

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** **China continued high maritime presence in waters around contested Senkaku/Diaoyu island chain, while Beijing and Tokyo held high-level virtual meeting.**

Chinese vessels maintained high maritime activity. Four Chinese vessels 8 Sept entered waters around contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands; Japan next day said it was “extremely concerned” about Chinese activities around islands. As of 27 Sept, 68 Chinese Coast Guard vessels entered Japan’s contiguous zone over 19 days, including four identified in Japan’s territorial waters; notably, one Chinese naval vessel 15 Sept entered Japan’s territorial waters off southern Kagoshima prefecture.

Japan-China FMs held video-conference to discuss relations. Ahead of fiftieth anniversary of Japan and China normalising relations on 29 Sept, Chinese FM Wang Yi and Japanese counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi 12 Sept outlined five points on bilateral relations, including to “deepen cooperation” and “foster positive and friendly mutual perception”.

Japan conducted military exercises with India and U.S. Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force 10 Sept commenced week-long joint exercise with Indian Navy in Bay of Bengal. Japanese Air Self-Defence Force 12 Sept held joint exercises with U.S. forces in Sea of Japan off Aomori prefecture; *USS Ronald Reagan* same day departed Yokosuka to resume patrol. Japanese Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada 14 Sept held first meeting with U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin in which both agreed on joint technological research to counter hypersonic weapons.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** **North Korea fired ballistic missiles as U.S. and South Korea held military drills, Seoul proposed humanitarian talks with north, and Pyongyang outlined use of nuclear arsenal.**

As U.S.-South Korea military drills ended, Pyongyang launched spate of ballistic missiles. U.S. and South Korea 1 Sept concluded joint Ulchi Freedom Shield summer exercises, largest for four years; exercises included eleven different types of field exercise, including joint aircraft carrier strike drills and amphibious landings. North Korea did not respond, but 24 Sept launched first ballistic missile; launch came after South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol 21 Sept delivered UN General Assembly speech without mentioning North Korea for first time ever, and ahead of U.S.-South Korea joint naval exercises 26-29 Sept and visit by U.S. VP Kamala Harris to South Korean capital Seoul and inter-Korean border. Pyongyang 28-29 Sept launched additional missiles, including after VP Harris departed. South Korea, U.S. and Japan 30 Sept held anti-submarine exercises for first time in five years.

South Korea sought progress with north on reunions of separated families. Seoul 8 Sept requested talks with North Korea on restarting unions of families separated by Korean War, in first attempt by new administration to make progress on longstanding humanitarian issue; Pyongyang did not respond to outreach, reaffirming disdain for new conservative administration.

North Korea promulgated new law governing nuclear use. Ahead of country's founding day on 9 Sept, North Korea 8 Sept promulgated new law specifying conditions for use of nuclear arsenal. Law stipulates North will not attack non-nuclear states except if allied with nuclear states, nuclear weapons can be deployed if "attack by hostile forces on the state leadership...was launched or drew near", and use aimed at preventing "expansion and protraction of a war". In speech accompanying new law, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un same day declared "legislating nuclear weapons policy is to draw an irretrievable line so that there can be no bargaining over our nuclear weapons". While symbolic, law appears to be timed to raise regional military stakes in absence of highly provocative actions ahead of China's ruling party congress beginning on 16 Oct.

➔ Taiwan Strait China maintained high-level of incursions into Taiwan's air defence zone, while U.S. continued to signal strong support to Taipei as President Biden vowed to aid island in event of attack.

China conducted daily aerial incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ). China dispatched 377 planes as of 21 Sept into Taiwan's ADIZ; notably, 181 aircraft crossed unofficial demarcation known as median line, which has become near-daily routine since visit of U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in Aug. Chinese naval vessels were sighted 133 times in surrounding waters in Sept. Taiwan 1 Sept shot down Chinese civilian-operated drone in Kinmen county, off China's Fujian province; Taiwanese military 5 Sept confirmed Chinese UAVs crossed median line for first time. U.S. and Canada 20 Sept held joint operation with destroyer *USS Higgins* and frigate *HMCS Vancouver*, transiting strait for second time in three weeks; China slammed exercise as provocative.

