

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan** **Japan reported uptick in Chinese aircraft incursions last year and proposed expanding defence budget to meet threats from China and North Korea.** Japan Defence Ministry 15 April said it scrambled fighter jets on over 1,000 separate occasions in 2021 in response to aircraft approaching its airspace, up from 725 previous year; 722 scrambles were in response to Chinese aircraft, with majority over disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. As of 27 April, 84 Chinese vessels entered waters surrounding Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands during month; notably, four Chinese govt ships 12 April entered territorial waters, in sixth such incursion this year. Japan and U.S. 12-13 April conducted bilateral exercises in Sea of Japan. Russia 14 April launched cruise missiles from submarines in Sea of Japan as part of unilateral exercise involving fifteen vessels and aircraft. In first such report since Nov 2021, Japan 27 April announced Chinese navy ship sailed through its territorial waters. Meanwhile, Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi 5 April said he would request raised defence budget for next year to manage Chinese and North Korean challenges. In sign of Japan recalibrating its traditional pacifist stance, ruling Liberal Democratic Party 15 April proposed country acquire enemy base strike capability.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** **North Korea continued weapons testing as Seoul fired submarine-launched missiles, while incoming South Korean president planned early engagement with U.S.** Following launch of intercontinental ballistic missile in March, U.S. 1 April sanctioned five entities it accused of providing support to North Korea's weapons programs. North Korean state media 17 April reported leader Kim Jong Un observed test launch of new tactical guided weapon. South Korea week of 18 April tested two submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) off east coast of Korean Peninsula, in first such test since Sept 2021. Tests coincided with U.S. envoy to North Korea Sung Kim's 18 April visit to South Korea's capital Seoul, where he affirmed U.S. and South Korea would maintain "strongest possible joint deterrent" over Pyongyang's "escalatory actions". U.S. and South Korea same day commenced joint military exercises. North Korea 15 April marked "Day of the Sun" birth anniversary of national founder Kim Il Sung, without major military parade. Modest celebrations in Pyongyang were held in contrast to evidence of satellite images and diplomatic reports of preparations for parade, which went ahead 25 April in celebration of 90th anniversary of army foundation; no major new equipment was shown. President-elect Yoon Suk-Yeol's advisers 4 April commenced visit to U.S. to prepare ground for early summit with U.S. President Biden. Outgoing South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un 20-21 April exchanged letters in likely final communication before Moon leaves office in May; Moon's letter called on Kim to pursue peaceful inter-Korean relations under Yoon's incoming conservative administration; Yoon transition team next day asserted "peace and prosperity" could only come from denuclearisation. South Korean Defence Minister Suh Wook 1 April said South Korean military had "ability to accurately and quickly hit any target in North Korea"; Kim Yo Jong, sister of Kim Jong Un, 3 April condemned remarks as worsening "inter-Korean relations and

military tension”, and 5 April said North Korea opposes war but would use nuclear weapons if attacked, sentiment Kim Jong Un reiterated at parade 25 April.

➔ **Taiwan Strait U.S. maintained strong diplomatic and military support for Taiwan, while China responded with fiery rhetoric and continued aerial incursions into Taiwan’s air defence zone.** In third such package under Biden administration, U.S. State Department 6 April approved potential sale of military equipment, including Patriot Air Defence System, training and other services worth \$95mn to support Taiwanese defence; China same day called arms sale violation of one-China principle. U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi cancelled 9 April Taiwan visit after reportedly testing positive for COVID-19; China had 7 April pledged to “resolutely fight back” if Pelosi visited. Six U.S. legislators 14 April visited Taiwan. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan 15 April said U.S. would “take every step we possibly can to ensure that [China’s invasion of Taiwan] never happens”; Chinese foreign ministry same day said “China must and will be reunified”. U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai 18 April met Taiwanese Minister John Deng to review bilateral trade progress; Taiwan next day said it seeks to join U.S. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Chinese military 15 April conducted destroyer-bomber joint patrol around Taiwan; state media same day said exercise was both warning to Pelosi over any future visit and preparation “for potential, real actions that would resolve the Taiwan question once and for all”. Chinese aircraft continued incursions into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone throughout month, totalling 68 planes as of 27 April. U.S. 7th Fleet Destroyer USS Sampson 26 April sailed through Taiwan Strait; in response, China said that it is one of U.S. “provocative acts that send wrong signals to “Taiwan independence” forces”. Taiwanese Coast Guard 8 April received fourth and fifth of 12 planned locally-made offshore patrol vessels. Taiwanese military 12 April released handbook on civil defence for first time, giving citizens survival guidance in war scenario.

