

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan Tensions continued between Japan and China over contested island chain in East China Sea, while Tokyo and Washington began biannual military exercises.** Beijing 3 Oct opened digital museum claiming “legal and historical proof” that disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands belong to China; Tokyo 5 Oct demanded museum website be taken down. Two Chinese coastguard vessels 11-13 Oct entered Japanese territorial waters around Senkaku/Diaoyu, staying for record 57-hour period; during stay, the vessels 12 Oct approached Japanese fishing boat in area, prompting Tokyo to send coastguard for protection and to lodge protest with Beijing over incident. Japanese Self-Defence Forces 9 Oct conducted anti-submarine drill in South China Sea. U.S. and Japan 26 Oct began biannual “Keen Sword” military exercises around Japan involving air, sea and land forces and including cyber and electronic warfare for first time; drills to run until 5 Nov; commander of U.S. forces 26 Oct said exercises would demonstrate forces’ ability “to defend the Senkakus”. New Japanese PM Suga 18-21 Oct visited Vietnam and Indonesia in first trips abroad; Suga and Vietnamese PM Phuc 19 Oct agreed to increase security cooperation, including by Tokyo exporting military equipment to Vietnam, while Suga next day agreed to increase speed of defence and trade talks with Indonesian President Widodo; Chinese state-run *Global Times* newspaper 19 Oct quoted Chinese analysts saying deals targeted China and could “cast a shadow over regional stability and peace” in South China Sea. In first speech to parliament, Suga 26 Oct stressed importance of stable China-Japan relations for both countries and region.

➔ **Korean Peninsula North Korea unveiled new missiles during annual parade while U.S.-South Korea dispute over military cost sharing continued.** Pyongyang demonstrated previously unseen long-range intercontinental ballistic missile and submarine-launched missiles at 10 Oct military parade to celebrate 75th anniversary of Party Foundation Day attended by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un; during event, Kim claimed all citizens in North “healthy and sound” despite reports of COVID-19 outbreaks; next day, govt in Seoul held emergency meeting to discuss military parade. U.S. and South Korea 13-14 Oct held annual military talks featuring heads of military and defence ministers; in joint statement, Washington and Seoul pledged to “continue to develop” U.S.-ROK Alliance and recognised “significant threat that North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs pose”; amid continued tensions over sharing cost of maintaining 28,500 U.S. troops on Korean peninsula, statement also noted that lack of agreement has “lasting effects for Alliance readiness”. Defence ministry in Seoul 26 Oct said U.S. did not commit to maintain its current troop levels as Washington wished to have more flexible deployment. Danish documentary produced over ten years 11 Oct alleged pro-Pyongyang organisation Korean Friendship Association helped North Korea evade UN ban on trading arms. Senior U.S. justice official 22 Oct accused China of helping North Korea launder money from cyber-attacks to evade UN

sanctions; next day, Beijing denied accusation and said it “fully and earnestly” implements UN sanctions. In reported defection of senior official, chairman of South Korea’s National Assembly’s intelligence committee 8 Oct confirmed reports that North Korean diplomat Jo Song-gil, who disappeared while acting as ambassador to Italy in 2018, had been living in South since 2019. Pyongyang 30 Oct blamed Seoul for Sept killing of South Korean fisheries official at de facto maritime border.