U.S. representatives continued visits, U.S. legislators approved new Taiwan act and President Biden vowed to defend island. Following Pelosi's 2 Aug visit, U.S. engagement remained high. Arizona Governor Doug Ducey 1 Sept and Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy 8 Sept began visits. Five Taiwanese legislators 13 Sept visited U.S. capital for closed-door meetings with U.S. officials. Members of Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, hosted by U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, 15 Sept called for greater support for Taiwan and expressed opposition to any unilateral change of status quo. U.S. Senate's Foreign Relations Committee 15 Sept approved Taiwan Policy Act; Chairman Bob Menendez called it "most comprehensive restructuring of U.S. policy toward Taiwan since [...] 1979", with notable provisions including \$6.5bn military aid to Taiwan through 2027; China same day said bill will "greatly shake the political foundation of China-U.S. relations" if passed. In fourth and clearest remark since assuming office, Biden 18 Sept said U.S. would defend Taiwan from any "unprecedented attack". China 23 Sept accused U.S. of sending "very wrong, dangerous signals" during meeting with U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken, who same day affirmed "long-standing one-China policy".

South Asia

➔ Afghanistan Taliban continued discriminatory policies toward women and girls and rejected U.S. initiative on unfreezing state assets; Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) stepped up deadly attacks.

Taliban leadership continued repression of women's rights and freedoms. Taliban Supreme Court 4 Sept asserted there was "no need" for female judges. Deputy justice minister next day stated country had "no need" for constitution or political parties. Local authorities 5 Sept reopened girls' secondary schooling in Paktia province after demands by local tribal elders; de facto authorities, however, closed schools once again, sparking protests. UN special rapporteur 12 Sept highlighted significant deterioration of women's rights since Taliban takeover. Emir 21 Sept appointed close ally Mawlawi Habibullah Agha as education minister.

Despite poor economic trajectory, Taliban did not accept U.S. proposal on unfreezing state assets. U.S. 15 Sept announced plan to establish fund in Switzerland for disbursement of \$3.5bn from frozen Afghan financial reserves. Taliban same day called mechanism "unacceptable", primarily as it bypassed central bank and excluded Taliban input. Minister of commerce 6 Sept expressed hopes of joining China's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor megaproject. In apparent prisoner exchange, U.S. 19 Sept handed drug dealer and long-time Taliban supporter, Haji Bashir Noorzai, to Taliban, which released U.S. citizen taken hostage in 2019.

ISKP intensified deadly attacks, Taliban launched new offensive in north. Taliban 1 Sept claimed killing of ISKP's shadow governor for Farah province (west). ISKP 2 Sept killed firebrand cleric and Taliban supporter Mawlawi Mujib ur Rahman Ansari in suicide blast in Herat province (west). ISKP 5 Sept attacked Russia's embassy in capital Kabul, killing two Russian diplomats, among others. Blast at Wazir Akbar Khan Mosque inside Kabul's diplomatic zone 23 Sept caused casualties and bore hallmarks of ISKP. Blast at mosque in Kabul 23 Sept killed at least seven worshippers; similar attack on school in Kabul killed at least 19 students 30 Sept. Meanwhile, Taliban 13 Sept launched major offensive in Panjshir and Andarab provinces against insurgents. Some anti-Taliban political figures, notably National Resistance Front leader, 15 Sept gathered in Austrian capital Vienna. Al-Qaeda 12 Sept claimed group had ceased any attacks against U.S. from Afghanistan.

➔ Bangladesh Political tensions remained elevated in lead-up to parliamentary elections due in 2023 as security forces clashed with opposition protesters; Myanmar's conflict spread to border regions.

Political tensions ran high ahead of 2023 elections. Sporadic clashes 1 Sept took place in several districts when police attempted to prevent Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) from holding public rallies to celebrate party's 44th anniversary; notably, police fired on rally in Naraynganj district, killing one and injuring five. PM Sheikh Hasina same day said police had right to protect themselves against violent protesters. BNP also held countrywide rallies against rising fuel, power and commodity during month; clashes injured several protesters and police officers in Rangpur district on 6 Sept, in capital Dhaka on 15 Sept, and in Munshganj district on 21 Sept. Awami League activists 17 Sept attacked and injured BNP local leader in Dhaka and party's VP in Comilla district. Delivering statement at 51st session of

Human Rights Council on 12 Sept, UN acting rights chief Nada al-Nashif called on govt to ensure freedoms of expression and to bar security forces from using “excessive force” against protests in “polarising environment” ahead of general elections, due in 2023. EU mission in Dhaka 15 Sept “raised concerns about escalating protest-related violence and need to ensure participatory and peaceful conditions” in lead-up to elections.

