

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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### ➔ **China/Japan** Amid Japan's calls for resolute defence of disputed islands in East China Sea, China maintained heavy maritime presence in area.

Japanese foreign ministry 16 Sept announced it lodged formal protest with China over 30 Aug appearance of seven Chinese coast guard vessels in contiguous zone of disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, with ships approaching five Japanese fishing vessels; Japanese Coast Guard called event "extremely serious", saying it was largest number of ships in area since 2016; unconfirmed reports indicated Chinese coast guard ship rammed Japanese coast guard vessel. Separately, at least 91 Chinese coast guard vessels entered contiguous zone of disputed islands during month, while four entered territorial waters. Elsewhere, Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force 3 Sept observed Chinese naval flotilla in Miyako Strait, which Chinese commentators described as warning to Japan and Taiwan, and Japanese defence ministry 12 Sept reported Chinese submarine in contiguous zones of its southern islands. Japanese Ground Self-Defence Force 15 Sept launched largest military exercise since 1993, with 100,000 personnel simulating defence of south-western Japan. Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi 16 Sept said Japan has to demonstrate its resolute defence of Diaoyu/Senkaku islands with "greater number of Japanese coast guard vessels than that of China". Joint statement from first in-person summit of "Quad" leaders (U.S., Australia, India and Japan) 24 Sept noted need to "meet challenges to the maritime rules-based order" in East China Sea. Former Japanese FM Fumio Kishida 29 Sept won party leadership election and is set to become next PM; Kishida same day declared intention to pursue "free and open Indo-Pacific".

### ➔ **Korean Peninsula** Seoul and Pyongyang conducted high-profile missile tests, overshadowing high-level meetings to reignite diplomatic track.

In sign of rising inter-Korean arms race and end of quiet period since so-called "Winter Olympic truce" in 2018, North Korea and South Korea tested missiles. Pyongyang 11 and 12 Sept tested intermediate-range cruise missiles, and 15 Sept fired two railway-mobile ballistic missiles from South Pyongan province toward east coast in violation of UN Security Council resolutions prohibiting ballistic missile tests; North Korea 28 Sept fired missile from central north province of Jagang. South Korea 15 Sept tested submarine-launched ballistic missile, becoming first country without nuclear weapons to do so; South Korean President Moon Jae-in same day said missiles would prove "sufficient deterrence to respond to North Korea's provocations at any time"; Kim Yo-jong, senior North Korean official and sister of leader Kim Jong-un, same day criticised Moon, warning "slander and detraction" could push bilateral relations "toward a complete destruction". Tests also coincided with meeting between Chinese FM Wang Yi and South Korean FM Chung Eui-yong in South Korea's capital Seoul, and came one day after meeting between nuclear envoys of U.S., South Korea and Japan in Japanese capital Tokyo to discuss bringing North Korea back to negotiating table; latter meeting urged North Korea to respond to offers of unconditional dialogue. During his UN General Assembly address, Moon Jae-in 21 Sept proposed formal end to 1950-1953 Korean War; North Korea Vice FM Ri Thae Song 24 Sept rejected proposal, saying nothing will change so long as "U.S.

hostile policy is not shifted”. Shortly after missile test, North Korea’s UN Envoy Kim Song 28 Sept said govt would respond to offers of talks if U.S. revised “double standards” and hostile policy; Kim Jong-un 30 Sept announced he had requested communication lines with South Korea be restored to “promote peace”.

➔ **Taiwan Strait China warned U.S. against official diplomatic interactions with Taiwan, while military activity continued in region.**

U.S. President Biden in 9 Sept call to Chinese President Xi said U.S. had no intention of changing its one-China policy. Media reports 10 Sept indicated U.S. was considering changing name of Taiwan’s U.S. mission from “Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office” to “Taiwan Representative Office”. In response, China 13 Sept called on U.S. to stop official interactions, calling Taiwan “the most important and sensitive issue at the core of China-US relations”; should official office name be changed, Beijing may respond by ramping up military activity around Taiwan or flying its planes across de facto sea demarcation known as “median line”. Meanwhile, military activity continued. Number of Chinese military planes that entered Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone rose, returning to high levels last seen in April; notably, 24 planes entered on 23 Sept. Chinese military 17 Sept conducted exercise off Taiwan’s south-western coast. U.S. warship same day transited through Taiwan Strait in ninth such passage in 2021. Taiwan 13-17 Sept conducted annual Han Kuang military exercise and 16 Sept announced proposal to allocate \$8.7 bn in addition to defence budget over next five years to purchase missiles, naval ships and weapons systems for warships. British warship 27 Sept sailed through Taiwan Strait for first time since 2008. European Parliament 16 Sept adopted resolution calling for bilateral investment agreement with Taiwan and European Commission to facilitate Taipei’s full participation as an observer in UN agencies. China 20 Sept began ban on import of Taiwan’s custard and wax apples, 90% of which go to China, citing pests; Taiwan denied charge and warned it would file formal complaint at World Trade Organization.