➔ **Taiwan Strait Cross-strait tensions remained high amid intense Chinese military activity and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.** Taiwanese govt claimed series of Chinese military jets entered Taiwanese Air Defence Identification Zone during month, including: Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft on 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 15-17, 21, 25 and 31 Oct; one KJ-500 surveillance aircraft 7 Oct; two planes including one Y-9 transport aircraft 9 Oct; three jets including KJ-500 jet 20 Oct; two jets including a Y-8 plane 26 Oct; one electronic warfare plane 27 and 29 Oct; two planes 28 Oct; and three planes including electronic signals intelligence plane 30 Oct. In response, Taipei scrambled jets and tracked planes with air defence system on each occasion. Canadian warship 3 Oct and U.S. warship 14 Oct sailed through Taiwan Strait; following latter, Chinese military warned Washington to stop “words and deeds that provoke trouble”. U.S. military transport plane 8 Oct flew route along “median line” in Strait. Meanwhile, U.S. state dept 21 Oct approved sale of three weapons systems, including missiles and artillery, to Taiwan; next day, Taipei welcomed package, thanking U.S. for helping “strengthen its self-defense capabilities”; Beijing 26 Oct announced it would sanction U.S. arms companies involved in deal, including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Raytheon for move, which “China firmly opposes and strongly condemns”. Taipei denied reports on Chinese state television 12 and 13 Oct that allegedly showed confessions of two Taiwanese spies that Chinese authorities had supposedly arrested as part of a large anti-espionage operation “Thunder 2020”. U.S. National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien 16 Oct said Taiwan should “fortify itself” against potential invasion or Chinese-led economic measures such as embargo. In Taipei, parliament 6 Oct unanimously passed opposition Kuomintang party-proposed resolutions calling for further U.S. military aid and resumption of U.S.-Taiwan diplomatic ties. Taiwanese President Tsai 10 Oct in annual National Day address said maintaining “stability in cross-strait relations is in the best interest of both sides”.

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## South Asia

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↓ **Afghanistan Hostilities escalated as Taliban launched major attack on Helmand’s provincial capital while intra-Afghan peace talks stalled.** Taliban 10-11 Oct launched large-scale assault on Lashkar Gah, provincial capital of Helmand province (south) in first major attack on urban centre in 2020; militants seized much of city’s outskirts amid reports of Afghan troops’ extensive withdrawal from front-line areas; fighting killed dozens and displaced over 35,000. Other notable Taliban attacks during month included: several clashes in Kunduz province (north) killing and wounding dozens of security forces 8, 9 and 18 Oct; assault on checkpoints in Gozargah-e Noor district, Baghlan province (north) 14 Oct that killed at least twelve police officers and soldiers; 18 Oct bombing in Firuzkoh, Ghor province (centre) that killed tens and wounded nearly 100; and assault on Baharak

district, Takhar province (north) that killed at least fifteen security forces 21 Oct. U.S. military continued to limit its action, primarily conducting defensive airstrikes to protect Afghan troops around Lashkar Gah; U.S. President Trump 8 Oct tweeted he intended to continue drawdown of U.S. forces and have all soldiers “home by Christmas”. Islamic State (ISIS) claimed 24 Oct suicide attack at education centre in Kabul that killed at least 24. Meanwhile, intra-Afghan talks stalled in pre-negotiations over procedure and protocol; U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad 6 Oct travelled to Doha, Qatar’s capital, in effort to break impasse and urge de-escalation of violence; attempt to reduce violence seems to have failed but early reports suggest that parties may accept third-party mediation. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of former militia Hizb-e Islami, 21 Oct announced he would seek talks with Taliban to “join forces” in future Afghan state despite govt’s opposition. Domestic political tensions continued as High Council for National Reconciliation chief Abdullah Abdullah and President Ghani continued to compete for political prominence; rolling series of visits conducted abroad by FM and Ghani appointee Hanif Atmar, along with Abdullah, including to India, Pakistan and Iran. Govt 16 Oct appointed VP Saleh to oversee security for Kabul; Saleh announced increased surveillance and tougher police enforcement in city.