Govt protested cross-border fire from Myanmar. Govt called in Myanmar ambassador four times in late Aug-Sept to protest Myanmar’s strikes along border and intrusions into Bangladeshi airspace (see Myanmar). Notably, Myanmar military helicopters and fighter jets 3 Sept fired shells and gunshots in Bandarban’s Gumdham border area, and approached to within 300-400 yards of Bangladesh’s airspace; 10-12 mortar shells reportedly landed inside Bangladeshi territory 16-19 Sept. FM Abdul Momen 20 Sept said Myanmar mistakenly shelled territory due to “crisscrossed” border.

PM Hasina visited India, securing defence agreement. State visit to India 5-8 Sept saw signing of first defence contract under India’s \$500mn line of credit associated with 2019 deal between two countries. Hasina and Indian PM Modi agreed to end deaths from “incidents along the border”, reference to Bangladeshis killed during past Indian border security operations.

↑ India (non-Kashmir) India and China agreed partial disengagement along disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC), signalling progress in overcoming months-long stalemate.

Govt and Beijing announced disengagement from border friction point. Following 16th round of commander-level talks, sides 8 Sept announced their armies began to disengage by few kilometres from Patrolling Point-15 in Gogra-Hot Springs area of Eastern Ladakh, aiming to creating buffer zone in area disputed since May 2020; 50,000 personnel on both sides would remain in area. China welcomed deal, saying “beginning of disengagement is a positive development”, but reiterated: “We don’t accept the so-called status quo created by India’s illegal crossing of the LAC”; agreeing disengagement at remaining friction points will remain tough challenge.

Govt signed treaty with eight armed groups in north east. Govt and Assam state authorities 15 Sept signed agreement with eight armed tribal groups in Assam aimed at mainstreaming groups and affording them political and economic rights; home ministry said all eight groups had agreed to abandon armed violence. Union Home Minister Amit Shah 15 Sept said that it was govt’s intention to reconcile with all armed insurgent groups in region before 2024, when national elections are due. Earlier, National Investigation Agency 2 Sept conducted searches in 16 locations in Assam state (north east) and militant training in camps based across border in Myanmar in connection with recruitment by militant outfit United Liberation Front of Asom.

Maoist violence continued. Security forces 2 Sept killed two alleged Maoists in Seraikela-Kharsawan district, Jharkhand state (east); 8 Sept arrested two alleged Maoists in Telangana state (centre), discovering explosive material and Maoist literature. Around 700 Maoist sympathisers, including 300 militia, 18 Sept surrendered in Malkangiri district, Orissa state (east).

In important international developments. While addressing UN Security Council, FM S. Jaishankar 22 Sept said: “The trajectory of the Ukraine conflict is a matter of profound concern for the entire international community”, signaling veiled criticism of Russia for first time.

➔ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Diplomatic engagement between India and Pakistan remained tense, while dispute over electoral rights and localised violence persisted in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).**

Tensions persisted between India and Pakistan. Pakistan’s foreign ministry 5 Sept blamed India for “extra-judicial killing” of Tabarak Hussain, “mentally challenged Pakistani national”, in Aug; Pakistan claimed he inadvertently crossed border, while Indian army says Pakistan sent him to target Indian positions. Addressing Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 16 Sept, India PM Modi indirectly criticised Pakistan for blocking its aid to Afghanistan by denying transit rights. Addressing UN General Assembly 23 Sept, Pakistan PM Sharif said “constructive engagement” with India was dependent on “enabling environment” by reversing Aug 2019 steps in J&K. In third such move, China 15 Sept blocked U.S.-India proposal to add Lashkar-e-Tayyaba’s Sajjad Mir – reportedly wanted for 2008 Mumbai attacks – to UN Security Council’s 1267 sanctions list.

Controversy over voting rights fuelled tensions in J&K. Tensions persisted over chief electoral officer’s attempt to grant “anyone who is living ordinarily” right to vote, marking change from pre-2019 policy which permitted only permanent residents to vote. Region’s former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti 6 Sept said non-local labourers and security forces personnel were being enlisted as voters in Baramulla district. As Kashmiri Pandits continued protests and sought transfer outside of Kashmir for safety amid rise in targeted attacks, Mufti 13 Sept accused govt of ignoring Pandits’ grievances and using “arm twisting approach” to “muzzle their voice”. All Migrant (Displaced) Employees Association Kashmir 19 Sept said: “Either the government should provide us proper security in Kashmir Valley or take back its oppressive orders”.

