

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan** Speaking at Xiangshan security forum in Beijing 21 Oct, Chinese defence minister Wei Fenghe stated that disputed Diaoyu islands, which Japan also claims, are “inalienable parts of China’s territory”. Japan released its 2019 Defence White Papers late Sept, describing China as “strategic threat” ahead of North Korea, and accusing China of claiming seas and islands controlled by Japan; said China’s navy and air force had “expanded and intensified their activities in the surrounding sea areas and airspace of Japan, including the area surrounding the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu)”. Japanese PM Abe 23 Oct called for Beijing to take “positive action” on Japanese national detained in China in Sept, believed to have been accused of spying.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** Amid North Korean missile launches and continued inter-Korean tensions, U.S.-North Korean denuclearisation negotiations remained stalled with Pyongyang criticising U.S.’ approach to bilateral talks. U.S. and North Korea 5 Oct held working-level discussions in Swedish capital Stockholm, but Pyongyang broke off dialogue after a few hours claiming U.S.’ approach had not changed; North Korea’s chief negotiator Kim Myong-gil said U.S. would not “give up their old viewpoint and attitude” and negotiations had “not fulfilled our expectation”; U.S. reportedly also noted North Korean intransigence. Following speech by North Korea’s UN ambassador Kim Song at UN General Assembly 30 Sept, during which he accused U.S. of failing to attempt to implement June 2018 Joint Declaration issued by U.S. President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, North Korean criticism of U.S. policy continued; ruling party Central Committee vice-chair Kim Yong-chol 26 Oct warned that only Trump-Kim relationship stopped two countries returning to hostile relations, while govt reiterated U.S. has until end of 2019 to change “hostile policy”. In continued inter-Korean tensions, Kim Jong-un 23 Oct demanded South Korea remove its facilities in Mount Kumgang tourist zone – not in use since 2008 killing of South Korean tourist by North Korean guard – during visit to site; South Korea 28 Oct offered talks to resolve issue, but next day reported that North Korea had rejected proposal, preferring to reach agreement by “means of exchanging documents”. North Korea 2 Oct tested what is thought to be new ballistic missile capable of being launched from a submarine, while South Korea 31 Oct said Pyongyang that day had fired two unidentified “projectiles” into East Sea/Sea of Japan.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** During 10 Oct speech marking National Day, President Tsai denounced “one country, two systems” formula proposed by Beijing for reunification, saying it has put Hong Kong on “brink of disorder” and represents threat to Taiwan. Foreign minister earlier described China as practicing “authoritarian expansionism” in the Pacific, citing planned Chinese military presence in two Pacific countries (Kiribati and Solomon Islands) that switched diplomatic allegiance to Beijing in Sept. Speaking at Xiangshan security forum in Beijing 21 Oct, Chinese defence minister Wei Fenghe stated that reunification with Taiwan is China’s “greatest national interest”.

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## South Asia

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➔ **Afghanistan** Amid stalled formal peace process, violence remained at high levels while electoral commission delayed results of Sept presidential elections. In continued fighting, Taliban 4 Oct attacked Kunduz City, killing at least ten soldiers and capturing outpost later re-taken by govt forces; *The New York Times* counted at least 383 pro-govt forces killed 20 Sep-24 Oct. High level of civilian casualties continued including govt airstrike 12 Oct killing at least eight civilians in Wardoj District, Badakhshan Province. Suicide bomber 18 Oct detonated during Friday prayers at mosque in Nangarhar Province, killing some 73 people, in attack Taliban blamed on Islamic State Khorasan Province. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 17 Oct reported 1,174 civilian deaths 1 July-30 Sept, highest quarterly number since UN began documentation in 2009, saying numbers driven by increased attacks by “anti-govt elements” as well as “aerial and search operations” by pro-govt forces. Formal peace process remained stalled following U.S. President Trump’s Sept decision to pause negotiations with Taliban, though informal efforts continued; Taliban delegation led by deputy leader Abdul Ghani Baradar 3 Oct met Pakistani FM Qureshi in Islamabad; U.S. Special Envoy Khalilzad was present in Islamabad at same time, with unconfirmed reports he met with delegation. U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper 19 Oct travelled to Afghanistan to meet President Ghani and other govt officials, remarking “political agreement” remained “best way forward”. Khalilzad 22 Oct began trip to Brussels, Paris and Moscow to discuss peace process; in Moscow meeting with Russia, China and Pakistan 25 Oct, participants expressed support for “earliest resumption of negotiation process”. China reportedly offered to hold intra-Afghan talks in Beijing. Taliban reportedly reiterated willingness to resume formal negotiations while govt continued to express scepticism over Khalilzad’s efforts. Announcement of results from 28 Sept presidential elections, originally scheduled for 19 Oct, hampered by technical issues with new biometric voter system; electoral commission announced low preliminary turnout of 1.93mn, 27 Oct said preliminary results will be announced 14 Nov.