➔ **Bangladesh Political tensions emerged over local by-elections, security forces continued anti-militancy operations and armed groups clashed in refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar.** Ruling Awami League (AL) and opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) traded accusations of violence in lead-up to 17 Oct by-elections in “Dhaka 5” and “Naogaon 6” constituencies that AL won; AL said BNP responsible for two bomb blasts at AL rally in Joypurhat district 4 Oct that injured three; BNP candidate claimed AL supporters attacked his car in Demra area of capital Dhaka 7 Oct. BNP alleged massive electoral irregularities in vote and held widespread protests in Dhaka and other cities 18-19 Oct. BNP also claimed AL supporters responsible for violence and intimidation during AL by-election victory in Khulna district 20 Oct. In continued anti-militancy operations, counter-terrorism police 13 Oct detained six suspected members of Neo-Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh in Chittagong district and 15 Oct arrested seven alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir and Ansar al-Islam members from several areas of Dhaka; paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion 25 Oct detained three suspected Allahr Dal members in Rangpur district. Dhaka court 27 Oct indicted chief of banned Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami and 185 other leaders and members for 2014 attack on police station. Govt continued to suppress critics, particularly journalists; police 10 Oct arrested journalist in Rajbari district after AL official accused him of defaming PM Hasina on social media. Amid reports govt formed committee to relocate 10,000 Rohingya refugees to Bhashan Char island in Bay of Bengal despite longstanding concerns that island is prone to flooding and lacks services. NGO Human Rights Watch 1 Oct requested visit by UN to see if island is “safe and hospitable”. Meanwhile, armed groups clashed in Cox’s Bazaar district 30 Sept-7 Oct: Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and criminal group reportedly trafficking drugs fought for control of Kutupalong refugee camp, killing at least eight Rohingyas and one Bangladeshi, injuring over 100 refugees and displacing 2,000 others, while dozens of houses burnt down; govt 7 Oct sent additional forces to camp and arrested twelve residents for suspected involvement in clashes.

➔ **Kashmir Militant attacks and counter-insurgency operations inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued at high intensity, while clashes persisted across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir).** Inside J&K, militants 5 Oct killed three paramilitary police officers in Pulwama district and two others in regional capital Srinagar; militants 6 Oct attacked a ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader in Ganderbal district, killing security guard. Security forces same day killed three militants in Shopian district; in further operations police killed four militants in Kulgam and Pulwama districts 10 Oct, two in Srinagar 12 Oct and another in Anantnag district 17 Oct; security forces 26 Oct killed militant in Pulwama district, and two others in Bugdgam district the next day. Additional militant attacks injured police officer and civilian 17 Oct and paramilitary officer 18 Oct, both in Pulwama, and killed police officer in Anantnag district 19 Oct. Militants 29 Oct killed three BJP politicians in Kulgam. Tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad continued over reciprocal allegations of cross-LoC fire and Pakistan's intention to hold legislative elections in Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly part of J&K, on 15 Nov; India accused Pakistan of cross-LoC fire that killed two soldiers and injured five others 1 Oct, killed army officer 5 Oct, and injured civilian and two border guards 10 Oct in two separate incidents that day. Pakistan claimed Indian fire was responsible for wounding two civilians 14 Oct. Authorities 13 Oct released former chief minister and Peoples Democratic Party leader Mehbooba Mufti after over one year in detention under controversial Public Safety Act, which allows detention for up to two years without charges, trials or judicial review; following release, Mufti said Kashmiris need to take back what New Delhi had taken away "illegally and in an undemocratic manner", referring to govt's 5 Aug 2019 revocation of constitutional article 370; all mainstream J&K parties 15 Oct formed alliance calling for restoration of region's special constitutional status. Opposition parties also protested 27 Oct notification allowing non-residents to buy land in Jammu and Kashmir for first time.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir) India held disengagement talks with China amid tensions over disputed border, anti-Maoist security operations continued, and India bolstered ties with U.S. and regional allies.** Following flare-up in tensions in Sept, Indian and Chinese military officials 12 Oct held "positive, constructive" talks on disengagement of troops along Line of Actual Control and agreed to reach "a mutually acceptable solution (...) as early as possible". Indian defence minister 25 Oct said India "wants an end to the ongoing border tensions", but reiterated that its soldiers "will never allow even an inch of our land to be taken away". FM Jaishankar 6 Oct met with U.S., Australian and Japanese counterparts in Japan's capital, Tokyo, for Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad") to discuss Indo-Pacific regional security issues; U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo called on "Quad" members to "collaborate to protect our people and partners" from Beijing's "exploitation, corruption and coercion"; India defence ministry 19 Oct announced Australia will join India-U.S.-Japan Malabar annual military exercises in Nov. During 26-27 Oct visit by Pompeo and U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper to capital New Delhi, U.S. and India signed agreement expanding military satellite information sharing. Meanwhile, anti-Maoist security operations and Maoist violence continued. In Maharashtra state (west), security forces 18 Oct killed five Maoists in Gadchiroli district. In Telangana state (centre), Maoists 11-25 Oct killed two civilians in Mulugu and Bhadrachalam districts; police 18 Oct shot and