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## **South Asia**

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➔ **Afghanistan Amid worsening humanitarian crisis and crackdown on protests, Taliban tightened its grip across country, including by gaining control over Panjshir province.**

After initial negotiation efforts failed, Taliban 2 Sept stepped up efforts to capture last stronghold of Panjshir province (north) as group sent troops, set up blockade and cut off telecommunications, food and other supplies from getting to valley. Taliban 6 Sept gained control of provincial capital, marking first time group controls city; Ahmad Massoud, leader of Northern Resistance Front, same day vowed to resist and called for large-scale protests. Series of anti-Taliban protests took place in early Sept; notably, hundreds of people, including women, 7 Sept protested in capital Kabul chanting anti-Pakistan slogans and “freedom”; amid rising crackdown on demonstrators, Taliban 9 Sept cut off internet and phone services to several suburbs of Kabul to disrupt coordination among protesters. Taliban 7-8 Sept announced new acting govt composed of old guard, including Mohammad Hassan Akhund, group’s founding member, as PM; Abdul Ghani Baradar, lead negotiator in U.S.-Taliban Feb 2020 deal, as deputy PM; Mohammad Yaqub, son of group’s first leader Mohammad Omar, as defence minister; Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of prominent militant Jalaluddin Haqqani, as

interior minister; and Amir Khan Muttaqi, veteran Taliban diplomat, as FM. First slate of cabinet appointments excluded women and several ethnic groups (only small minority of appointments are non-Pashtuns); no state had yet recognised new govt by end of month. Following U.S. freeze in mid-Aug over country's financial assets and aid suspension, concerns rose over economic collapse, humanitarian crisis and potential mass exodus; donors 13 Sept pledged more than \$1.1 billion following UN flash appeal for humanitarian assistance. Aside from sporadic violence in Panjshir and Baghlan provinces, violent incidents reportedly six times lower than 2021 average prior to Taliban take-over. There was, however, increasing trend of incidents targeting Taliban's security forces, with majority being claimed by Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K): notably, roadside bombs near daily mid-to-late month targeted Taliban vehicles in Nangarhar province (east); bomb 18 Sept attacked private vehicle leaving two civilians injured.

➔ **Bangladesh Authorities targeted members of opposition Jamaat-e-Islami party, and arrested dozens of Rohingyas fleeing refugee camp on flood-prone island.** Rohingya refugees continued to seek to escape refugee camp on flood-prone Bhasan Char island; notably, police 8-9 Sept arrested 28 Rohingyas who had fled in Chittagong's Sitakunda sub-district and Mirsarai area. Addressing virtual meeting on Rohingya crisis held under Bangladesh's auspices and co-sponsored among others by EU and Organisation of Islamic Conference that called for "urgent" global efforts to repatriate Rohingyas from Bangladesh, PM Sheikh Hasina 23 Sept warned that failure to repatriate would "jeopardise our collective security" since alienated refugees are "easy prey to extremist ideologies". Unknown assailants 29 Sept killed prominent Rohingya Muslim leader Mohib Ullah. Authorities arrested dozens of members of Jamaat-e-Islami, police 6 Sept detained around 12 Jamaat-e-Islami leaders on charges of conspiring to commit sedition in capital Dhaka; 10 Sept arrested ten female Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists in Satkhira district; 12 Sept detained three members of group's student wing in Rajshahi district. Court 12 Sept accepted charges lodged by paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) against cartoonist and six others for anti-govt activities on social media. Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit same day opened investigations into bank accounts of 11 senior journalists; journalist union 17 Sept called investigations "unprecedented and ill-motivated". Authorities continued to arrest suspected militants: notably, RAB 4 Sept arrested four suspected Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants in Mymensingh district; 9 Sept arrested alleged JMB leader in Dhaka. Counter-terrorism police 16 Sept detained two suspected Ansar al-Islam militants in Mymensingh district; and next day claimed to have arrested two Ansar al-Islam members in Mymensingh district. Police 10 Sept arrested around 45 members of Tablighi Jamaat, Sunni Islamic missionary movement, from mosques in Dinajpur district, accusing them of planning to carry out sabotage; denying charge, mosque leaders said that Tablighi Jamaat members had come from Dhaka for religious assembly.