➔ **Bangladesh** Security forces continued to arrest alleged members of banned militant groups, while relations with India fed domestic tensions, and govt maintained hardline stance toward Rohingya refugees. In anti-militancy operations, police arrested three alleged Harakatul Jihad Bangladesh and four suspected Ansar-al-Islam (also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team) in Dhaka early Oct, and seven more in Narayanjang and Pabna districts 12 Oct; security forces arrested two alleged Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh militants. Following arrest of Hindu man in Bhola Island 19 Oct on charges of inciting religious hatred in social media post, thousands protested demanding his execution; police fired on demonstrators, killing four and injuring dozens, claiming crowd threw rocks at them. Bangladesh and India 5 Oct signed seven bilateral agreements during PM Hasina’s visit to New Delhi, including allowing India to use Chittagong and Mongla ports and withdraw water from Feni river; Hasina also raised concerns over situation of Bengalis in Indian state Assam, after Indian govt in Aug excluded almost 2mn people from National Register of citizens. Sec Gen of opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) called for Hasina to resign for “anti-state” agreements; police 12 Oct arrested 100 BNP leaders and activists protesting agreements. Border guards 17 Oct killed Indian soldier following disagreement over three Indian fishermen detained for allegedly entering

Bangladeshi waters. Court 30 Oct jailed in absentia for three years BNP vice chair Giasuddin Quader Chowdhury for statements “conducive to public mischief” and “criminal conspiracy”, over 2018 speech where he said Hasina’s fate would be “worse” than her father, former President Mujib, assassinated in 1975. Hardline stance against Rohingya refugees from Myanmar continued; security forces 2 Oct arrested 45 Rohingyas for intruding into Bangladesh, first arrest of Rohingyas for infiltration, and 12 Oct killed refugee during alleged gunfight, accusing him of drug-trafficking; foreign ministry 15 Oct provided list of 50,000 refugees to Myanmar’s ambassador for verification and repatriation. Myanmar official 3 Oct confirmed govt rejected Chinese proposal to facilitate “go and see” visit for Rohingya refugees to Rakhine state ahead of potential repatriation.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Clashes between security forces and Maoists continued. Militants 4 Oct killed two members of Jharkhand Jaguar security forces – special task force established in 2008 to tackle Maoist insurgency – during gunfight on border of Ranchi and Khunti districts, Jharkhand state (east); police 7 Oct arrested three suspected Maoists in Tilma village, Ranchi. In Chhattisgarh state (east), security forces claimed to have killed Maoist in clash in Dantewada district 8 Oct and another in Sukma district 15 Oct. In Kerala (south), police 28-29 Oct killed four suspected Maoists during clashes in Palakkad district.

➡ **Kashmir** Tensions remained high between India and Pakistan over former’s revoking of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) special constitutional status, and continued clashes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir). New Delhi 31 Oct formally divided state into two federally-administered “union territories”, J&K and Ladakh. In continued clashes across LoC, Pakistani military sources claimed Indian fire killed soldier 10 Oct and three civilians 15 Oct. Spike in cross-LoC attacks 20 Oct with India claiming to have targeted three militant camps allegedly used for infiltration into India-administered Kashmir, reporting two soldiers killed by Pakistani fire, and claiming to have killed five Pakistani soldiers in retaliation; Pakistan claimed to have killed nine Indian soldiers. Pakistani PM Khan 8 Oct met with Chinese President Xi in Beijing in bid to gain support over Kashmir; joint statement declared China’s opposition to “any unilateral action that complicates the situation”, which should be resolved based on UN Charter, “relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements”. India criticised China for commenting on “internal affairs”; Xi and Indian PM Modi did not mention Kashmir during meeting in India 12 Oct. Within J&K, clashes continued including police claiming to have killed three militants in south 16 Oct. New Delhi began easing some restrictions including 10 Oct releasing three mid-level politicians and 14 Oct restoring some mobile phone connections, though other connections and internet services remained blocked. Govt re-blocked text messaging services hours later after militants killed truck driver in Shopian district; militants 29 Oct killed five migrant labourers in Kulgam district. National Conference party delegation 6 Oct met detained leaders Farooq Abdullah and son Omar; party’s provincial head said “mainstream leaders have to be released” to start political process with New Delhi. Delegation of 23 largely far-right European parliamentarians visited Kashmir in “private capacity” late Oct. In Pakistan-administered Kashmir, hundreds of supporters of pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front marched toward LoC intending to cross it, but were barred by govt; Khan stated anyone crossing LoC “will play into the Indian narrative” of terrorism.