killed two Maoists in Mulugu district. In Chhattisgarh (centre), Maoists 2-24 Oct killed civilian and security personnel member in Bastar and Narayanpur districts; security forces 17-29 Oct killed three Maoists in Longding, Bijapur and Sukma districts. In Arunachal Pradesh (north east), Maoist attacks 4-21 Oct left at least two security personnel dead in Changlang and Tirap districts. In Jharkhand state (east), Maoist 18 Oct shot and killed civilian in Chatra district. In Odisha state (east), Maoists 21 Oct reportedly killed civilian in Malkangiri district. UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet 20 Oct called on govt to safeguard rights of activists and human rights NGOs. India's reported COVID-19 cases 29 Oct surpassed 8mn.

➔ **Nepal Divisions within ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) re-emerged as govt struggled to mount response to worsening public health and economic crises.** Despite efforts to address factional differences in Sept, tensions flared within NCP between PM KP Oli and party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, raising prospect that party could soon split. Oli 1 Oct nominated two officials close to him to key ambassadorships in U.S. and UK, despite previously committing to taking such decisions only after discussing with other party leaders. Leadership dispute in Karnali province surfaced as local NCP leaders 11 Oct registered no-confidence motion against provincial chief minister closely allied to Dahal; move reflected how factionalism is rife at several levels within party. Oli's 14 Oct decision to shuffle cabinet portfolios and appoint three new ministers criticised by Dahal as unilateral and taken without adequate consultation with other NCP leaders. These dynamics made more complicated following Dahal's claims of being unaware of Indian intelligence chief Samant Goel's unannounced 21-22 Oct visit to capital Kathmandu where he met Oli; Goel's visit was first by high-level Indian official since Nepal-India border tensions escalated in May; Indian Army chief General MM Naravane scheduled to visit 4 Nov in further efforts to mend bilateral relations. Meanwhile, World Bank 8 Oct projected economic growth for 2020/2021 fiscal year could fall as low as 0.1 per cent, with informal businesses – comprising 50% of all enterprises – suffering most acutely. Nepal's COVID-19 total caseload 30 Oct reached 168,235 cases; healthcare sector severely strained with 12 Oct reports of hospital bed shortages in Kathmandu and patients being transferred to hotels.

↓ **Pakistan Tensions escalated between ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and opposition alliance, which strongly criticised military.** Opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) alliance – formed in Sept and featuring eleven opposition parties including Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) – held mass anti-govt rallies in several cities including Gujranwala 16 Oct, Karachi 18 Oct and Quetta 25 Oct attended by tens of thousands; PDM continued to call for PM Khan to resign and for new elections, and plan more demonstrations in Dec and mass rally in capital Islamabad in Jan. Alliance members – particularly former PML-N PM Sharif – continued to decry military's influence in politics; Sharif 16 Oct accused army chief Javed Bajwa and intelligence chief Faiz Hameed of undermining democratic institutions; Khan next day accused Sharif of “trying to sow discord in the military”. Police 19 Oct arrested Sharif's son-in-law in Karachi, reportedly under pressure from army; son-in-law later released on bail. Internationally, govt continued to position itself as key player in Afghan peace process; U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan 8 Oct made unannounced visit to Pakistan to reportedly ask for Bajwa and govt's help in convincing Taliban to agree to ceasefire or reduce levels

