-sharing for U.S. troop presence. North Korean missiles 28 Nov flew into sea between Korean peninsula and Japan; Pyongyang 30 Nov threatened ballistic missiles would fly over Japan “in the not distant future”. Earlier in month, Pyongyang 13 Nov warned U.S. would face “bigger threat and harsh suffering” if Kim Jong-un’s unilaterally-imposed end-2019 deadline is “ignored”, continuing pressure on U.S. to offer proposal on nuclear deal; Pyongyang demanding U.S. and South Korea halt joint military drills and lift sanctions. Washington and Seoul 17 Nov announced postponement of joint air drills as good-will gesture; Pyongyang dismissed it, said it was not interested in talks “that bring nothing to us” and would not “gift the U.S. president with something he can boast of”. North Korean state media 25 Nov reported Kim ordered artillery drills near disputed inter-Korean maritime border while inspecting military unit on islet off west coast, in first known trip to front-line military unit since entering nuclear diplomacy with U.S.; artillery firing aimed toward South Korea, which expressed regret saying drills violated 2018 inter-Korean military agreement. Third round of negotiations between U.S. and South Korea on how to divide cost for maintaining U.S. troops on Korean peninsula ended abruptly 20 Nov, amid renewed tensions after U.S. President Trump demanded Seoul pay 400% (about \$5bn) more in 2020. South Korean newspaper 20 Nov reported U.S. considering withdrawing one brigade (3,000-4,000 troops) if sides unable to reach agreement by end of 2019; U.S. denied. Seoul 22 Nov postponed with conditions its controversial decision to terminate intelligence sharing agreement with Japan, which had omitted South Korea from its “white list” of trusted trading partners. South Korean and Chinese defence ministers 17 Nov agreed to establish more military hotlines, in apparent message and warning to Washington.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** Rhetoric between Taipei and Beijing grew more tense ahead of Taiwan’s presidential and legislative elections set for 11 Jan 2020, with President Tsai accusing China of interfering with elections. China’s Taiwan Affairs Office 4 Nov revealed measures to further open China’s markets and economic projects to Taiwanese firms, prompting Taipei to accuse China of agenda “promoting reunification, enticing Taiwan, and trying to split apart Taiwan internally” to influence elections. Chinese Communist Party early month issued communiqué pledging to “fully respect” Taiwanese way of life after it has been “peacefully reunified”. Taiwan’s Foreign Affairs Minister 6 Nov warned that China could resort to military conflict with Taiwan to divert domestic attention from economic slowdown; Beijing called Wu’s comments “nonsense” and “rubbish”. China sailed its first domestically-built aircraft carrier through Taiwan Strait to South China Sea 17 Nov; Taipei accused it of intimidation. China 21 Nov warned independence is “dead end” that will bring “profound disaster to Taiwan”, after President Tsai’s running mate called himself “realistic worker for Taiwan independence”. Australian media

23 Nov reported Chinese asylum seeker in Australia had confessed to authorities to being Chinese spy and provided details inter alia of Beijing-led campaign to interfere in Taiwan's election; Taipei said it was investigating claims, which Beijing denied. Foreign minister of Tuvalu in South Pacific 21 Nov said country had rejected Chinese offers to help build artificial islands, which it interpreted as effort to undermine Taiwan's influence; told Reuters diplomatic ties with Taiwan are "strongest they've ever been", and country is working with other Taiwanese allies in South Pacific to counter Chinese influence. U.S. 13 Nov guided-missile cruiser sailed through Taiwan Strait, in what U.S. described as routine operation to demonstrate its "commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific".