➔ **India Military held exercises close to disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, authorities signed agreement with insurgent groups in Assam state, and clashes with Maoists persisted.** Army 3 Sept conducted live-fire exercises using tanks and helicopters in eastern Ladakh, close to Line of Actual Control (LAC). FM S. Jaishankar 16 Sept met Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, where Jaishankar noted

some progress in resolution of issues related to LAC as well as completion of disengagement in Gogra area since July but said there were still outstanding issues. In Assam state, govt 5 Sept signed peace agreement with provincial govt and with five insurgent groups – the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front, People’s Democratic Council of Karbi Longri, United People’s Liberation Army, Karbi People’s Liberation Tigers and the Kuki Liberation Front – from tribal region of Karbi Anglong; agreement pledged devolution of power and greater autonomy. Maoist violence continued at lower level in Sept compared to Aug; in Maharashtra state (west), Maoists 19 Sept shot dead villager in Gadchiroli District; exchange of fire between security forces and Maoist militants 21 Sept also occurred in Malkangiri District of Odisha state (east). Hundreds of thousands of farmers 5 Sept rallied in Muzaffarnagar city in Uttar Pradesh state (north) to protest govt-proposed agricultural reforms in largest protest in almost ten months of campaigning. Protesters 27 Sept marked ten months with all-India shutdown rally, blocking roads and railway lines in capital Delhi and calling for national strike. Amid armed clashes in Myanmar, thousands of refugees 10 Sept entered Champhai and Hnahthial districts of Mizoram state, which shares 501km border with country (see Myanmar).

➔ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Tensions between India and Pakistan and within Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued to run high, including over controversial burial of Kashmiri leader.** In virtual UN General Assembly, Pakistan PM Khan 24 Sept condemned rights violations in J&K, including forcible burial of prominent Kashmiri leader. In J&K, death of 92-year-old Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani – who had been in prison and under house arrest since 2010 – on 1 Sept sparked tensions after family alleged that Indian police hurriedly buried Geelani in early hours next day, denying him burial in line with his wishes. Fearing protests and clashes, Indian govt 1-3 Sept imposed communications blackout and curfew in Kashmir valley. In Jammu, traders 22 Sept went on strike to protest govt’s “anti-trade” policies. J&K National Conference party leader Omar Abdullah 1 Sept asked Indian govt to clarify whether it still considered Taliban to be terrorist organisation after it contacted Taliban officials in Qatar’s capital Doha day before. Taliban leader Anas Haqqani same day said Kashmir was not part of their jurisdiction; Taliban 3 Sept however said it is group’s right “to raise our voice for Muslims in Kashmir”. J&K Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leader Mehbooba Mufti 19 Sept accused ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of using threats posed by Afghan Taliban and Pakistan to gain votes. Indian Army official 20 Sept said Afghan militants were unlikely to extend operations to Kashmir, said he focused on presence of around 60-70 Pakistani militants seeking to motivate local youth to take up arms in Kashmir. Militant attacks and security operations continued in J&K. Notably, militants 12 Sept killed police officer in regional capital Srinagar; 17 Sept killed police officer and migrant labourer in separate incidents in Kulgam district. Security forces 12 Sept killed militant in Rajouri district. Delhi Police Special Cell 14 Sept arrested six men for allegedly planning terror attacks across country, said preparation for attacks conducted in Pakistan and at least two of those arrested received training by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence.

➔ **Nepal Dispute among ruling parties continued to hamper appointment of govt ministers, while opposition Unified Marxist-Leninist party sought to block Nepali Congress-led coalition's legislative priorities.** PM Deuba continued to struggle to balance demands of his ruling partners, with only five ministers appointed since Deuba's appointment in mid-July. Fearing splits inside Janata Samajbadi party (which is part of Deuba's ruling coalition), Janata Samajbadi leaders throughout Sept conditioned cabinet expansion on repeal of Deuba's controversial 18 Aug decree; decree had lowered requirement for members to split from one party and form another, notably allowing Madhav Kumar Nepal's CPN (Unified Socialist) party to separate from PM KP Oli's Unified Marxist-Leninist party in Aug. In response to writs filed in Aug, Supreme Court 24 Sept refused to annul Deuba's Aug decree, potentially clearing path for CPN (Unified Socialist) to join ruling coalition. Meanwhile, parliamentary sessions 8 Sept resumed; Unified Marxist-Leninist party during Sept repeatedly obstructed them in protest against House Speaker Agni Sapkota's role in party's breakup, leaving over 50 bills pending approval.