of violence. Leader of former militia Hizb-e Islami and Pakistan ally Gulbuddin Hekmatyar 19 Oct met Khan, President Alvi and FM Makhdoom Qureshi in Islamabad and two days later announced he would seek talks with Taliban. Inter-governmental body Financial Action Task Force late Oct retained Pakistan on “grey list” until Feb 2021. Meanwhile, militant attacks continued: in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistani Taliban 10 Oct killed two soldiers and wounded three others in North Waziristan tribal district and roadside bomb 14 Oct killed seven soldiers. Bomb blast reportedly targeting Afghan cleric 27 Oct killed eight madrasa students and injured around 120 in Peshawar city. In Balochistan province, Baloch separatists claimed 15 Oct attack on oil company convoy near Omara town in Gwadar district that killed seven soldiers and seven security guards; bomb blast 25 Oct killed three persons in Quetta. Amid inter-communal tensions in Karachi, gunmen 10 Oct killed prominent Sunni Deobandi religious leader.

↓ **Sri Lanka Parliament removed constitutional checks on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, heralding return to authoritarianism and institutionalisation of hardline Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.** Govt-sponsored bill introduced in Sept on 20th constitutional amendment, which would give president sweeping powers, continued to generate strong criticism throughout month, including from bar association and retired judges. Supreme Court (SC) 5 Oct concluded hearing of 39 petitions filed by opposition and civil society challenging amendment. Catholic Bishops’ Conference in Sri Lanka 13 Oct urged govt not to proceed with amendment saying “that concentration of power in an individual without checks and balances does not augur well for a democratic, socialist republic”; senior monks of two of Sri Lanka’s four Buddhist chapters previous day called on govt to withdraw amendment, saying that it threatened “democracy by undermining the system of checks and balances” and that its adoption would mark “birth of authoritarianism [and] arbitrary despotism”; chief monks of both chapters later disavowed statement. Parliament speaker 20 Oct said SC ruling indicates that with revision of four clauses, amendment bill could be passed by two-thirds parliamentary majority without approval at public referendum; following two-day debate, parliament 22 Oct passed revised bill giving president virtually unlimited powers, including to appoint judges and all senior state officials, appoint and dismiss ministers, head ministries and dissolve parliament halfway through its term. Meanwhile, police 19 Oct arrested opposition All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC) party leader, Rishad Bathiudeen, for alleged misappropriation of public funds during 2019 presidential election; arrest followed widespread criticism of Sept release of Bathiudeen’s brother, detained since April for alleged involvement in 2019 Easter bombings, reportedly as part of deal for APMC votes for 20th amendment. Gotabaya 9 Oct received high-level Chinese delegation, which promised additional financial assistance and defence of Sri Lanka “at international fora” including UN Human Rights Council. During visit to capital Colombo, U.S. Sec of State Mike Pompeo 28 Oct accused China of “lawlessness” and being a “predator” and pressed Sri Lanka to “take meaningful, concrete steps to promote accountability, justice, and reconciliation”; Chinese Embassy in Colombo 27 Oct accused U.S. of trying to “bully Sri Lanka”.

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## South East Asia

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➔ **Indonesia** **Amid ongoing security operations, low-level violence continued in Papua, while large-scale demonstrations erupted after gov't passed controversial job creation law.** In Intan Jaya regency, Papua province, armed separatist group West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA) 9 Oct attacked gov't investigative team, leaving two injured; WPLA next day rejected Jakarta-mandated team tasked to lead inquiry into Sept killings and called instead for UN investigation. Investigative team 23 Oct reported finding evidence that security forces were involved in last month's killing of local pastor in Intan Jaya. During joint military-police operation in Jalae village in Intan Jaya, security forces 26 Oct shot dead local resident; military alleged man belonged to armed group, while Timika diocese 27 Oct refuted claim. As students protested against Special Autonomy law in Papua region in regional capital Jayapura, security forces 27 Oct allegedly opened fire to disperse protesters; a dozen students reportedly arrested. In Aceh province, unidentified assailants 23 Oct shot dead two fishermen near Simeulue island. Series of demonstrations held throughout month in capital Jakarta and other major cities following passage of controversial job creation bill on 5 Oct; demonstrators fear law will weaken labour protections and environmental regulations. Street clashes between law enforcement and protesters 5-9 Oct led to nearly 4,000 protesters arrested and over 100 protesters injured.

