

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **Korean Peninsula** Positive statements by U.S. and North Korean officials during month signalled potential for revival of bilateral dialogue, despite North Korea launching another test of short-range missile early Sept. North Korea 10 Sept launched two short range missiles, similar to launches in July and Aug. In 6 Sept speech, U.S. Special Representative Stephen Biegun signalled greater flexibility concerning U.S.'s North Korea policy. U.S. President Trump 20 Sept said he is open to "new method" in future talks; North Korean media same day reported Pyongyang's chief negotiator Kim Myong-gil welcomed Trump's comments. Trump 23 Sept held out possibility of another summit with Kim Jong-un, which observers fear could reduce the likelihood of working-level dialogue. South Korean President Moon 23 Sept met with Trump, reportedly advocating for creation of denuclearisation roadmap and stating Seoul's objectives to strengthen U.S.-South Korean alliance. North Korea responded angrily, accusing U.S. of intervening in inter-Korean affairs, but statement from veteran North Korean official Kim Kye-gwan's 27 Sept indicated North Korea keen to arrange third summit with U.S.. Chinese customs figures released mid-Sept showed steadily rising trend of oil exports to North Korea, suggesting ambivalent Chinese enforcement of international sanctions on North Korea.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** Tensions with Beijing continued as two more countries cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, and Taipei accused Beijing of interference ahead of presidential elections in Jan 2020. Solomon Islands 16 Sept became latest country to cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, joined by Kiribati 20 Sept, leaving Taiwan with just fourteen countries that recognise its independence, plus the Vatican. President Tsai 20 Sept condemned China for its efforts to "suppress and coerce Taiwan" ahead of its elections. China 11 Sept confirmed Taiwanese national who went missing in Aug was arrested for "endangering national security", prompting Taiwanese govt to warn citizens against visiting Hong Kong and China. Canadian warship sailed through Taiwan Strait 10 Sept, Chinese foreign ministry next day questioned Canada's "intentions".

South Asia

⚡ **Afghanistan** U.S. cancellation of talks with Taliban dealt blow to peace process, while levels of violence remained high, including attacks around 28 Sept presidential election. Hopes for deal between Taliban and U.S. quashed after President Trump in series of surprise tweets 7 Sept cancelled U.S.-Taliban negotiations and secret meeting with Taliban and Afghan govt at Camp David in U.S., citing 5 Sept death of U.S. soldier in Taliban attack in Kabul and doubts over militants' desire for peace due to their failure to agree to ceasefire. Tweets came day after U.S. Special Envoy Khalilzad and Taliban had completed discussion on draft deal and moved onto details of deal's announcement; Khalilzad had earlier said in TV interview that agreement "in principal" with Taliban would see drawdown of

5,400 U.S. troops within 135 days of deal's signing. Insurgent attacks continued; in Kabul, Taliban 2 Sept attacked housing complex used by international security contractors with vehicle packed with explosives followed by gunfight, killing at least 30. Taliban 16 Sept killed U.S. special forces soldier in Wardak province during joint U.S.-Afghan operation against militants; seventeenth U.S. combat fatality in 2019, highest yearly number since 2014. Next day, in election-related violence ahead of 28 Sept presidential election, Taliban suicide bomber attacked campaign rally for President Ghani in Charikar, Parwan province, killing 26; and same day killed at least 22 in suicide attack near U.S. embassy in Kabul, reportedly targeting Afghan military facility. Elections took place 28 Sept; bomb at polling station in mosque in southern city Kandahar wounded sixteen. Election commission reported low turnout from data from half of polling stations; full data and results expected mid-Oct. Amid continued high levels of civilian casualties, local civilians and officials in Nangarhar province 18 Sept reported U.S. drone strike, intended to hit Islamic State-Khorasan Province hideout, mistakenly killed 30 civilians.