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## South Asia

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➡ **Afghanistan** U.S. President Trump made surprise visit to U.S. troops, week after U.S. and Taliban traded hostages for prisoners in confidence-building measure ahead of planned resumption of informal talks over peace process, while violence remained high despite seasonal winter lull in fighting, and further delay in results of Sept presidential election raised concerns about legitimacy of vote and fuelled political tensions. Trump made unannounced Thanksgiving visit to U.S. troops in Bagram Airfield 28 Nov, confirmed U.S. officials were meeting with Taliban representatives, and said he believed Taliban would agree to ceasefire. Earlier, U.S. 18 Nov released three Taliban prisoners, including brother of Taliban deputy leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, in exchange for release next day of two Australian and American academics held hostage by Taliban since 2016, in southern Zabul province. Taliban described prisoner swap as "confidence-building measure to help the peace process". Despite slower pace of fighting, serious security incidents included Taliban 29 Oct capture of military base in Aqcha district, Jowzjan province in north, killing 24 security personnel and capturing five soldiers; govt recaptured base but Taliban escaped with vehicles, weapons and equipment. In Kunduz province in north east, Taliban 20 Nov attacked military base killing thirteen soldiers; U.S. aerial counter-attack killed three Taliban. U.S.-led coalition airstrikes in 2019 reported at record high amid concern over increasing civilian casualties. Number of high-profile attacks in Kabul down slightly; car bomb 13 Nov exploded near convoy of foreign security contractors, killing twelve; no group claimed responsibility. Independent Election Commission (IEC) 13 Nov postponed results of 28 Sept presidential election for second time, sparking complaints among opposition factions; President Ghani's leading opponent in race Abdullah Abdullah 17 Nov said his campaign would try to stop partial vote recount until decision on status of 300,000 votes he considers suspicious; also accused IEC of favouring Ghani. Abdullah's campaign organised protests throughout month, growing bigger at end of Nov.

➡ **Bangladesh** Arrests of alleged members of banned militant groups continued, while govt warned of potentially destabilising effects of Rohingya refugee camps. Arrests by paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and police included suspected member of Allahr Dar militant group, which govt formally banned 5 Nov, in Gaibanda district 11 Nov; suspected Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) regional commander in Barisal district 13 Nov; four suspected members of banned Ansar ul-Islam in Dhaka and Satkhira districts; and five suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Dhaka district 16 Nov. Officials alleged two suspected JMB members

arrested in Dhaka 30 Oct were on their way to Cox's Bazar to recruit Rohingya refugees, claimed some refugees had already joined group. U.S. State Department's country report on terrorism 1 Nov attributed decline of terrorist activity in Bangladesh to govt's "zero-tolerance" policy, but noted transnational groups continued to spread ideologies, using social media. Islamic State (ISIS)'s media outlet 2 Nov released photographs of Bangladeshi militants pledging allegiance to new ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Quraishi, reportedly in Egypt's Sinai. Govt raised Rohingya refugee issue at various international forums, warning of potential for destabilisation and radicalisation. NGO Amnesty International 4 Nov accused Bangladeshi security forces of extra-judicial killings under guise of anti-drugs campaign. In one such example, border guards 15 Nov claimed to have killed alleged Rohingya drug dealer in Cox's Bazar district; two refugees, also accused of narco-trafficking, killed by border guards in same district 17 Nov. Arrests and sentencing of opposition politicians continued; supreme court 30 Oct rejected banned Jamaat-e-Islami party leader ATM Azharul Islam's appeal against death sentence by controversial International Crimes Tribunal in 2014 for war crimes committed during 1971 war. Bangladesh Nationalist Party's secretary general 16 Nov criticised govt's agreeing to share Feni river waters with India, and accused Indian border forces of continuing to kill Bangladeshis; two days later, Bangladesh's Border Guards protested killing by India's Border Security Force of two Bangladeshi nationals allegedly smuggling cows.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** In Jharkhand state, officials reported three police killed by Maoists in Latehar district 22 Nov; police reported Maoist rebel killed in clash with security personnel in Seraikela-Kharswan district 28 Nov.

➡ **Kashmir** Tensions continued over India's revocation of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) special constitutional status, amid ongoing clashes between India and Pakistan at Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir), and India's deployment of joint special forces to J&K to combat attacks by militants. At LoC, Indian military 8 Nov reported death of soldier from Pakistani shelling; improvised explosive device attack 17 Nov killed one Indian soldier and injured two in Pallanwalla sector. Within J&K, unclaimed grenade attack 4 Nov killed one civilian and injured dozens in Srinagar; further grenade attacks 26 Nov killed two in Badasgam village including govt official and injured four civilians in attack in Srinagar. Indian armed forces 26 Nov killed two suspected militants in Pulwama district. Indian govt 24 Nov announced joint deployment of special forces from army, navy and air force under new Armed Forces Special Operations Division, to conduct combined counter-terrorism operations against militants in Kashmir valley. Indian Home Ministry 15 Nov claimed situation in Kashmir close to normalcy but refused to provide timeframe for release of Kashmiri chief ministers detained since Aug; several released during month. Home Minister Amit Shah's 20 Nov declaration that situation was "fully normal" prompted traders to shut down shops in protest. Indian media 25 Nov reported handful of businesses being allowed to restore internet for first time since Aug but under strict conditions, after promising connections would be used "for business purposes only" and accepting to give "complete access ... as and when required by security agencies"; use of connections for social media, proxies, virtual private networks and Wi-Fi banned, and access for general public remains suspended. Pakistan PM Khan 9 Nov called for renewed talks with India including on resolution of Kashmir dispute at inauguration of India-