➔ **Myanmar** **Fighting continued between Arakan Army (AA) and security forces, while election commission cancelled forthcoming polls in numerous locations.** In central and northern Rakhine State and Paletwa town in Chin State, armed conflict escalated in first half of October, with major clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Tatmadaw in Rathedaung and other townships; gov't 5 Oct deployed air power and both sides reportedly suffered dozens of casualties. AA fighters 14 Oct abducted three ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) candidates in Toungup township, 19 Oct called them "traitors", offered to free them in return for release of all innocent Rakhine civilians. Dire human rights situation continued in AA conflict: patrolling Tatmadaw soldiers 5 Oct used two Rohingya children working as cowherds in Buthidaung township as human shields, forcing them to walk ahead of troops; both killed after patrol walked into AA ambush. NGO Human Rights Watch 8 Oct released report on conditions of 600,000 Rohingya in Rakhine State, concluding that situation met legal definition of apartheid and calling for officials to be prosecuted; NGO Amnesty International 12 Oct issued report on recent "indiscriminate attacks" by Tatmadaw in Kyauktaw township that showed "disregard for human suffering" constituting crimes against humanity. Ahead of 8 Nov elections, Union Election Commission (UEC) 16 Oct announced locations where polls would not be held for security reasons, covering Kachin, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan States, as well as Bago Region; cancellations included six whole townships in Shan State, nine whole townships in Rakhine State, and partial cancellations in 582 wards and village tracts across the six regions; subsequent 27 Oct announcement revoked a small number of these partial cancellations, and added most of rural Paletwa township to cancelled areas. Cancellations will leave 22 seats vacant in national parliament, likely benefiting ruling NLD. UEC 2 Oct disqualified three Rohingya Muslim candidates and an ethnic Chinese candidate, stating that candidates' parents were found not to have been citizens at time of birth.

➔ **Philippines** **Clan feuds and clashes between militant groups and security forces continued in south.**

In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, clan feuds continued: clash between warring clans 10 Oct killed four and injured four in Pikit municipality in Cotabato province; firefight 13 Oct broke out between commanders of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) 105th and 118th Base Commands in Mamasapano municipality; two warring MILF commanders of 105th and 118th Base Command 18 Oct engaged in firefight in Shariff Aguak municipality, killing one combatant. Small-scale clashes between soldiers and elements of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continued in Sulu archipelago: authorities 10 Oct arrested individual involved in Jolo blast in Aug, along with two other female ASG members; authorities 11 Oct arrested ASG senior leader in Zamboanga City; clash between security forces and ASG members 18 Oct killed two ASG members in firefight in Isabela municipality. Ceasefire between govt and MILF remained stable but progress on peace agreement implementation remained delayed as govt and interim govt focused on preventing spread of COVID-19; total cases countrywide continued to rise to over 360,000, with average of 2,000-3,000 new cases daily throughout month. Bangsamoro Transition Authority resumed parliamentary sessions late Oct. Regarding ongoing govt efforts to rehabilitate Marawi city, Task Force Bangon Marawi chairman Del Rosario 23 Oct confirmed rehabilitation was on track and would be completed by Dec 2021 deadline. Clashes between communist New People's Army and armed forces continued in Luzon island in north, Visayas islands in centre and Mindanao island in south at relatively lower levels than last month, killing at least 10 combatants and civilians and injuring 16 throughout month.