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## **South Asia**

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➔ **Afghanistan Taliban announced farming restrictions which could aggravate economic crisis, series of terror attacks claimed over one hundred civilian casualties, and several new armed resistance groups emerged.** In move that is likely to exacerbate financial woes of many farmers, Taliban 3 April announced ban on cultivation of all poppy crops and production of all other narcotics (including alcohol); implementation remained uncertain. Taliban also reportedly increased interference in humanitarian efforts in April, pushing for aid to be distributed in coordination with govt. After relatively calm months, country witnessed several mass casualty attacks coinciding with Spring season, mostly targeting Shia Hazara ethnic minority, as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) launched some of its deadliest attacks of year. Notably, bomb blasts 2 April killed five and injured at least 20 people on playground in Herat (west); bomb blasts 19 April targeted Hazara children going to school and education centres in capital Kabul; bomb blasts 21 April targeted minivan in Kunduz province (north), killing at least 18 govt employees; ISKP same day attacked Hazara mosque in Balkh province (north), killing dozens; bomb blasts 22 April targeted Sunni mosque, killing 33 in Kunduz province, with no group claiming responsibility; twin explosions 28 April killed at least nine people on two buses in Balkh province (north), again targeting

Hazara. Explosion at Khalifa Sahib Mosque in Kabul 29 April killed over 50 Sunni worshippers. Grievances against Taliban govt appeared to rise, with several new armed resistance groups emerging, bringing total to near dozen such groups active inside country, mostly in northern provinces; National Resistance Front (NRF) led by Ahmad Massoud, Afghanistan Freedom Front (purportedly led by former General Zia Yasin) and High Council for Resistance (led by Atta Noor) appeared to be particularly active. Most notably, NRF attacks and Taliban counter-operations continued in Panjshir, Parwan, Kabul, Kapisa, Baghlan and Takhar provinces in April. Meanwhile, relations with Pakistan worsened. Pakistan 16 April launched cross-border airstrikes, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties in Kunar and Khost provinces (east); Taliban authorities warned Islamabad of dire consequences, while Pakistan accused Taliban of failing to prevent Pakistani Taliban from launching cross-border attacks against Pakistani security forces.

➡ **Bangladesh Tensions between ruling Awami League Party and opposition persisted, authorities continued arrests of suspected jihadist militants, and fires again affected Rohingya refugee camp.** Police 6 April arrested opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Ishraque Hossain while he was protesting price hikes in capital Dhaka, for alleged role in Nov 2020 arson attack in Dhaka; BNP Sec Gen Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir 9 April called Hossain's arrest part of ruling Awami League (AL) Party's "new game" of "arresting opposition leaders and activists in false cases" ahead of general elections due to take place in Dec 2023. BNP 14 April said U.S state dept's 2021 report on govt's human rights practices published 12 April had exposed Awami League govt's "deadly misrule", including sentencing and imprisoning BNP chief Khaleda Zia on political grounds, subverting judicial independence and involving security forces in "killings, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings"; FM Abdul Momen previous day rejected report's findings, stating it was based on "misinformation" from "anti-government propaganda" machines. Meanwhile, authorities 22 April arrested Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Rajshahi district, accused of terrorist activities and conspiring against state; authorities previous day arrested three other Jamaat leaders in Barguna district for allegedly "planning sabotage". Dhaka court 13 April sentenced four Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants to death for 2014 attack of liberal Dhaka University professor. Paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 14 April arrested Harakat-ul-Jihad al-Islami fugitive in Kishoreganj district, who had been sentenced to death in 2014 for attack on Hindu festival in 2001 and 2004 grenade attack that threatened PM Hasina. RAB 25 April arrested suspected Ansar Al-Islam militant in Narail district. FM Abdul Momen 4 April met with U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in Washington DC and called on U.S. to encourage BNP to take part in election process; Momen same day told reporters removal of U.S. sanctions on RAB would take time because U.S. administration process requires clearances from "23 committees" before sanctions can be lifted. In third such incident in four months, fire 4 April broke out in Cox's Bazar's Camp 17, which is part of conglomeration of camps hosting over 600,000 Rohingya refugees, destroying school.