➔ **Pakistan Political tensions persisted amid plans for new govt-controlled central media authority; authorities continued to debate ways to engage with new Afghan govt.** Relations between ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and Election Commission deteriorated after commission 7 Sept raised 37 objections to PTI's proposal to introduce electronic voting machines in next general election, stressed mechanism's inability to counter all types of fraud; in response, Federal Minister for Information Fawad Chaudhry 10 Sept called commission's logic "strange", Federal Railways Minister Azam Swati same day accused body of taking bribes to rig election, called for such institutions to be "set on fire". Journalist unions 11 Sept rejected govt's proposed Pakistan Media Development Authority, which would be authorised to regulate all media, said it was "unconstitutional", a step to "muzzle" freedoms. Members of media, lawyers' groups and human rights activists 13 Sept held protests outside parliament as President Alvi addressed both houses; opposition and independent members boycotted Alvi's address, vowed to vote against proposed bill; human rights minister next day said law had yet to be given "final shape", suggesting govt could postpone placing bill before parliament. Regionally, govt had yet to decide if it will recognise newly announced acting Taliban govt (see Afghanistan); FM Qureshi 21 Sept said if Taliban want recognition "they have to be more sensitive and more receptive to international opinion and norms". PM Imran Khan in 24 Sept virtual UN General Assembly address called on international community to "incentivize", "strengthen and support" current (Taliban) govt and warned unstable Afghanistan "will again become a safe haven for international terrorists". Earlier, Qureshi 15 Sept said govt would consider giving amnesty to Pakistan's Taliban members who renounced violence; opposition leader and Pakistan Peoples' Party chair Bhutto Zardari 17 Sept said that would be "an insult" to victims. Meanwhile, Pakistani Taliban attacks in regions near Afghan border continued; in South Waziristan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistani Taliban attack 15 Sept killed seven Pakistani soldiers. Militant attack 26 Sept killed one paramilitary soldier and injured two others in Mach town, Balochistan province. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 14 Sept said U.S. would reassess its relationship with Pakistan in coming weeks.

➔ **Sri Lanka UN Human Rights Council voiced concerns over erosion of rights, while economy continued to face deep strains.** UN Human Rights Council 13 Sept began its 48th session where High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet noted “the corrosive impact that militarisation and the lack of accountability continue to have on fundamental rights” in country and urged govt to undertake major reforms, including repealing Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Statement by “Core Group” nations next day said they were “deeply concerned about current human rights developments, in particular increased limitations being put on civic space”. Report to council by special rapporteur on truth and justice debated 16 Sept concluded “the current administration has shown that it is unwilling or unable to make progress in the effective investigation, prosecution, and sanctioning of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law”. In response to criticism, FM G.L. Peiris 14 Sept said govt had made progress in domestic processes for national reconciliation and rejected external initiatives that “will polarize our society”. EU team 27 Sept arrived in capital Colombo for ten-day mission to monitor govt’s compliance with terms of EU’s GSP+ trade concessions; meetings included discussions with govt on recent promises to “review” PTA, as repeal of controversial law was condition for Sri Lanka regaining GSP+ status in 2017. State Minister for Prisons Lohan Ratwatte 15 Sept resigned after news emerged he had threatened to kill Tamil prisoners held under PTA during unplanned and drunken visit to Anuradhapura city on 12 Sept. Country continued to face economic hardship. After President Rajapaksa 31 Aug declared state of emergency in response to food shortages, Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa 7 Sept acknowledged “country is facing a serious foreign exchange crisis” as well as growing budget deficits due to huge loss of revenue resulting from COVID-related restrictions. Central Bank Governor W. D. Lakshman 14 Sept resigned and was replaced by Rajapaksa loyalist Ajith Nivard Cabraal, who resigned as state minister of money and capital markets. Govt 17 Sept extended island-wide quarantine and curfew until 1 Oct as numbers of reported cases and deaths remained high during month.