Militants attacks and security operations continued in J&K. Militant 2 Sept shot and injured non-local Muslim labourer in Pulwama district. Security forces 6 Sept killed two alleged Hizbul Mujahideen militants in Anantnag district and same day recovered 5kg bomb on outskirts of Srinagar regional capital; 7 Sept killed two alleged Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind militants in Anantnag district, and two alleged Lashkar-e-Tayyaba militants in Shopian district; 12 Sept killed alleged militant in Shopian district; 14 Sept killed two alleged Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind militants on outskirts of Srinagar.

➔ **Nepal President Bhandari blocked amendment to citizenship law in move widely seen as beyond usual presidential prerogatives, raising concern over further erosion of 2015 constitution.**

President rejected amendment to citizenship act, stoking controversy. President Bhandari 20 Sept refused to authenticate bill amending Citizenship Act despite its being endorsed twice by both chambers of parliament; bill was aimed at addressing demands of stateless individuals, many of them in southern Madhes plains, who have been unable to obtain Nepali citizenship and therefore do not have voting rights. Govt officials, civil society and observers widely qualified Bhandari’s move as

another blow to 2015 constitution, which does not grant president (who performs ceremonial role) authority to reject bills approved by parliament; five-party ruling coalition 21 Sept called move “unconstitutional” and said Bhandari had “seriously insulted and devalued the federal parliament”. Options for coalition to challenge Bhandari’s move remained unclear, as House of Representatives’ five-year term 17 Sept lapsed and Supreme Court remained mired in dispute over Chief Justice Choolendra Rana who was suspended in Feb following impeachment motion.

Preparations continued for Nov general elections. Ruling coalition 29 Sept agreed to tentative seat-sharing formula for House of Representatives polls after Election Commission imposed 9 Oct deadline for parties to nominate candidates.

↓ **Pakistan Pakistani Taliban stepped-up deadly attacks, killing several security forces personnel; political tensions remained dangerously elevated as former PM Khan continued to escalate rhetoric.**

Pakistani Taliban launched deadly strikes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Despite “indefinite ceasefire” and ongoing negotiations between Pakistani Taliban and security forces, Pakistani Taliban claimed several deadly attacks: notably, three attacks on police 4 Sept, killing police constable in Lakki Marwat district; group stepped up strikes in Malakand division, where bomb 13 Sept killed eight people, including two police constables, and shooting 14 Sept killed local anti-Taliban leader. Rallies 15-16 Sept held against rising attacks in Malakand. Attack on convoy of leader of militant group Jamaat-ul-Ulema Islam 9 Sept left four police constables dead. Additionally, attacks by militants, including from Afghanistan, 13, 19 and 25 Sept killed eight Pakistani soldiers in Kurram, North Waziristan, Khyber and South Waziristan districts. Relations remained strained with Afghan Taliban govt as military and Taliban forces 14 Sept clashed at disputed border.

Political instability persisted as former PM Khan criticised govt and military. Khan sought to politicise appointment of new army chief ahead of Qamar Javed Bajwa’s retirement on 30 Nov. Khan 4 Sept accused PM Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and FM Bhutto’s Pakistan’s Peoples Party (PPP) of opposing snap elections in order to make own appointment to prevent “strong and patriotic” army head. Military next day said it was “aghast at the defamatory and uncalled for” statement. Khan 6 Sept doubled down, asserting “Thieves –Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari – cannot be allowed to pick the new army chief”; 10 Sept warned “people could take to the streets to hold peaceful protests or we will hold elections by force”, accused military intelligence of conspiring against his party’s coalition govt in Punjab, calling on his supporters to combat threats with counter-threats. Islamabad’s High Court 19 Sept ruled to remove anti-terrorism clauses in case against Khan and 22 Sept dismissed contempt of court case against him.

Flood fallout continued. With around 33mn citizens affected by floods and estimated total damage at over \$30bn (10% of GDP), Sharif 23 Sept appealed for debt relief from creditors, citing “vast scale & extent of destruction”; floods had left about 16,000 killed as of 20 Sept.

