

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China (internal)** Rapporteur to UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) 13 Aug cited reports China's expanding network of political "re-education" centres in Xinjiang region may now hold up to a million people in "counter extremism centres". Describing "massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy", rapporteur said "another two million have been forced into so-called re-education camps for political and cultural indoctrination"; also cited cases of seemingly arbitrary detention, mass surveillance and confiscation of travel documents, among other security measures. Rapporteur said national security laws have become "imprecise and over-broad" and now "enable abusive, arbitrary, and discriminatory prosecutions and convictions". Statements by U.S. officials and 17 Aug reporting by *Wall Street Journal* and other media corroborated assessment and noted that Uighurs outside China said that some relatives have died in detention or soon after release. Responding to allegations, Chinese official acknowledged camps' existence for first time but described them as "vocational training centres"; official denied they held a million people but did not provide alternative figure. CERD's concluding observations 30 Aug expressed alarm and called for China to end detentions and release detainees. Commentary in state media *Global Times* 12 Aug argued that measures are necessary transitional phase to eliminate terrorism and stabilise region.

➔ **China/Japan** Chinese Premier Li and Japanese PM Abe 12 Aug exchanged congratulatory messages commemorating 40th anniversary of China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship; comes ahead of planned visit by Abe to Beijing in Oct. Japan's Ministry of Defence 28 Aug published "Defence of Japan 2018 White Paper" saying "China's rapid modernization of the PLA [People's Liberation Army], enhancement of operational capabilities, and unilateral escalation of activities, without sufficient transparency, are generating strong security concerns"; China 29 Aug said it firmly opposed paper which was "full of slanders". Japan's Defence Ministry 31 Aug proposed largest budget in country's history, with 2.1% rise and doubling of spending on missile defence.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** North and South Korea 13 Aug held senior-level talks at Panmunjom to prepare for third summit between their leaders, which they agreed would take place in Sept. Other advances during month included full restoration of cross-border military communication line in east of Korean peninsula 15 Aug (following restoration in west in July), and organisation of family reunions at Mount Kumgang 20-26 Aug. In his annual Liberation Day speech 15 Aug, President Moon argued that advancing inter-Korean relations should be main driver of denuclearisation, not merely an outcome of improved U.S.-North Korean ties. U.S. 13 Aug said it is too early to consider ending Korean War, and that improvements in inter-Korean relations must occur "in lockstep" with progress toward denuclearisation. In report published 20 Aug, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it found no evidence North Korea had reduced nuclear activity, same day that South Korean media report citing anonymous U.S. official warned that inter-

Korean liaison office set to open in Kaesong pursuant to April Panmunjom Declaration could represent violation of sanctions. U.S. President Trump 24 Aug cancelled trip to North Korea by Sec State Mike Pompeo without consulting State Department, citing lack of progress on denuclearisation talks and prompting angry response from Pyongyang; U.S. Sec Defence James Mattis 29 Aug said U.S. and South Korea may opt to resume large-scale military exercises. North Korea stepped up preparations for its celebrations of 70th anniversary of country's founding 9 Sept; rumours suggest Chinese President Xi could attend celebrations or visit in preceding days. China and Russia 9 Aug blocked U.S. UN Security Council request to blacklist Russian, Chinese and North Korean individuals and entities alleged by U.S. to have helped North Korea evade restrictions on financial transactions, in bid to halt oil exports to North Korea; U.S. unilaterally imposed sanctions. Koreas marched together in opening ceremony of Asian Games in Indonesia and co-competed in six events late Aug.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Taiwan lost another diplomatic ally as El Salvador 20 Aug announced it was shifting its diplomatic relationship from Taiwan to China, fifth country to change alignment since Democratic People's Party took power in Taiwan in 2016; brings number of countries that formally recognise Taiwan as Republic of China down to seventeen. U.S. and Taiwan criticised move; President Tsai said China's behaviour "increasingly out of control". Tsai made transit stops in U.S. 13-14 and 19 Aug during official visit to diplomatic supporters Belize and Paraguay; high profile trip part of apparent effort to push back at Beijing's pressure, included public speeches and meetings with members of U.S. Congress; China lodged formal protests against both transit stops. Associated Press 18 Aug reported Taiwan has stepped up development and production of missiles and anti-missile systems. China's State Council 18 Aug approved measures making it easier for citizens of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau to apply for residency permits and remain on mainland, latest measure intended to encourage ties.