➡ **Bangladesh** Security forces continued anti-militancy operations, while govt took more hardline stance toward Rohingya refugees. Paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion 1 Sept arrested suspected members of Allahr Dal and Ansar-al-Islam (also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team, ABT) in Narayanganj. Following stalled 22 Aug attempt at repatriating Rohingya refugees to Myanmar and same day murder in Cox's Bazar of Omar Faruk from Awami League-youth wing Juba League, allegedly by Rohingya refugees, Bangladeshi govt took more hardline approach, including reportedly returning or refusing entry to new Rohingya arrivals caught crossing border and imposing restrictions on telecommunications in refugee camps; govt claimed some NGOs had organised 25 Aug rally of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas and had incited refugees to reject repatriation, withdrawing 41 NGOs from working in camps by early Sept and banning two. Police claimed Rohingya couple – reportedly part of gang that murdered Faruk – killed in gunfight soon after being detained 22 Sept; at least thirteen Rohingya refugees killed in alleged gunfights since Faruk's murder. Insecurity continued in Chittagong Hill Tracts area; army officer injured 25 Sept during clash between military and members of United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF, regional party supporting complete autonomy for Chittagong Hill Tracts); came after army claimed to have killed four UPDF members in gunfights in Rangamati and Khagrachhari district late Aug.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Clashes between security forces and Maoists continued, while militants targeted suspected police informants. In Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra state (centre), militants 11 Sept shot dead former Maoist member on suspicion of being police informant, and security forces 15 Sept claimed to have killed two militants during clash. Maoists 13 Sept slit throat of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party official in Munger district, Bihar (east), and next day killed villager in Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh (east), both reportedly for providing information to police. Police 22 Sept claimed to have killed five Maoists during gunfight on Andhra Pradesh-Odisha border (east). Police claimed Maoists responsible for 24 Sept IED that killed three in Bastar district and 28 Sept murder of man in Sukma district, both in Chhattisgarh state.

➡ **Kashmir** Fallout from Indian govt's revoking of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) special constitutional status in Aug continued, amid sustained clashes along Line of

Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir). Tensions remained high between India and Pakistan, with New Delhi insisting changes to J&K's status was internal matter and Islamabad demanding reversal of decision. Despite rejecting India's 29 Aug allegation that Pakistan was trying to infiltrate militants into J&K to create "alarmist situation", Pakistan military spokesperson 4 Sept said "Kashmir is our jugular vein" and will be fought for "until our last bullet, soldier and breath". Pakistani PM Khan 18 Sept statement made resumption of bilateral dialogue with India conditional on revival of J&K's special status and end to security lockdown; Khan also stated any Pakistanis wishing to fight in Kashmir would do "greatest injustice to the Kashmiris" and give India pretext to "blame Pakistan for cross-border terrorism and infiltrating terrorists". U.S. Assistant Sec State 19 Sept welcomed Khan's statement and said Pakistan's commitment to counter-terror groups was "critical to regional stability". During speech to UN General Assembly 27 Sept, Khan warned of "bloodbath" once lockdown in J&K is lifted. Indian and Pakistani military continued clashing along LoC, including deaths of two Pakistani soldiers 12 and 14 Sept. Security lockdown and communications blackout continued through month in most Muslim-majority areas of J&K; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Bachelet 9 Sept expressed concern about restrictions on internet communications, peaceful assembly and detention of local leaders and activists. Reuters reported Indian govt 6 Sept report showed 3,800 people have been arrested in J&K since clampdown started, 2,600 of them subsequently released. Indian govt 15 Sept formally charged former J&K chief minister Farooq Abdullah under controversial Public Safety Act, which allows detention for up to two years without charges, trials or judicial review. Six militants and a soldier reported killed 28 Sept during two separate clashes in J&K.

➡ **Nepal** Four-year anniversary of promulgation of 2015 constitution met with protests 20 Sept by minority ethnic and indigenous groups who are critical of Nepal Communist Party (NCP)-led govt for refusing to amend key constitutional provisions, such as redrawing of federal provincial boundaries and ensuring proportional representation in upper house of parliament. Civil society leaders expressed concerns about govt's overtly-nationalistic rhetoric in efforts to mark celebrations, including by demanding mandatory attendance of civil servants and urging civilians to don clothing bearing national flag. Constitutional experts criticised govt for failure to empower provincial govts throughout first four years under new constitution and thus weakening the core commitment underpinning the new statute: the transition toward a federal structure. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Kathmandu 8-10 Sept and met PM KP Oli and NCP Co-chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal among others to lay groundwork for potential visit by Chinese President Xi in Oct; Yi's 10 Sept meeting with Dahal caused controversy following official readout from Chinese Foreign Ministry describing Nepal's disagreement with U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Strategy. Opposition figures also criticised ruling party for "importing ideology" after NCP's 23-24 Sept symposium with Communist Party of China which included training on Xi Jinping Thought.

➡ **Pakistan** Govt faced concerns over terrorism financing and tensions with India over Kashmir (see Kashmir), while militant attacks persisted. Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf govt continued efforts to remove Pakistan from Financial Action Task Force (FATF)'s "grey list" for counter-terrorism financing and anti-money laundering deficiencies; FATF review due to begin in Oct. Interior Minister Ijaz