➡ **India Communal violence flared during celebration of Hindu festivals, deadly Maoist activity continued, and govt extended ceasefire with Naga armed groups.** Communal violence and rioting between Hindus and Muslims in states of Delhi, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka 16 April

erupted during celebrations of Hindu festival Hanuman Jayanti. Earlier, celebration of another Hindu festival, Ram Navami, 10 April also led to communal clashes in states as distant as Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand and West Bengal. In both instances Muslim homes and shops were destroyed, preceded by provocative hoisting of Hindu nationalist saffron flags on mosques – suggesting attacks were well-planned rather than spontaneous. Maoist violence continued. Notably, Maoists 10 April hacked police officer to death in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh state (centre); banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) 15 April alleged that security forces targeted them in Bijapur district, using more than 50 bombs within one hour, though there were no deaths or injuries; security forces denied conducting any such airstrikes. Maoists 17 April attacked security camp in Bijapur district with grenades, injuring four security forces personnel. Maoists 18 April allegedly killed 30-year-old man in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district. Govt 20 April extended ceasefire agreement with three Naga (tribes located in Nagaland and Manipur states) militant groups for another year, until 27 April 2023; groups include breakaway factions of powerful anti-govt separatist armed groups NSCN-IM and NSCN-K, namely National Socialist Council of Nagaland-NK (NSCN-NK), National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Reformation (NSCN-R) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-K-Khango (NSCN-K-Khango). Govt interlocuter for talks 19 April met NSCN (IM) general secretary at group's headquarters near Dimapur, Nagaland state (north east); while talks have been ongoing since 1997, progress has remained stalled as NSCN-IM refuses to give up demand for separate flag and constitution for Nagas.

➔ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Indian PM Modi and Pakistan's new PM Sharif exchanged conciliatory messages, while militant attacks and security operations persisted in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).** Indian PM Narendra Modi 12 April congratulated newly elected Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif, calling for “constructive engagement”; Sharif 17 April responded by urging resolution of Kashmir dispute in “interest of mutual peace and prosperity”. Previously, at “Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue”, sides 11 April “strongly condemned any use of terrorist proxies and cross-border terrorism” and called on Pakistan to take “irreversible action” to ensure its territory is not used to launch terror attacks; Islamabad 13 April rejected “unwarranted” reference to “some non-existent and dismantled entities”. India's Minister of Home Affairs Nityanand Rai 6 April told parliament militants have killed 14 Hindus, including four Kashmiri Pandits, since govt repealed Article 370 in Aug 2019. India's National Investigative Agency 8 April filed charges against 25 people accused of targeted killings in Kashmir and blamed Pakistan-based terrorist organisations for “deep-rooted conspiracy to spread terrorism” and radicalise youth in J&K. India's Ministry of Home Affairs 8 April designated son of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) chief Hafiz Saeed as terrorist under Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act; 14 April also designated Al-Umar-Mujahideen founder Mushtaq Ahmad Zarg as terrorist. Counter-insurgency operations and militant attacks continued in J&K. Security operation 9 April killed two alleged LeT militants in Anantnag and Kulgam districts; 10 April killed two alleged Pakistani militants in Srinagar district; 11 April killed two militants in Kulgam district; 14 April killed four alleged LeT militants in Shopian district; 16 April killed security personnel in Anantnag district; 21 April killed alleged LeT commander in Baramulla district. Militants 4 April killed security force in Srinagar; 15 April killed village level elected representative in Baramulla district; 18 April killed security force personnel in Pulwama district. Security forces 1 and 3 April arrested three alleged militant