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## South Asia

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➡ **Afghanistan** Month saw major Taliban attacks in several provinces and political manoeuvring ahead of Oct parliamentary elections. President Ghani 19 Aug offered Taliban three-month ceasefire, conditional on Taliban reciprocating; fighting between two sides subsided during Eid al-Adha festive period and Taliban 20 Aug issued statement announcing release of hundreds of "enemy prisoners", however no ceasefire occurred. In reaction to July efforts by govt to undermine its religious legitimacy, Taliban claimed that gathering of 4,000 Islamic scholars at unspecified location 5 Aug declared armed struggle as legitimate jihad against occupation; Taliban leader 18 Aug issued message re-emphasising righteousness of insurgency; Taliban officials in Qatar sent delegations to Uzbekistan 6-10 Aug and Indonesia 12-15 Aug, reportedly discussing peace process and withdrawal of foreign military forces. Taliban launched major attacks in several provinces. Some 1,000 Taliban fighters attacked Ghazni city 10 Aug, taking most of it during five-day siege and claiming to have captured thousands of weapons and dozens of military vehicles; military expelled last Taliban from city centre 15 Aug; casualties reportedly included hundreds of govt forces, insurgents and civilians killed. Taliban also overran govt bases in Ghormach and Baghlani Markazi districts of Faryab and Baghlan provinces

mid-Aug; captured Uruzgan province's Chinarto district 3-4 Aug, until govt recapture 8 Aug, and Faryab province's Bilchiragh district 18 Aug. Leaders of self-declared Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP)-affiliated group in Jowzjan and about 250 followers surrendered to govt 1 Aug to evade Taliban, weeks after Taliban offensive against it; public controversy ensued over allegations of govt collusion with ISIS-KP-affiliated group. IS-KP continued launching attacks, including targeting Shiite sites in Paktia province 3 Aug killing at least 33, and in Kabul 15 Aug, killing 48. Grand National Coalition opposition group of more than 30 parties and civil society groups 10 Aug called for immediate reform of election system, threatening to oppose Oct parliamentary elections. Electoral Complaints Commission 12 Aug announced disqualification of 35 prospective parliamentary candidates, including twelve MPs, based on connections to illegal armed groups among other concerns.

➔ **Bangladesh** Massive student protests across country that began 29 July over dangerous road conditions continued, triggered by death of two students hit by bus allegedly owned by relative of govt minister in Dhaka; police 5 Aug used tear gas and bullets against protesters in Dhaka, injuring around 100; at least 97 students detained, most subsequently released. Same day, police arrested and allegedly tortured photographer and activist Shahidul Alam for coverage of govt's response, and charged him with making "false" and "provocative" statements. Bangladesh Chhatra League, student wing of Ruling Awami League (AL) party, reportedly attacked protesters and journalists covering protests; govt claimed student wing of opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) was responsible for violence, denied by BNP. UN called on all parties to prevent violence. Students 9 Aug ended protests but police subsequently detained at least twelve social media activists and announced investigations into around 1,000 Facebook accounts allegedly used to incite violence during protests. Armed men 4 Aug attacked U.S. ambassador's car; govt 8 Aug demanded U.S. embassy withdraw its criticism posted on Facebook condemning "brutal attacks and violence" against protesters. Court 13 Aug granted imprisoned BNP leader Khaleda Zia bail in defamation case, one of many ongoing criminal cases against her. FM Ali 9-12 Aug visited Myanmar to assess progress in receiving and resettling returning Rohingya refugees, including visit to villages around Maungdaw township in Rakhine state (see Myanmar); both govts agreed to speed up process but without specifying time frame; diplomatic sources in Dhaka reported that progress in resettling returnees is slow, particularly in provision of accommodation in conflict-hit areas.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Security forces 6 Aug killed at least fourteen suspected Maoists during raid in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh state.

➔ **Kashmir** Clashes across Line of Control (LoC) and militant attacks continued, as did separatist demonstrations, prompted by perceived attempt to change demography of region. Indian troops 18 Aug reportedly killed Pakistani villager in firing across Line of Control (LoC); Pakistan's Foreign Ministry summoned Indian diplomat to lodge protest in what it called "unprovoked firing". Indian army 7 Aug claimed four Indian soldiers and two militants killed in gunfight during infiltration attempt by militants across LoC. Militants 22 Aug reportedly killed three policemen and one politician in three separate attacks in Pulwama (west) and Kulgam (south) districts. Separatists 5-6 Aug held strikes and demonstrations throughout Kashmir to protest legal challenge in Supreme Court to Article 35-A of constitution, which

provides special rights and privileges to Jammu and Kashmir's permanent residents and bars non-residents from acquiring immovable property in state; separatists claim challenge is attempt to change disputed region's demography and convert its majority Muslim population into a minority; held further strikes 27 Aug in which they clashed with security forces in capital Srinagar and Anantang district (south), and again 30-31 Aug ahead of court hearing on Article 35-A. Militants 30-31 Aug reportedly kidnapped at least twelve relatives of police in south Kashmir, allegedly in response to arrest of son of Hizbul Mujahideen chief. Protesters and security forces clashed in Srinagar 21 Aug during demonstrations against Indian rule. New Pakistani PM Khan 21 Aug tweeted Pakistan and India must have dialogue and "resolve their conflicts including Kashmir".