Pakistan border crossing at Kartapur corridor connecting two Sikh shrines, first ever visa-free border crossing between countries. U.S. Congress Commission on Human Rights 14 Nov opened public hearing on human rights situation in Kashmir.

➡ **Nepal** Following factional differences between its main leaders, ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) 20 Nov elevated former Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal from party's co-chair to its sole executive chairman in exchange for PM KP Oli continuing to lead govt for remainder of its five-year tenure, despite a May 2018 gentleman's agreement to handover prime-ministership to Dahal halfway through tenure. Oli appeared unwilling to cede complete control of NCP, however, asserting 25 Nov that he retains seniority over Dahal. Oli also reshuffled cabinet 20 Nov to address internal NCP divisions, with three of six new ministers coming from Dahal's faction. Concerns over NCP's unilateral decision-making increased following 3 Nov dismissal of governors of all seven provinces appointed under previous Nepali Congress-led govt; critics described move as abuse of power. NCP's continued restrictions over civil liberties also came into focus with cabinet decision to authorise Home Ministry – responsible for internal security – to draft new legislation to regulate NGOs; Human Rights Watch (HRW) 14 Nov rebuked govt's move as attempt to weaken civil society. NGOs HRW, Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists 25 Nov expressed concern over govt's moves to appoint new transitional justice commissioners without making necessary legal reforms.

➡ **Pakistan** Govt warded off opposition challenges, including protest march by politico-religious party. Amid growing concern over risks of violence, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt sought peaceful end to Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) chief Fazlur Rehman's protest march. Leaders of opposition Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) addressed marchers at rally 1 Nov, however both parties distanced themselves from JUI-F's Islamabad sit-in, instead calling for replacement of govt through constitutional means. Following talks including with PTI's coalition ally Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam - PML-Q), Rehman 13 Nov called off sit-in, and 19 Nov also called off action blocking major highways. Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa 4 Nov told corps commanders in Rawalpindi that army "will continue to support national institutions as and when asked as per constitution", implying continued support for PTI govt; military spokesperson 18 Nov said PTI govt and army were "on the same page". Govt continued confrontational stance toward mainstream opposition, but suffered judicial setbacks including higher courts' decisions to release its most prominent opponent, former PM Nawaz Sharif, on bail. PM Khan 19 Nov said Pakistan "fully supported and facilitated" exchange of Taliban prisoners for Western hostages in Afghanistan as part of its support for negotiated political settlement of conflict (see Afghanistan). Speaking at National Assembly committee meeting 7 Nov, Minister for Economic Affairs warned that country could remain on Financial Action Task Force (FATF)'s grey list at least until Oct 2020 if it failed to ensure 100% compliance with its action plan to curb terrorist financing. Militant attacks included: four security personnel reportedly killed in clash with suspected Baloch militants 10 Nov in Punjab's Rajanpur district; three soldiers killed in bomb blast in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district 12 Nov; three personnel of paramilitary Frontier Corps killed in bomb blast in Balochistan 15 Nov.