associates of Jaish-e-Muhammad in Pulwama district and five alleged LeT associates in Bandipora district.

➔ **Nepal Political parties remained fixated on local elections slated for mid-May amid signs of looming economic crisis.** Five-party ruling alliance 20 April reached deal dividing up mayoral and deputy mayoral candidacies for 17 key local election races planned for 13 May; several local leaders of ruling Nepali Congress criticised move, claiming PM Sher Bahadur Deuba had made decision unilaterally without consulting party's wider membership. Meanwhile, fears grew of potential economic crisis due to increase in inflation, decrease in remittances, and growing balance of payment deficit, all of which have created multiple pressures on Nepal's import-reliant economy. Central Bank 12 April reported that inflation was over 7 per cent (highest levels in nearly five years), balance of payment deficit was over \$2bn, and foreign exchange reserves were sufficient for fewer than seven months. Finance Minister Janardan Sharma 8 April suspended Central Bank governor for supposed incompetence and leaking of sensitive information in move widely perceived as politically-motivated given governor was appointed by previous KP Oli-led govt; Sharma 11 April also dismissed concerns of potential crisis as misinformation.

➔ **Pakistan After losing no-confidence vote, former PM Khan called on supporters to reject new govt, risking further political and anti-West violence amid surge in militant attacks.** Deputy speaker 3 April dismissed no-confidence vote in PM Khan and president of National Assembly same day dissolved assembly and retained Khan as interim PM; Supreme Court 7 April ruled both decisions were unconstitutional and called for no-trust vote to be held. Nine-party joint opposition spearheaded by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) 10 April ousted Khan through vote of no-confidence; assembly next day elected Shehbaz Sharif as PM in absence of ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers, who, with exception of around two dozen dissidents, had resigned en masse. In attempt to undermine new govt's legitimacy, Khan 10 April called for nationwide protests against "foreign conspiracy of regime change"; protests same day took place in Peshawar, Karachi, and Lahore cities, as large crowds chanted anti-U.S. slogans. Khan's supporters on social media criticised military leadership for failing to prevent Khan's ouster. Political infighting engulfed Punjab province after Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar resigned late March; PTI and aligned PML-Q (Pakistan Muslim League –Quaid-e-Azam) parliamentarians rejected election of PM Sharif's son on 16 April; Punjab governor's refusal, despite Lahore High Court's advice, to administer oath to Hamza Sharif left province without functional govt. Meanwhile, attacks by Pakistani Taliban militants on security personnel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, particularly near Afghan border, escalated sharply. Notably, militant attack 14 April killed seven soldiers in North Waziristan district near Afghan border, where another attack killed three soldiers 23 April. Two separate militant attacks 11 and 12 April killed officer and soldier in South Waziristan district and five police officers in Dera Ismail Khan district. Spike in attacks and military casualties strained Islamabad's relations with Afghan Taliban govt, which 16 April claimed that Pakistani military planes had bombed villages in Kunar and Khost provinces, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties, including women and children. Balochistan Liberation Army 26 April claimed suicide attack

on Karachi university, killing three Chinese teachers and injuring another; group next day warned of more attacks on Chinese targets.