➔ **Nepal** Following period of relative inactivity, govt security forces mounted pressure on Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) with 16 Oct arrest of 21 district-level leaders in Dang district following biggest Nepal Police raid on CPN to date. Security officials claimed CPN – led by hardline Maoist leader Netra Bikram Chand – planning to conduct attacks in leadup to 30 Nov local-level by-elections. National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) investigation concluded June death of CPN’s Sarlahi district-in-charge Kumar Paudel – described by security officials as being killed in police action – was extrajudicial in nature as it occurred after Paudel was taken into custody; NHRC recommended suspensions and filing of criminal charges against three police officials and urged investigations into govt officials including local mayor. Chinese President Xi’s 12-13 Oct state visit to Kathmandu included meeting with PM KP Oli and signing of over twenty agreements mostly related to infrastructure, development and trade; senior U.S. official expressed concern about Chinese influence in Nepal at 22 Oct Congressional hearing. Fears of Nepal Communist Party-led govt’s suppression of civil liberties grew with two musicians taken into custody for supposedly violating social norms.

➔ **Pakistan** Political tensions remained high, amid govt’s push for criminal prosecution of opposition, and concerns over terrorism financing. Authorities continued corruption probes into opposition leadership: National Accountability Bureau 11 Oct remanded former PM Sharif in custody on corruption charges. Jamaat Uleme-e-Islam (JUI) 27-31 Oct held protest “Azadi [Freedom] March” from Karachi to Islamabad, Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) participated, demanding PM’s resignation and new elections; position supported by other opposition parties including Pashtun nationalist Awami National Party and Baloch nationalist National Party. Amid concerns over terrorism financing, govt 10 Oct arrested four Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa) leaders on terrorism financing charges; however Financial Action Task Force 18 Oct declared govt had still taken insufficient steps to curb terrorism financing and money laundering, warning govt would be put on blacklist if sufficient progress not made by Feb 2020. Insecurity continued particularly in Balochistan province, including 15 Oct bomb in provincial capital Quetta that killed one and injured five police officers. Peshawar High Court 17 Oct declared law related to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) region – “Action (in Aid of Civil Power) Ordinance” which authorised military force and gave legal protection to military internment centres in KPK – and two similar 2011 regulations as unconstitutional, directing KPK’s police chief to take control of all internment centres within three days. Govt lodged appeal against rulings in Supreme Court. FM Qureshi 3 Oct met delegation led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, head of Taliban’s political office, in Islamabad, saying govt wanted U.S.-Taliban negotiations to resume; U.S. Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad in Islamabad at same time, with unconfirmed reports he met with delegation.

➔ **Sri Lanka** As campaigning began for 16 Nov presidential elections, parliamentary committee 23 Oct released report on investigation into April ISIS-inspired bombings that criticised govt and security services. Report placed “greatest responsibility” for failure to stop attack on State Intelligence Service chief and criticising other top security officials, president and PM for “fail[ing] in their duties”; called for investigations into “whether those with vested interests did not act on intelligence so as to create chaos and instil fear” ahead of presidential election. Former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, candidate for Sri Lanka Podujana

Peramuna and widely assumed to be front-runner, 15 Oct rejected claims that hundreds of Tamils disappeared after surrendering during civil war in May 2009 while he was defence secretary, and announced his govt would not honour commitments on reconciliation and accountability made by current govt at UN Human Rights Council; earlier, Gotabaya declared he would acquit and release all “war heroes” held on “baseless” charges during 9 Oct campaign rally. Amid concerns over increased political repression under a Gotabaya govt, several prominent NGOs and activist groups working on minority and human rights issues reported increased police surveillance and harassment. Sajith Premadasa, candidate for ruling United National Party, took increasingly nationalist position, called for death penalty for terrorists, 10 Oct vowed to appoint controversial former army commander Sarath Fonseka as defence minister and 27 Oct promised to protect army commander Shavendra Silva with his life. U.S. State Department officials told Congress 22 Oct that “serious and credible” allegations of war crimes by unit under Silva’s command in 2009 meant his Aug appointment “will significantly curtail bilateral cooperation”.