↓ **Sri Lanka** Victory of former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 16 Nov presidential election, his appointment of controversial figures to govt and moves to increase surveillance and militarisation, prompted fears over rise in political repression and ethnic tensions, and end of post-war reconciliation and transitional justice efforts. Following largely peaceful campaign, Rajapaksa won with 52.25% of vote, largely from majority Sinhala voters; ethnic and religious tensions increased following result, with upsurge in anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim hate speech on social media. Leader of anti-Muslim group Bodu Bala Sena 19 Nov praised Gotabaya as “good leader” who has fulfilled their goal of uniting Sinhalese people. Gotabaya 21 Nov appointed his brother and former president Mahinda Rajapaksa as PM and finance minister, and another brother as minister of development and trade; 19 Nov appointed as his new defence secretary retired Major General Kamal Gunaratne, who commanded units that the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights has implicated in war crimes against Tamils in final months of civil war. Gotabaya 22 Nov invoked Public Security Ordinance authorising military to engage in civilian policing throughout country. Website critical of Rajapaksas raided by police 26 Nov; editor of separate website called in for police questioning 28 Nov. Lead police investigator in multiple cases implicating military and Rajapaksa family 24 Nov fled country after new govt removed his security detail. Swiss foreign ministry 27 Nov demanded govt investigate 25 Nov incident of local embassy employee allegedly “detained against her will on the street and threatened at length by unidentified men in order to force her to disclose embassy-related information”, reportedly including whereabouts of police investigator who had just fled country and details of others seeking political refuge. Mahinda Rajapaksa 17 Nov stated that new govt would push for constitutional changes to reverse 19th amendment to return to system of stronger presidential rule.

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## **South East Asia**

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➔ **Indonesia** Tensions continued in Papua, while police arrested dozens across country following suicide terror attack in Sumatra. With tensions in Papua still high from deadly unrest in recent months, authorities put in place additional security measures ahead of 1 Dec, when region traditionally mark anniversary of West Papuan independence day, and which was marred by deadly separatist violence in 2018. Papua police chief said patrols being intensified in known separatist strongholds in regencies of Puncak Jaya, Lanny Jaya, Intan Jaya and Mimika, as well as in provincial capital Jayapura in anticipation of pro-independence rallies. Military 30 Nov reported rebel attack on army helicopter in Nduga regency, one suspected separatist rebel shot dead. Jayapura police reportedly arrested more than 30 people same day for planning to celebrate independence day, and several for wearing symbols of independence. In north Sumatra, 24-year-old student blew himself up outside police station in Medan 13 Nov, injuring four police and two civilians; police 18 Nov said attacker connected to Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, along with 22 other suspects in area. Police arrested dozens in north Sumatra and other provinces, including group leader, and killed two suspected bomb-makers in raid in Hamparan Perak village in north Sumatra 16 Nov. Police 14 Nov also arrested wife of Medan suicide bomber, who they said had been planning attack in Bali.

➔ **Myanmar** Amid ongoing clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and military in Rakhine State, AA continued apparent asymmetric tactic of mass kidnappings, with 3 Nov abduction of ten people from speed boat on Kaladan River from southern Chin State to Rakhine State, including five Indian engineers and ruling party MP for Paletwa; AA released hostages after one engineer died, but continues to hold MP, U Hwai Tin. Bilateral ceasefire talks continued between army and four members of Northern Alliance - Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), AA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA, Kokang); military and KIO appeared to be inching toward new agreement, however possible accord between military and AA and TNLA remained elusive. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and UN Secretary-General António Guterres clashed at ASEAN-UN Summit in Bangkok 3 Nov, after Guterres expressed concern over situation of Rohingyas in Rakhine State and Cox's Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh, and stressed Myanmar's responsibility for creating conditions conducive to voluntary return. Moves toward international accountability ramped up, with Gambia 11 Nov filing case under Genocide Convention against Myanmar at International Court of Justice (ICJ), which will hold public hearings 10-12 Dec to consider Gambia's request for provisional measures; Myanmar 19 Nov announced Suu Kyi would personally lead delegation to "defend the national interest of Myanmar at the ICJ", and has retained prominent international lawyers. Case launched in Argentina 13 Nov under country's universal jurisdiction provisions that names Suu Kyi, Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and two former presidents in crimes against Rohingya. International Criminal Court 14 Nov announced decision granting authorisation for formal investigation which could lead to indictments of individuals in Myanmar deemed responsible for international crimes.