➡ **Maldives** Ahead of Sept presidential election Human Rights Watch 16 Aug released report detailing extensive govt crackdown on media, judiciary and political opposition.

➡ **Nepal** Six months into PM KP Oli's term, concerns about govt's attacks on civil liberties heightened further with 17 Aug enforcement of new civil and criminal code criticised widely for provisions limiting press freedoms including outlawing photography without consent, recording conversations, disclosing private information on public figures, and criminalising satire, carrying prison sentences of up to three years for journalists found in violation. Following enactment of code, statutory governmental body Press Council Nepal summoned several print media editors to reprimand them for minor publication errors; one individual arrested 22 Aug for sharing image mocking Oli on Facebook group. Federation of Nepali Journalists issued declaration 25 Aug arguing for code to be immediately amended; Committee to Protect Journalists issued alert 20 Aug calling govt to repeal or amend code. Oli claimed criticisms were exaggerated. Allegations that police blamed an innocent local man for rape and murder of thirteen-year-old girl in far-western Kanchanpur district led to protests and clashes; police firing 24 Aug killed fourteen-year-old boy and injured 24 others. Incidents sparked wider protests against sexual violence against women; national survey revealed reported rapes increased 256% in past decade.

➡ **Pakistan** New govt took power following July general election, militant violence continued, as did tensions with U.S. and Afghanistan over allegations of Pakistani assistance to Taliban. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan sworn in as country's 22nd PM 18 Aug, promising an "Islamic welfare state", after assembling coalition govt with support of several smaller parties to secure 176 (out of 342) votes in lawmakers' 17 Aug vote for PM, ahead of 96 for Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) nominee Shahbaz Sharif. Opposition alliance against PTI in protest at alleged election rigging appeared to unravel as former President Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), with 43 seats, refused to support Sharif's nomination and abstained from voting. PTI also heads Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial govt, has coalition govt in Balochistan, and formed govt in Punjab. Amid concerns over banned militant groups taking part in election through political fronts, extremist Tehreek-i-Labbaik Islam (political party of Barelvi radical Tehreek-i-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah) emerged as major political player with two provincial assembly seats in Karachi; its 2.2mn votes make it fifth largest party in terms of vote share. Militant violence continued, including: gunmen 11 Aug killed three police officers in Gilgit-

Balistan (north); bomb killed one person and injured ten in Chaman district, Balochistan (south west) 12 Aug. Following late-July speech in which he said relations with U.S. were currently “one-sided” and called for change to make them “mutually beneficial”, U.S. mid-Aug reportedly suspended funding for training of Pakistani military officers, and 20 Aug reiterated concerns that Afghan Taliban enjoy safe haven in Pakistan; U.S. Sec State Pompeo to visit Pakistan in Sept. Pakistani army chief strongly refuted allegation by Afghan President Ghani 16 Aug that Pakistani hospitals were treating Pakistani citizens who had participated in recent Taliban attack on Ghazni city. Financial Action Task Force (FATF) 16 Aug completed review of Pakistan’s anti-money laundering and counter-terror financing laws, telling govt that framework for non-profit and charitable organisations is weak and liable to misuse by militant and jihadist groups.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Ahead of presidential elections due by end 2019, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa 18 Aug told media his Sri Lanka Podujuna Peramuna party would formally request Supreme Court’s opinion on whether 19th amendment to constitution prohibits him running for third term, as widely believed when amendment adopted in April 2015. Mahinda questioned at his residence 17 Aug by police investigating 2008 abduction of journalist Keith Noyahr. New High Court for major corruption cases began work 24 Aug with indictments of Rajapaksa’s former chief of staff and three others on charges of embezzling \$3mn from state insurance firm, and of former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa and six others for alleged misappropriation of public funds. Court of Appeal 8 Aug convicted Ven Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, leader of radical Buddhist organisation Bodu Bala Sena, on four counts of contempt of court relating to incident that took place in Jan 2016, sentenced him to six years’ rigorous imprisonment; Gnanasara filed appeal. Sri Lanka country mission report of UN special rapporteur on promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism 23 July found that Sri Lanka’s “counter-terrorism apparatus is still tainted by the serious pattern of human rights violations that were systematically perpetuated under its authority” and “none of the measures so far adopted to fulfil Sri Lanka’s transitional justice commitments are adequate to ensure real progress”. In first ever visit by a Japanese defence minister, Itsunori Onodera 21-22 Aug met govt leaders and visited ports in Colombo, Hambantota, recently leased to Chinese state-owned company for 99 years, and Trincomalee, site of planned Indian and Japanese investment.