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## South East Asia

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➡ **Indonesia** Tensions continued in Papua region following Sept unrest in which dozens of people were reported killed in clashes. Military 7 Oct reported more than 16,000 people had fled Wamena, where most deaths occurred, including some 11,4000 evacuated by military. National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas) 18 Oct called for investigation into deaths, and said number of killed higher than previously reported, including 43 in Wamena; Human Rights Watch early Oct called for govt to allow UN human rights officials access to region, and called for inquiry led by Komnas. Media 1 Oct reported that President Widodo said he was ready to meet with Papuan activists demanding independence referendum; one Papuan leader told Reuters talks would need international mediation. Police 11 Oct said they would investigate discovery of bodies of five villagers – three women and a teenage boy and girl – with bullet wounds in Nduga area, site of clashes between military and separatists since late 2018. Military reported three civilians killed by separatists in Hitadipa 18 Oct; West Papua National Liberation Army claimed victims were military personnel. Widodo visited Papua late Oct, opening new bridge in provincial capital Jayapura. At national level, Widodo’s appointment as defence minister of former general Prabowo Subianto, his rival during April presidential election, prompted concern over past accusations of human rights abuses against Subianto. Suspected ISIS supporter stabbed chief security minister Wiranto in Banten province, west of capital Jakarta 10 Oct; Wiranto operated on for his wounds; husband and wife arrested in connection with attack.

➡ **Myanmar** Insecurity continued in northern Shan state and Rakhine state in west, while govt held talks with ethnic armed groups based along Thai border. In Shan state, following end of military’s unilateral ceasefire in Sept, clashes continued between Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and military including TNLA 9 Oct ambush of convoy army trucks passing through Hseni town, killing three soldiers, injuring three others and seven civilians. In Rakhine State military and Arakan Army (AA) clashed regularly, with military deploying air and naval assets. Navy 1 Oct shelled village on Kaladan River in Kyauktaw township claiming AA fighters were taking refuge there; hit monastic school, injuring five. AA 26 Oct

attacked ferry in northern Rakhine, abducting some 50 police, military and govt officials; several reported killed in military operation to release them; military 28 Oct reported fourteen rescued. Mandalay court 8 Oct charged six alleged AA members and supporters with terrorism offences following Sept police raid that uncovered explosives, detonators and communications equipment. Govt continued informal talks with Restoration Council of Shan State and Karen National Union, two largest ethnic armed groups along Thai border, with hopes it could lead to them resuming full participation in formal negotiations. Govt also held separate discussions with Kachin Independence Organisation, AA, TNLA and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, aiming to establish bilateral ceasefires. Court in Ngapudaw township, Ayeyarwady Region (south of Rakhine state), 4 Oct sentenced 21 Rohingya to two years imprisonment for attempting to travel from Rakhine to Yangon without permission, following single hearing and without legal representation for defendants; rights groups condemned trial as evidence of continued discrimination faced by Rohingya and lack of conditions for safe repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh. UN Special Rapporteur on situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee 22 Oct reported it remains “unsafe for [Rohingya refugees] to return to Myanmar”, and called on UN Security Council to refer Myanmar to International Criminal Court. Bangladeshi govt maintained hardline stance against Rohingya refugees (see Bangladesh).