Ahmed Shah 12 Sept said country had “spent millions of rupees” financing militant group Jamaat-ud-Dawa – whose leader Hafiz Saaed has petitioned Lahore High Court to dismiss several terrorism financing cases against him. Authorities continued corruption probes into opposition leadership: National Accountability Bureau 18 Sept announced it had arrested Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Khursheed Shah during investigation into his wealth; PPP condemned case as “political victimisation”. Insecurity persisted amid continued militant attacks; in Balochistan’s capital Quetta, security forces claimed to have killed six Islamic State-linked militants during operation in which one paramilitary officer was killed; one rescue worker was killed and ten people injured in two coordinated bomb blasts 5 Sept. Militants 13 Sept killed soldier in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province’s North Waziristan tribal district; next day, cross-border militant attack in KPK’s Upper Dir district near Afghan border killed three soldiers. Officer and soldier killed in bomb attack near Afghan border in Mohmand tribal district 21 Sept. Following U.S. President Trump’s 7 Sept decision to cancel U.S.-Afghan talks, foreign ministry emphasised “no military solution” to Afghan conflict, urging both sides to “re-engage to find negotiated peace”.

► **Sri Lanka** Political manoeuvring continued ahead of presidential elections set for 16 Nov, while international actors raised concerns about progress of post-war reconciliation. Following months of bitter internal debate, governing United National Party (UNP) 26 Sept named its deputy leader Sajith Premadasa as its presidential candidate, with agreement of Premadasa’s rival, party leader and PM Ranil Wickremesinghe. Former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, candidate for Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and widely assumed to be front-runner, faced series of ongoing legal cases. President Sirisena 20 Sept testified to public parliamentary hearings into April terror attacks and next day appointed presidential commission of inquiry for further investigations. Police continued post-attack operations including late-Aug arrest and detention of Usthaz Hajjul Akbar, former head of Sri Lanka Jama’athe Islami; cabinet 18 Sept approved memorandum outlining new counter-terrorism legislation reportedly designed in part to address threats from international jihadi networks. UK 10 Sept made statement at UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on behalf of UNHRC core group on Sri Lanka noting govt implementation of 2015 resolution on accountability and reconciliation “remained slow in many areas” and sharing High Commissioner Bachelet’s Aug concerns over appointment of Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva as army commander and effect on justice, accountability and reconciliation. UN Department of Peace Operations announced 25 Sept it was suspending future non-essential deployments of Sri Lankan military as peacekeepers in light of Silva’s appointment.

South East Asia

↓ **Indonesia** Demonstrations led to violence again in Papua, resulting in at least 30 reported dead and scores injured. Separate protests erupted in Wamena city and Papua’s capital Jayapura 23 Sept. Demonstrations in Wamena allegedly provoked by rumours that teacher directed racial slurs against indigenous Papuan student 21 Sept. Protesters reportedly set fire to buildings, including govt district office; at least sixteen people reported killed, most non-indigenous, and many after being trapped in fires; dead reportedly include children. In Jayapura, media reports indicated

violence erupted after authorities stormed gathering of indigenous Papuan students at university, including some taking refuge from other cities; at least three protesters and one soldier reported killed in clashes in Jayapura. Media reported thousands of people attempted to flee Wamena late month; military 27 Sept said they evacuated about 700 residents. Authorities ramped up efforts to arrest activists suspected of involvement in Aug protests in Papua, including Buchtar Tabuni, arrested 9 Sept for suspected treason, and issued notice to Interpol for arrest of Australia-based Indonesian human rights lawyer Veronica Koman. Authorities 26 Sept arrested journalist Dandhy Laksono, accused of violating online hate speech laws in posts on Papua clashes. Military 19 Sept reported three civilians including a young child killed and four wounded in shoot-out with separatists in Ilaga town. Elsewhere, counter-terror unit Densus 88 arrested nine suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) during 23 Sept raids near Jakarta; police said they uncovered bomb-making materials. Anti-corruption protesters clashed with police in Jakarta and other cities late Sept; at least three protesters reported killed, including two students in Sulawesi island.

➤ **Myanmar** Insecurity continued in Rakhine state with ongoing clashes between military and ethnic Rakhine insurgents, while alliance of ethnic armed groups in north east announced pause in fighting. Violence continued across several townships in Rakhine State as Arakan Army and security forces clashed; unidentified assailants 1 Sept stabbed off-duty police officer to death in Ponnagyun township; decapitated and mutilated bodies of two villagers found in Myebon township 10 Sept, prompting military to declare situation in area “resembles anarchy”. Govt 1 Sept restored internet to five townships in Rakhine and Chin states cut off since June; internet shutdown however continues in four townships. Same day, military announced it would form court martial to try soldiers for “possible weakness in following military instructions” amid ongoing inquiry by Judge Advocate General’s Office into alleged massacre of Rohingya in Gudarpayin village in 2017. In northern Shan State, Brotherhood Alliance – joint force of Arakan Army, Ta’ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army – announced one-month cessation of hostilities against military 9 Sept, and 20 Sept extended ceasefire until end of year, although reserving right to act in defence. Military’s unilateral ceasefire with ethnic armed groups in Kachin and Shan states ended 21 Sept, with reports of subsequent clashes between army and militants in Mongko and Kutkai townships in Shan State. UN Fact-Finding Mission 17 Sept presented final report on alleged human rights violations by Myanmar military and security forces to Human Rights Council, identifying pattern of ongoing attacks “aimed at erasing the identity and removing” Rohingya from Myanmar, as well as military persecution during operations in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin states; said govt-established Independent Commission of Enquiry not credible. Bangladeshi govt took more hardline approach vis-à-vis Rohingya refugees, including reportedly returning or refusing entry to new Rohingya arrivals caught crossing border (see Bangladesh).