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## **South East Asia**

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➔ **Cambodia** Election commission 15 Aug announced official results confirming ruling Cambodian People’s Party’s sweep of all 125 seats in July election. U.S. same day announced expansion of restrictions on visas for Cambodian officials it deems responsible for what it called “anti-democratic actions taken in the run-up to the flawed July 29 election”. Govt pardoned almost two dozen prisoners in second half of month in perceived attempt to appease external critics, including former lawmaker, two former Radio Free Asia journalists, jailed Oct 2017 on espionage charges, and fourteen govt critics, most former members of dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) convicted in 2014. Supreme Court 22 Aug denied bail to jailed CNRP leader Kem Sokha, arrested Sept 2017 on charges of

treason and yet to be tried. Fourteen former CRNP members pardoned 27 Aug after three years in jail.

➡ **Indonesia** Court in Sumatra 21 Aug sentenced Buddhist woman to eighteen months' jail for complaining about level of noise from her neighbourhood mosque, in controversial verdict that added to concerns that country's strict blasphemy laws are being used to violate religious freedoms and bully minorities; moderate Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama among those criticising verdict. Indonesia and Philippines 10 Aug signed agreement to enhance defence cooperation including on fighting terrorism. Police chief 7 Aug said police had arrested almost 300 terror suspects since mid-May Surabaya terror attacks. Group proclaiming itself pro-Islamic State (ISIS) hackers threatened to attack govt to avenge jailing of "brothers" and crackdown on their social media activity. Military ordered soldiers to pursue Papua National Liberation Army, suspected of killing two soldiers in ambush in Puncak Jaya regency 20 Aug.

➡ **Myanmar** UN fact-finding mission 27 Aug issued report calling for investigation and prosecution of Myanmar military leaders for genocide against Rohingya and war crimes and crimes against humanity against minorities in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan states; said military were "killing indiscriminately, gang-raping women, assaulting children and burning entire villages"; called for referral of case to International Criminal Court (ICC). Report also criticised State Councillor Aung San Suu Kyi for not acting to stem or prevent events, found civilian govt "contributed to the commission of atrocity crimes". Govt rejected report and questioned body's impartiality and sincerity. Facebook, long criticised for providing platform to incite hatred and facilitate violence against Rohingya, immediately removed eighteen accounts and 52 pages associated with Myanmar military and its commander-in-chief, depriving him of his main channel of communications with Myanmar people. UN Security Council held open session on situation in Myanmar 28 Aug, addressed by Secretary-General Guterres; while there were many strong statements, Council remains deadlocked on stronger action due to opposition from China and Russia. Office of the State Counsellor 9 Aug stated it has declined to engage in any way with ICC on question of whether it has jurisdiction over possible crime of deportation of Rohingya from Myanmar (a non-State Party) to Bangladesh. Chair of Commission of Enquiry 16 Aug stated that Commission would not "point fingers" and that seeking accountability was "quarrelling ... not looking for peace", dealing major blow to body's international credibility. Govt's Advisory Board on Rakhine crisis prematurely dissolved 16 Aug after submitting hasty final report. U.S. Treasury 17 Aug announced sanctions on four members of Myanmar military and two units, for serious human rights abuses in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan states. Bangladesh FM visited Myanmar for talks with senior officials 10 Aug, during which they reaffirmed commitment to early repatriation of Rohingya refugees and agreed to establish hotline to facilitate cooperation. UNICEF 23 Aug warned of potential "lost generation" of Rohingya children lacking access to education in camps in Bangladesh.