► **Philippines** Clashes continued between armed forces and militants, including Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and Abu Sayyaf group in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in south, and communist rebels in several regions. In BARMM’s Maguindanao province, encounter between govt-aligned Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and BIFF faction under Abu Toraify reportedly killed seven MILF and four BIFF in Shariff Saidona town 4 Oct. Armed forces 6 Oct killed suspected BIFF member believed to be involved in 4 Oct clash at checkpoint in Pandag, Maguindanao. Armed forces and MILF 19 Oct launched operation to dislodge Toraify Group from Maguindanao-North Cotabato border; following operation, roadside bombing 24 Oct injured seven MILF members; ISIS claimed attack, announced three deaths. In BARMM’s Sulu province, armed forces killed suspected member of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and captured another after intense firefight 6 Oct in Sitio Kan Pataw, Talipao municipality. MILF reportedly continued to talk to two BIFF factions (under Kagi Karialan and Commander Bungos) but groups apparently remain unwilling to return to MILF or disband. Security on periphery of BARMM remained volatile; British national and his wife were kidnapped in Tukuran, Zamboanga del Sur province 4 Oct; ransom demand raised later in month, although no group claimed responsibility. Implementation of Bangsamoro peace process continued with meeting of peace implementing panels involving govt and MILF in Davao 19-20 Oct, while President Duterte mid-Oct named govt delegates to Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA)’s Intergovernmental-Relations body, expected to settle disputes between national and Bangsamoro govts; MILF appointed members months earlier. Independent Decommissioning Body (IDB) reported it had decommissioned over 2,000 MILF combatants since early Sept. Clashes between govt and communist New People’s Army (NPA) occurred in several areas, including Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental, Quezon (centre), Sarangani (south), Isabela (north), and Las Navas, Samar island, as govt continued counter-insurgency efforts despite local peace dialogues; several NPA and govt forces reported killed.

➔ **South China Sea** Tensions over South China Sea (SCS) continued between China and Vietnam, and China and Philippines. Amid stand-off between Vietnam and China over oil exploration and fishing rights in disputed areas of SCS, Vietnamese President Nguyen Phu Trong 15 Oct called for restraint. Chinese energy survey vessel and three escorting ships again spotted in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) same day, despite Vietnam's previous calls for China to remove ship from area. Chinese Foreign Ministry 16 Oct called for dialogue to resolve "differences"; the Chinese vessels left Vietnamese waters 24 Oct. Earlier in month, Vietnam again accused China of preventing Vietnamese boat from fishing in its EEZ on 5 Oct, calling incident a violation of its sovereignty and jurisdiction. Philippines' Foreign minister 2 Oct announced diplomatic protest after Chinese coast guard ships were seen near disputed island occupied by Philippines navy in South China Sea. Philippines early Oct reportedly invited Russian oil company Rosneft to explore for oil and gas in waters also claimed by Beijing. Speaking at Xiangshan security forum in Beijing 21 Oct, Chinese defence minister Wei Fenghe stated that SCS islands are "inalienable parts of China's territory". U.S., Philippine, and Japanese forces conducted military drills in Philippines; U.S. and Brunei militaries also held joint exercises.

➔ **Thailand** Deep south largely quiet in terms of insurgency-related violence and official peace-dialogue process between govt and MARA Patani (Patani Consultative Council), while febrile political environment continued at national level. Apparent suicide attempt 4 Oct by judge in Yala courtroom focused public attention on long-standing misgivings about impartiality of justice system in southernmost provinces; judge shot himself after delivering verdict acquitting five Malay-Muslim defendants of murder and "illegal association", alleging political interference in case by his superiors. Four rangers suffered light injuries in roadside IED attack in Bannang Sata district, Yala 26 Oct. At national level, royal powers continued to increase, and pro-military govt continued efforts to paint opponents as disloyal to monarchy. Army general 3 Oct brought sedition charges against academic and seven opposition party leaders for discussing constitutional amendments at seminar in Pattani late Sept; 51 MPs of governing Phalang Pracharat Party 9 Oct filed complaints over opposition MPs' "treasonous" acts, and demanded they be banned from parliament. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha used emergency powers to transfer command of two army regiments to King's Guard, which reports directly to King Maha Vajiralongkorn; Future Forward Party noted objection to PM's bypassing parliamentary approval for move. Palace 21 Oct announced that king stripped Royal Noble Consort Sineenat Wongvajirapakdi of military rank and royal titles for "disloyalty". King subsequently purged at least six other palace officials. Digital Economy and Society Minister early Oct announced that police were on verge of "purging" anti-monarchy figures on social media, and ordered all internet cafes to track customer use of computers for 90 days.

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## **Pacific**

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➔ **Papua New Guinea** Preparations underway for referendum in autonomous region Bougainville scheduled for 23 Nov-7 Dec, when some 300,000 voters will choose between greater autonomy and independence. Vote, outcome of which will need to be ratified in national parliament, is part of 2001 Bougainville Peace

Agreement which ended decade of conflict on island over revenues from mining and its environmental impact. Referendum delayed twice in 2019 due to lack of funding.