➤ **Philippines** Clashes continued between armed forces and militants, including Abu Sayyaf in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in south, and communist rebels in centre. In BARMM’s Sulu province, security operations against Abu Sayyaf 10 Sept resulted in one suspected militant killed. Army 16 Sept reported it had recovered approximately 700 kg of bomb components belonging to Abu Sayyaf in Sulu. Military 21 Sept reported three Abu Sayyaf

members surrendered in Basilan province. U.S. State Department 11 Sept added Abu Sayyaf leader Hatib Hadjan Sawadjaan to its global terrorist list, along with suspected militant Almaida Marani Salvin. In centre, encounter between Communist New People's Army (NPA) rebels and armed forces in Iloilo 20 Sept left one suspected NPA dead, further clashes 25 Sept resulted in no govt casualties. Military 28 Sept killed suspected NPA commander in shoot-out in Bukidnon province. Security forces 17 Sept arrested two NPA during clashes in Negros Occidental; authorities same day arrested high-ranking NPA leader in Laguna province. Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) 7 Sept reportedly carried out bomb attack that wounded eight in Sultan Kudarat province in Mindanao; military 23 Sept arrested suspected Swedish militant and two local militants. UN Human Rights Council 19 Sept released report naming Philippines in list of countries linked to growing reprisals against victims of human rights abuses and activists; govt said it "condemns all acts of intimidation and reprisals".

➡ **South China Sea** U.S. conducted freedom of navigation operation in South China Sea (SCS), while tensions continued between China and rival claimants to disputed areas. U.S. Navy destroyer 13 Sept sailed near contested Paracel islands, controlled by China but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam; Beijing said it "expelled" vessel, called it "act of trespass". BBC 3 Sept reported Chinese crane vessel spotted in area claimed by Vietnam as its exclusive economic zone; Chinese oil exploration survey ship 23 Sept departed from Vietnamese-claimed area of disputed Spratly Islands, where it had been spotted since early July. Chinese state media 25 Sept reported Beijing had deployed new deepwater drilling rig in SCS, without giving exact location. Philippines President Duterte 10 Sept said Chinese President Xi late Aug offered majority stake in joint oil and gas exploration venture inside disputed area which Philippines claims is inside its Exclusive Economic Zone, in exchange for setting aside July 2016 ruling by the Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration that China has no legal basis to claim historical rights to area encompassed by "nine-dash line"; Duterte's spokesperson later clarified that Philippines is not dropping its claim. Philippines military conducted series of drills, including 21 Sept exercise using amphibious assault vehicles near SCS. Chinese and Malaysian foreign ministers early Sept agreed to set up joint dialogue mechanism for disputed SCS. Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi said mechanism will deal with maritime issues and presents "new platform for dialogue and cooperation for both sides". U.S. and ten countries 2-6 Sept conducted maritime drills as part of first ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise, crossing SCS. U.S. reportedly sailed aircraft carrier near disputed Spratly Islands late Sept, with Chinese warships reported nearby; U.S. said it was "conducting routine operations", Beijing said U.S attempting "to flex muscles and escalate regional militarization".

➡ **Thailand** Violence continued in deep south, while constitutional court issued two rulings bolstering PM Prayut Chan-ocha's new govt. In Khok Pho district in Pattani province, two village defence volunteers killed in ambush involving roadside IED and small-arms fire 16 Sept. Gunmen 19 Sept killed Muslim village chief in Sai Buri district, Pattani province. General Wanlop Rugsanaoh, National Security Council chief, 26 Sept said he will lead Thai peace-dialogue delegation beginning in Oct. Following controversy over PM Prayuth during swearing-in of new govt in July omitting sentence from constitutionally required oath that directs cabinet to uphold the constitution, Constitutional Court 11 Sept declined to accept opposition petition

to examine omission, determining it had no authority to consider case. In separate case, court 18 Sept ruled that Prayuth was not considered a “state official” following 2014 coup when he served as head of National Council for Peace Order, which would have made him ineligible to stand as candidate for PM in June 2019. Rulings added to growing perception among some observers of double standards in application of law.