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## **South East Asia**

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➔ **Indonesia West Papua Liberation Army launched deadliest attack on military this year, while security forces killed East Indonesia Mujahideen militant group leader.** In West Papua province, dozens of militants from separatist armed group West Papua Liberation Army 2 Sept attacked military post in Kisor village in Maybrat district, killing four soldiers and injuring two in deadliest attack in region this year; group same day claimed responsibility for attack. Security forces subsequently arrested two suspects and 5 Sept reportedly engaged in gunfight with group in Maybart’s East Aifat sub-district. In Papua province, West Papua National Liberation Army 26 Sept reportedly killed member of Mobile Brigade forces in Kiwirok, Pegunungan Bintang regency, in shootout that injured two others. International rights group TAPOL 16 Sept published report accusing govt of using COVID-19 as pretext to crackdown on Papuan civil society groups and human rights defenders. UN Special Rapporteur on Situation of Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor 20 Sept urged govt to provide adequate medical care to imprisoned pro-independence Papuan activist Victor Yeimo, who was arrested in May 2021, amid reports of his deteriorating health. Separately, security forces 18 Sept killed leader of

Islamic State-affiliated East Indonesia Mujahideen militant group and another militant in shootout on Sulawesi island.

➔ **Myanmar** While opposition govt declared “people’s defensive war” to depose military dictatorship, announcement failed to lead to sustained escalation in attacks. National Unity Govt (NUG) 7 Sept declared “people’s defensive war” and state of emergency calling on people to rise up against regime. State Administration Council regime 9 Sept accused NUG, Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), People’s Defence Force and some ethnic armed groups of choosing “the terror way” and 12 Sept said NUG declaration aimed “to destabilise the country” to influence 14 Sept UN General Assembly decision on Myanmar’s UN credentials. While declaration did not result in significant escalation, deadly attacks on regime targets have continued. Notably, series of militia ambushes early Sept launched against troops in Magway region’s Gangaw township prompted military to occupy area, which resulted in killing of at least 22 villagers from 9-10 Sept, including teenagers and elderly. Military forces 18-19 Sept clashed with anti-junta militia Chin Defence Force in Thantlang town, Chin State, destroying at least 20 homes and forcing majority of town’s 10,000 residents to flee, including several thousands across border into India; militia reported it had killed 30 govt troops. Throughout Sept, regime also stepped up raids and arrests of people allegedly involved in resistance activity in Yangon and elsewhere. Meanwhile, regime 6 Sept dropped sedition charge against nationalist monk Wirathu, detained for past ten months. SAC 21 Sept tried deposed State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi for incitement; Suu Kyi pleaded not guilty, with trial set to continue in Oct. Internationally, Vice Senior General Soe Win 3 Sept held talks with Russian deputy defence minister focused on Russian plans to aid “military technology, education, health and various sectors”. Information Minister Maung Maung Ohn 9 Sept briefed foreign diplomats in Yangon on regime’s narrative of Feb coup, stating Tatmadaw had taken power according to constitution in response to “serious irregularities” in 2020 election. U.S. and China 13 Sept brokered agreement to defer decision on Myanmar’s UN representation until at least Oct-Nov; NUG-affiliated incumbent Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun retained UN credentials on condition he did not speak at high-level General Assembly debate.

➔ **Philippines** Violence persisted at low levels in south, while members of Bangsamoro Transition Authority passed bill to extend transition. In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, communal violence remained low, while some clashes between govt and armed groups continued. Notably, three members of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) 14 Sept surrendered to military in Datu Unsay municipality, Maguindanao province. Bomb blast 18 Sept killed one and injured eight civilians in Datu Piang town, Maguindanao; authorities attributed attack to BIFF. In Sulu province, four Abu Sayyaf Group members 7 Sept surrendered to military in Talipao town, followed by another two members next day in Ungkaya Pukan town, Basilan province. Police supported by military 17 Sept killed alleged Abu Sayyaf financier in firefight during attempted arrest in Luuk town, Sulu province. House of Representatives’ Strategic Intelligence Committee Chairperson Johnny Pimentel 5 Sept announced deployment of additional 4,500 troops to Jolo municipality, Sulu province, to combat armed groups. Bangsamoro Transition Authority Senate 6 Sept and House of Representatives 15 Sept each passed bills extending transition period;

both houses 21 Sept convened bicameral conference to reconcile both legislations, with bill submitted to President Duterte for signature on 27 Sept. Security forces continued to clash with communist New People's Army at similarly lethal levels as Aug in Mindanao island in south, Visayas islands in centre, and Luzon island in north, killing at least 22 and injuring four during month. President Duterte 8 Sept accepted ruling party PDP-Laban's nomination to run for vice presidency in May 2022 election; Senator Manny Pacquiao 19 Sept accepted nomination from supporters within PDP-Laban to run for presidency and Manila Mayor Francisco "Isko" Moreno Domagoso 22 Sept also declared candidacy for Aksyon Demokratiko party. Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases 11 Sept reached all-time daily high of 26,303.