➔ **South China Sea** **Tensions continued between China and U.S. amid military exercises on both sides.**

China began five simultaneous military exercises late Sept which continued in Oct, including two near Paracel Islands, one in East China Sea, and another in Bohai Sea. Japanese FM 6 Oct hosted Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Indian, Australian and U.S. counterparts, which China 2 Sept denounced as "mini-NATO". Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force 9 Oct conducted anti-submarine drills in SCS and in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam 10-11 Oct; Chinese state-backed news outlet *Global Times* 10 Oct criticised drills. Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency 9 Oct detained six Chinese fishing vessels in waters east of Johor state along with some 60 crew members for alleged illegal fishing. Chinese People's Liberation Army 12 Oct accused U.S. guided-missile destroyer USS *John S. McCain* of trespassing in Chinese territorial waters near Paracel Islands and warned vessel to leave area, dispatching ships and planes to track it; U.S. 7th Fleet responded that vessel had "asserted navigational rights and freedoms" in area. Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi 13 Oct said during visit to Malaysia that Beijing and members of South East Asia regional organisation ASEAN should cooperate to remove "external disruption" in SCS. China-backed South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative think tank 12 Oct alleged U.S. aircraft conducted 41 reconnaissance flights over SCS last month. U.S. aircraft carrier USS *Ronald Reagan* and its strike group 15 Oct returned to SCS to conduct flight operations, maritime strike exercises and training between surface and air units. U.S., Japan and Australia 19 Oct conducted trilateral naval exercises in South China Sea. During visit to Vietnam's capital Hanoi, Japanese PM Suga 19 Oct confirmed that Japan had agreed to export military equipment, including patrol planes and radar, to Vietnam. Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds 19 Oct met with Japanese Defence Minister Kishi Nobuo



during visit to Tokyo, agreeing that countries would enhance maritime cooperation in SCS. Chinese and U.S. military officials 28-29 Oct held video conference to discuss crisis communication mechanisms.

➔ **Thailand Amid mass pro-democracy protests, authorities used emergency decree to crackdown on activists and low-level violence persisted in deep south.** Following small-scale protests early Oct in capital Bangkok and provincial capitals, mass protest 14 Oct drew tens of thousands at Bangkok's Democracy Monument before marching to Government House demanding resignation of PM Prayuth and his govt as well as new constitution and reform of monarchy. Royal motorcade of Queen Suthida and Prince Dipangkorn same day passed through protest area, prompting jeers from protesters. Citing motorcade incident, govt 15 Oct imposed "serious state of emergency", prohibiting gatherings of over four people and broadening powers of arrest and censorship; police same day cleared protesters from around Government House. In defiance of emergency decree, however, anti-govt protests escalated for eight consecutive days: thousands 15 Oct gathered at Bangkok's Rachaprasong intersection; police next day cracked down on demonstrators at Bangkok's Pathumwan district; tens of thousands 17-19 Oct assembled in capital and in at least twenty provinces. Police 16-20 Oct arrested three activists for crime of threatening royal family. PM Prayuth 21 Oct said govt was willing to lift state of emergency if there was no further violence; thousands same day gathered at Victory Monument and marched through police barricades to Government House; protesters dispersed after giving Prayuth three-day deadline to resign. Royal Gazette 22 Oct said state of emergency was lifted. Extraordinary parliamentary session 26-27 Oct resulted in govt approval of proposed reconciliation committee but govt showed no signs of meeting protesters' demands. Tens of thousands 26 Oct marched to German embassy in Bangkok demanding that Berlin determine if King Maha Vajiralongkorn violated German law by exercising political power while residing in Bavaria; German govt 28 Oct reportedly concluded no violation so far. Hundreds of royalists 27 Oct rallied at Lumpini Park. In deep south, suspected insurgents 9 Oct ambushed teacher protection team in Sai Buri district, Pattani province, killing one police and injuring two others; IED detonation in same area same day killed one ranger and wounded three others; roadside IED 12 Oct damaged armoured pick-up at Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre in Si Sakhon district, Narathiwat province.