➔ **Philippines** Military operations continued against Islamist militants, including Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in south, notably in interior parts of Maguindanao province and Sulu province's Patikul town, while communist rebels clashed with armed forces in several regions. In BARMM, armed forces 23-24 Nov killed six ASG members, including a major leader, in two separate encounters in Sulu province. Army operations against BIFF and ASG led to temporary alliances between sub-groups, notably ASG's Radullan Sahiron and Hatib Sawadjaan. Army 25 Nov, with help from local Moro National Liberation Front, rescued British national and his wife, kidnapped by ASG 4 Oct, near Parang town, Sulu province. Political violence also resurgent, including ambush by unidentified perpetrators on Lanao del Sur mayor in Buadipuso-Buntong town 10 Nov that killed police escort and injured two civilians. As part of Bangsamoro peace process implementation, decommissioning of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) combatants continued, with more than 7,000 members laying down arms since late Sept. Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) continued its work, with working groups focusing on drafting priority legislation, including administrative code, election code and local govt code. BARMM end-Nov also approved 65.6bn Peso budget for 2020. While surrenders of communist New People's Army (NPA) members to armed forces continued, clashes took place in Nueva Ecija and Quezon (Luzon, north), northern and eastern Samar island (Visayas, centre) and Agusan del Sur and Bukidnon Sultan Kudarat (Mindanao, south). NPA attacks included explosive device in Borongan in eastern

Samar, killing six soldiers and injuring twenty others 12 Nov. Security forces early Nov arrested over 40 NPA militants in Negros island (Visayas).

► **South China Sea** Tensions continued between Vietnam and China over latter's seismic surveys in disputed area, and between U.S. and China amid U.S. activity in South China Sea (SCS). Vietnamese official 6 Nov said govt was exploring legal action and other options, including through UN Charter and UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, against China over its seismic surveys since July in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone, in area also claimed by China; China 8 Nov said it hopes Vietnam will not "complicate" SCS issue, accused Vietnam and other claimants of "invading and occupying" Chinese islands; countries discussed issues late month, agreed to continue working for peaceful solution. At ASEAN-China summit in Bangkok, Chinese premier Li Keqiang 3 Nov cited progress toward code of conduct among SCS claimants, and said China "willing to work with ASEAN, to sustain long term peace and stability" in SCS. U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper 17 Nov accused Beijing of increasing "coercion and intimidation to advance its strategic objectives" in area; Chinese counterpart next day urged him to "stop flexing muscles" and not provoke and escalate tensions in SCS; Esper responded reiterating U.S. "will fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows" and will "encourage and protect the rights of other sovereign nations to do the same". U.S. 15 Nov deployed littoral combat ship (designed for operations near shore) for first time for freedom of navigation operations near Mischief reef in disputed Spratly Islands; 19 Nov vowed to continue freedom of navigation operations in SCS, and to "continue support and to help modernise the Philippines armed forces and to improve maritime security and domain awareness". China 20 Nov called on U.S. to stop sending naval vessels to avoid "mishap". U.S. and Australian navies held joint navy drills in SCS early Nov; U.S. 20 Nov announced it will provide Vietnam with another coast guard cutter to boost its ability to patrol SCS.

► **Thailand** Large-scale militant attack in deep south indicated continued potency of Malay-Muslim insurgency despite steadily declining levels of violence over past years, while political tensions mounted as constitutional court disqualified opposition leader as MP. In deep south's Yala province, insurgents attacked checkpoint in Lam Phaya, Muang district, killing fifteen including many Village Defence Volunteers. Killing represented highest death toll in single militant attack over past eighteen years, and prompted questions about transfer of security responsibilities from army troops to civilian militias with minimal training. PM Prayuth floated idea of curfews; army 11 Nov announced it would not impose curfews. Suspected militants 11 Nov killed elderly couple in Mae Lan district, Pattani province, also injuring two-year-old child. General Wanlop Rugsanaoh, new head of Thai Peace Dialogue Panel, and other panel members spoke to media 29 Nov, pledged to renew dialogue with Malay-Muslim militants that has been suspended since Feb 2019. In national politics, constitutional court 20 Nov disqualified Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, founder and leader of anti-junta Future Forward Party (FFP), as MP for failing to divest shares in media company before registering as candidate, in precedent that could potentially jeopardise standing of more than 50 MPs. Thanathorn and FFP still face multiple court cases, which could result in Thanathorn's imprisonment, dissolution of party, and banning of its 24 executives from politics. Thanathorn told supporters he would continue to fight and though he

“might die in jail”, he would not “lick the boots” of the military; deputy PM warned Thanathorn against using inflammatory language.

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## **Pacific**

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➔ **Papua New Guinea** Voting began in long-delayed referendum on Bougainville island 23 Nov, where some 207,000 registered voters will choose between independence from PNG or greater autonomy, in line with 2001 Bougainville peace agreement; voting to continue until 7 Dec; result is non-binding and will go to national parliament.