➡ **Sri Lanka Authorities struck preliminary deal to address worsening economic crisis amid food insecurity and continued crackdown on dissent, while UN rights body spotlighted gov't's poor record.**

Amid dire economic conditions, govt struck initial deal with International Monetary Fund (IMF). In positive news, IMF 1 Sept announced long-awaited staff level agreement, enabling \$2.9bn loan; dispersal of loan requires govt winning parliamentary approval for unpopular measures and securing debt relief from foreign govts and international bond holders, talks about which began 23 Sept. UN World Food Programme 12 Sept warned “food and nutrition security situation in Sri Lanka continues to deteriorate by the day”, noting that based on surveys in June, 8.7m people (39.1% of population) did not have adequate diet, while one in every four households was reducing number of daily meals and 6.2m (28% of population) were estimated food insecure. Report flagged likelihood of further deterioration from Oct-Feb 2023, citing low crop yields.

Authorities continued crackdown on dissent and consolidated power. Police 10 Sept arrested prominent protest leader and authorities continued prosecutions of numerous others, including three student leaders detained last month under PTA. Authorities 24 Sept arrested 84 peaceful protesters, day after President Wickremesinghe invoked rarely-used Official Secrets Act to ban protests around key govt buildings covering large parts of capital Colombo; Bar Association and others denounced move and immediately challenged it in court. Disgraced former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa 2 Sept returned to country after six weeks abroad. Wickremesinghe 8 Sept appointed 37 new ministers, mostly members of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and aligned parties.

Govt faced condemnation of rights record at UN Human Rights Council. In strongly worded report to Council on 6 Sept, UN High Commissioner criticised systematic impunity for human rights violations, failure to pursue effective transitional justice, militarisation of civilian administration, and ongoing surveillance, harassment and arbitrary arrests under draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), calling for moratorium on act's use; for first time, report linked impunity and authoritarian governance with ongoing economic crisis. FM Ali Sabry 12 Sept rejected much of report and reiterated promise to replace PTA.

South East Asia

↓ **Myanmar After two-year pause, fighting resurged in Rakhine State; authorities continued to face violent opposition in other regions and repress peaceful dissent.**

Deadly conflict escalated in Rakhine. Informal ceasefire between military and ethnic armed group Arakan Army (AA) in place since Nov 2020 collapsed: after AA 31 Aug carried out raid on Border Guard Police outpost on Myanmar-Bangladesh border in Maungdaw township, killing at least 19 officers, military 2 Sept launched attacks on AA positions with two helicopter gunships, with fire landing in Bangladesh (see Bangladesh). AA 1 Sept attacked military convoy with landmines in Ann township, destroying two vehicles. AA 7 Sept attacked govt office in Myebon township, killing

and injuring several soldiers. AA forces 9-11 Sept attacked and captured military camp in Maungdaw township, killing 13 soldiers. In southern Chin State, after AA late Aug claimed to have killed ten soldiers, clashes were reported in Paletwa 1 Sept.

Violence in other regions continued, including in Shan State (south) and in Sagaing region (north). In Shan state, Karenni armed groups, including Karenni Army and Karenni Nationalities Defence Force, 8 Sept ambushed regime forces in Pekon township, reportedly killing up to 20 soldiers. Military during month also carried out helicopter gunship attacks on several villages in Tabayin Township in Sagaing, culminating in 19 Sept attack where at least 11 children were killed when two helicopters fired on monastery school for more than hour.

Crackdown on dissent continued, regime strengthened cooperation with Russia. Courts 2 Sept handed Aung San Suu Kyi eighth conviction, sentencing her to further three years' imprisonment with hard labour for "influencing electoral authorities", bringing sentence to 22 years with nine further charges outstanding. Insein Prison Court same day sentenced former British Ambassador Vicky Bowman and husband Htein Lin, noted artist and former political prisoner, to one-year imprisonment with hard labour for violating immigration law. Leader Min Aung Hlaing 7 Sept met Russian President Putin during second visit to Russia in two months; Min Aung Hlaing praised Putin for turning Russia into "world powerhouse" as pair discussed potential cooperation on various sectors including banking, energy and aerospace.

➔ Philippines Localised jihadist activity persisted in south, implementation of Peace Accord in Mindanao continued apace, and violence linked to communist insurgency left over dozen dead.