➡ **Philippines** Preparations began for plebiscite on Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), while attacks and clashes continued between military and Islamic State (ISIS)-linked militant groups and communist New People's Army. At ceremonial signing of BOL 6 Aug, President Duterte said he hoped it will "finally end decades of conflict that is rooted in the Bangsamoro's right to self-determination and recognition of their unique identity". Referendum to ratify BOL expected to take

place between Nov and Jan 2019. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal 10 Aug reported group had begun decommissioning MILF firearms, with second phase to take place after plebiscite and appointment of Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), interim govt until first Bangsamoro elections. MILF 21 Aug selected its Chairman Murad Ebrahim as interim chief minister of BTA. Electoral commission 22 Aug said preparations on track for referendum, as efforts began to encourage residents to register to vote and inform them on BOL content. Govt and MILF 9 Aug agreed to cooperate on rehabilitation of Marawi City, heavily damaged during five-month siege in 2017. Clashes between military and ISIS-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Front (BIFF) rebel group continued in Mindanao; included two suspected militants killed carrying bomb in M'lang, North Cotabato province 8 Aug; and seven suspected militants killed in clash in Maguindanao province 20 Aug; clashes between rival BIFF factions reportedly displaced scores in Shariff Saydona Mustapha town late month. Homemade bomb exploded during festival in Isulan town, Sultan Kudarat province 28 Aug, killing three and injuring dozens; military blamed BIFF, ISIS claimed responsibility. Clashes also continued with ISIS-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG): security forces killed ASG commander in Patikul town, Sulu, 15 Aug; 22 soldiers wounded and one ASG fighter killed in Patikul 23 Aug. ASG suspected of kidnapping ten-year-old son of official in Jolo mid-month. Unidentified gunmen killed six people and abducted pro-govt militia leader and his wife in Siritwai, Zamboanga del Norte province, 31 Aug. With peace talks suspended, military also continued to clash with communist New People's Army, including seven rebels reported killed in clash in Antique (centre) 15 Aug; several soldiers also killed in clashes, including three in Masbate (centre) 3 Aug.

➔ **South China Sea** In continuation of its “free and open Indo-Pacific” strategy, U.S. 30 July pledged \$113mn to increase technology exports to region, support energy industries and establish network to promote infrastructure development; at ASEAN meeting in Singapore 4 Aug pledged \$300mn in security assistance. China FM Wang Yi publicly mocked scale of assistance and traded barbs with his U.S. counterpart over militarisation of South China Sea (SCS). U.S. Congress 1 Aug passed defence spending bill which calls on Department of Defence (DoD) to increase public reporting on Chinese activities in SCS, and conditions future Chinese participation in Rim of Pacific naval exercises on Beijing halting its island-building activities and removing weapons from features it controls. DoD report 16 Aug said China seeks to establish regional pre-eminence and is developing land, sea and air nuclear capabilities. China's People's Liberation Army 10 Aug issued six alerts to overflying U.S. reconnaissance plane to stay away from Chinese-controlled features in disputed Spratly archipelago. Chinese media 14 Aug reported three satellites scheduled to launch 2019, part of constellation that will enable China to track ships across entire SCS. Vietnam's state-owned PetroVietnam and two Japanese companies 31 July signed agreement to extract and sell gas in Sao Vang-Dai Nguyet project, likely within China's nine-dash line claim. China 29 July donated four patrol boats to Philippine Navy as gesture to improve relations. In unusually stern statement, Philippine President Duterte 14 Aug said China had no right to repel aircraft and vessels passing artificial islands, calling waters international sea; China 16 Aug replied it had right to respond to aircraft and ships encroaching into its waters. ASEAN and Chinese officials 2 Aug formally announced agreement on single draft text that will serve as basis for code of conduct negotiations, which Chinese FM Wang

4 Aug said would be long and complex. Japanese helicopter carrier conducted rare SCS bilateral exercises with U.S. aircraft carrier strike group (CSG) 31 Aug.

► **Thailand** Violence in Southern insurgency continued: in Narathiwat province, two Muslim defence volunteers killed in ambush in Sungai Padi district 7 Aug, and police blamed militants for murder of Buddhist woman and her daughter in Bacho district 11 Aug. In Pattani province, gunmen 8 Aug killed villager in Mayo district and wounded defence volunteer in Kapho district; suspected militants shot and wounded police officer and his wife in Saiburi 18 Aug. Authorities 22 Aug announced they had killed three militant suspects and arrested ten in operations over preceding week, including two killed in raid in Yala province's Krong Pinang district. Gunman killed defence volunteer and bystander in Pattani town 30 Aug. Malaysian PM Mahathir appointed former police inspector general Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor as new facilitator for dialogue process between Thai govt and MARA Patani (Patani Consultative Council, umbrella group of five Malay-Muslim separatist groups in exile); still no indication of when dialogue will resume. In most concrete indication yet of prospective date for long-delayed general election, Election Commission 18 Aug said election would take place 24 Feb 2019 but reversed announcement following day; Deputy PM Wissanu Krea-ngam 20 Aug said election would take place between 24 Feb and 5 May; and PM Prayuth Chan-ocha said, during mobile cabinet meeting in Chumphon province 22 Aug, that election could be held 24 Feb "if we can do it".