➔ **South China Sea Australia, UK and U.S. unveiled trilateral defence pact that provoked mixed reactions in region, while Chinese naval forces conducted military exercises.** Australia, UK and U.S. 15 Sept announced "enhanced trilateral partnership" dubbed "AUKUS", which includes key agreement to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and provisions to cooperate on emerging technologies. Chinese foreign ministry next day said AUKUS would "seriously damage regional peace and stability, exacerbate an arms race and harm international nuclear non-proliferation agreements". Malaysian PM Ismail Sabri Yaakob in 17 Sept phone call to Australian PM Scott Morrison said agreement could "provoke other powers to act more aggressively, especially within the South China Sea", while Indonesian foreign ministry same day said it was "deeply concerned over the continuing arms race and power projection in the region". Filipino FM Teodoro Locsin Jr 19 Sept expressed support, saying the "enhancement of a near abroad ally's ability to project power should restore and keep the balance rather than destabilise it". Meanwhile, Chinese state media 8 Sept reported its naval forces same day conducted amphibious landing exercise in SCS, 9-10 Sept conducted live-fire exercises in western area of Leizhou Peninsula, and 18 Sept dispatched Y-20 large transport aircraft from mainland to airfields in Spratly Islands to conduct "amphibious landing drills", marking first time China dispatched large transport aircraft near reefs according to Chinese media. Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi 11 Sept visited Vietnam, reportedly told Vietnamese Deputy PM Phạm Bình Minh that both countries should refrain from exacerbating maritime disputes. German foreign ministry 15 Sept said China had denied request for Shanghai port visit of its frigate embarking on six-month mission to SCS. U.S. Navy Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group returned to SCS 24 Sept for exercises and training. EU 16 Sept released Indo-Pacific strategy urging "cooperation to maintain and ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation". Joint statement following first in-person leaders' summit of "Quad" on 24 Sept noted commitment to "freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes" in Indo-Pacific.

➔ **Thailand PM Prayuth Chan-ocha and govt officials saw off no-confidence vote, while series of protests rocked capital Bangkok, leading to hundreds of arrests.** In third such move, opposition 31 Aug-4 Sept challenged PM Prayuth Chan-ocha and five cabinet officials in parliamentary censure debate over issues including pandemic mismanagement and alleged corruption; lawmakers 4 Sept voted to reject no-confidence motion. In Bangkok, anti-govt protests continued throughout Sept with more than 600 arrested since July. Members of Red Shirts movement 2 Sept protested at Asoke intersection, calling for Prayuth's resignation. United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration and Thalufah group 3



Sept held mass demonstration in Rachaprasong area ahead of no-confidence vote, which thousands attended; Free Youth movement 4 Sept led march through commercial centre ending at Pratunam intersection and hanging banner reading "Reform of Monarchy". Additional rallies 6, 7 Sept held at Asoke; rallies planned on 8 Sept however called off, citing pending arrest warrants for leaders. Thalugas protesters 6 Sept clashed with police in Din Daeng district. Police next day arrested 18 protesters for damaging state property and protests same day continued amid further clashes with police. Also on 7 Sept, Ramkhamhaeng for Democracy demonstrators protested at Government House and Thalufah protesters rallied at Democracy Monument. Anti-govt protesters 19 Sept gathered at Asoke intersection on anniversary of 2006 coup that ousted then-PM Thaksin Shinawatra; protestors later proceeded to Democracy Monument in mobile rally of over 1,500 vehicles. Six police booths in Bangkok were found vandalised 23 Sept, including four torched. Parliament 10 Sept voted to approve constitutional amendment to adopt two-ballot election system, one for constituency candidate and one for the party list. Meanwhile, in deep south, unidentified gunmen 6 Sept killed Muslim man in Cho Airong district, Narathiwat province. Unidentified attackers 15 Sept attacked two Muslim men in Ruesoh district, Narathiwat province, killing one and wounding another. Drive-by grenade attack at security booth in Panare district, Pattani province, killed one ranger; paramilitary ranger died following grenade attack on his post in Pattani's Panare district 22 Sept. IED attack 28 Sept killed two police officers and wounded four in Chanae district, Narathiwat province.