Jihadist violence persisted in Mindanao. Alleged Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) gunmen 15 Sept ambushed and killed three soldiers en route to infantry detachment on hill in Magcawa village in Al Barka town, Basilan province. Six ASG members 1 Sept surrendered to police in Jolo municipality, Sulu province. Eight Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters combatants 3 Sept surrendered to military in Rajah Buayan municipality, Maguindanao province. Two members of Ussam clan's private militia 16 Sept surrendered in Bongao municipality, Tawi-Tawi province.

Implementation of Peace Accord in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region continued apace. Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) inaugurated new legislature. President Marcos Jr. 15 Sept attended inauguration of BTA parliament in Cotabato City, praising achievements of Bangsamoro Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim and asking parliament to pass crucial legislation "on fiscal policy... and to facilitate the conduct of the elections in the BARMM in 2025". Plebiscite vote 17 Sept officially divided Maguindanao into Maguindanao del Norte and Maguindanao del Sur. Third phase of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) decommissioning 27 Sept resumed in Maguindanao; at least 5,500 combatants are scheduled to be decommissioned until end of 2022. Meanwhile, authorities continued reconstruction efforts in Marawi city. Lanao del Sur Provincial Governor Mamintal Adiong Jr. 15 Sept said 95% of roads destroyed during 2017 Marawi siege had been rebuilt while reconstruction continued on some govt facilities; next day said residents refused to settle into govt-provided housing due to "substandard" construction. Lanao del Sur district Congressman Ziaur-Rahman Alonto Adiong 16 Sept said Marawi "is the longest calamity-stricken area in the country" amid ongoing rehabilitation.

Clashes between armed forces and communist New People's Army continued. Violence in Mindanao Island in south, Visayas Islands in centre and Luzon Island in north saw at least 17 combatant and civilian fatalities with one injured.

➔ **South China Sea Tensions remained high as Philippines revealed it had filed numerous protests against China's maritime incursions and Beijing expressed readiness to agree Code of Conduct.**

Philippines revealed it had repeatedly protested Chinese maritime incursions in 2022. Manila 8 Sept said it had filed 178 protests against Chinese incursion into territorial waters as of 31 Aug, including 48 since President Marcos Jr. took office on 30 June; incursions included illegal fishing, harassment of fisherman and unauthorised marine research.

Amid ongoing activity, China pledged support for finalising maritime Code of Conduct. Chinese FM Wang 20 Sept spoke to Vietnamese PM Pham Minh Chinh, affirmed China was ready to work with countries from South East Asia regional body ASEAN to reach early agreement on Code of Conduct in South China Sea (SCS). Philippine Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairwoman Senator Imee Marcos 14 Sept suggested Code of Conduct should only be negotiated among claimant countries, instead of all ASEAN states, to speed up process. Australian Navy chief Mark Hammond 9 Sept said Australian warships were regularly shadowed by Chinese military vessels in SCS, describing behaviour as "unusual".

U.S.-Philippines negotiations on security arrangements continued. Philippine Ambassador to U.S. Jose Manuel Romualdez 5 Sept said in event of Taiwan conflict, Manila would only let U.S. forces use its military bases if conflict affected Philippines' security; also said Manila and Washington were negotiating increase of bases available to U.S. forces under bilateral Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Philippine President Ferdinand Marco Jr. 22 Sept met U.S. President Biden at UN General Assembly, where pair pledged support for freedom of navigation and overflight.

➔ **Thailand Pro-democracy demonstrators protested against govt as Constitutional Court ruled that PM Prayuth could remain in post, while attacks continued in deep south.**

Amid anti-govt protests, court ruled PM Prayuth could stay in post. Pro-democracy protest group Kana Lomruam Prachachon 4 Sept held protest against govt involving hundreds in central Bangkok, following late Aug protests calling for resignations of Deputy PM Prawit Wongsuwan and Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda; protests developed amid PM Prayuth Chan-ocha's suspension from PM's duties in Aug pending outcome of case to determine when his term in office began. Constitutional Court 30 Sept ruled that Prayuth could remain PM as his eight-year term limit began with promulgation of constitution in April 2017.

Curtailment of peaceful dissent continued. Bangkok court 12 Sept sentenced political activist Jatuporn "New" Saeoung under lèse-majesté law to two years prison for insulting monarchy by allegedly impersonating queen at 2020 protest.

In deep south, insurgent attacks continued. Gunmen on motorcycles 12 Sept killed elderly rubber tapper couple in Muang district, Yala province. IED 20 Sept targeting

police patrol detonated in front of hospital in Mai Kaen district, Pattani province, killing one police officer and wounding four others.