➔ **Sri Lanka Unprecedented multi-class, multi-ethnic protest movement demanded Rajapaksa govt's resignation, as fears rose over prolonged political standoff and Central Bank announced first ever default.** Following unrest late March when crowds attempted to storm President Rajapaksa's private residence, govt 1 April declared state of emergency followed by two-day island-wide curfew and shutdown of social media networks; moves triggered fierce resistance to orders, forcing govt to reverse course. Tens of thousands 4 April took to streets in multiple locations. Thousands since 9 April peacefully camped outside president's offices in central Colombo, with daily protests across island. In coordinated tactical retreat designed to restore govt credibility, all govt ministers 3 April resigned. President Rajapaksa next day appointed new four-member cabinet, headed by brother Mahinda as PM; move failed to quell unrest, as parliamentary opposition 4 April rejected president's offer to form unity govt. Over 40 allied lawmakers 5 April withdrew support from govt, putting ruling party's parliamentary majority in doubt. Main opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) 21 April tabled bill with constitutional reforms, including to end system of executive presidency and return to full parliamentary system; parallel efforts to gain majority for no-confidence vote against govt were unsuccessful. President Rajapaksa 18 April appointed new cabinet, which failed to placate protesters. In 29 April meeting with 11-party group of former govt allies, president reportedly agreed to form interim govt with new PM. Police 19 April fired on crowds protesting fuel price increases, killing one and wounding two dozen. President Rajapaksa, under domestic and international pressure, 20 April promised impartial inquiry; incident renewed fears president and his allies in security forces may turn to widespread repression as means to retain power. Govt efforts to secure international financial relief continued. Central Bank 12 April announced suspending repayments of foreign debt, effectively declaring country's bankruptcy and first-ever default. Govt 18-19 April held first substantive talks with International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and 20 April indicated talks were at early stage. India 20 April announced willingness to supply additional \$500mn credit line for fuel purchases.

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## **South East Asia**

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➔ **Myanmar Deadly fighting between Tatmadaw and resistance forces continued, while China demonstrated public support for regime.** April saw profusion of military raids and clashes between regime and locally-organised people's defence forces (PDFs). Notably, in Magway region regime forces 2-4 April raided villages in Yesogyo township, destroying at least 120 homes and killing elderly man; resistance groups 2-3 April clashed with military, reportedly killing commanding officer and injuring at least three soldiers in Myaing township. Elsewhere in Myaung township, 22 resistance groups 2-3 April led combined assault against military, reportedly killing 12 soldiers. In Sagaing region, regime forces 3 April raided village in Khin-U township, burning 200 homes; in Pinlebu township, Kachin Independence Army and PDF fighters 30 March-10 April clashed with regime forces, capturing key buildings before withdrawing under aerial bombardment from military; resistance forces reportedly detained at least eight

soldiers, while fighting killed at least 13 civilians and resistance fighters and displaced some 1,000 civilians. In Kayin State, Karen National Liberation Army fighters 4 April clashed with regime forces at two locations along Kawkaik-Myawaddy stretch of so-called Asian Highway connecting Myanmar and Thailand. National Unity Govt (NUG), PDFs and ethnic armed groups 10 April congratulated Arakan Army (AA) on anniversary of foundation, underscoring growing power of group; AA leader warned that forces should “be ready to go to war”, raising possibility of renewed fighting between AA and regime forces in Rakhine state. Festivities were subdued at official Thingyan (Myanmar New Year) events 13-17 April, as resistance groups urged boycott; military 17 April announced release of 1,619 prisoners; monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma said 10,238 people were in detention for coup-related offences as of 15 April. NUG 7 April claimed responsibility for shooting Central Bank Deputy Governor. Naypyitaw court 27 April sentenced deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi to five years imprisonment in first of 11 pending corruption cases. Meanwhile, State Administration Council (SAC) FM Wunna Maung 1 April met Chinese FM Wang Yi in Huangshan city, China; in strongest public backing of regime to date, China declared it “will always support Myanmar in safeguarding sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity”.

➤ **Philippines Clashes between authorities and militants continued in south, while lethal violence between govt and communist rebels rose, leaving at least 25 dead.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, clashes between militants and authorities continued through month. Notably, in Basilan province military 2 April launched operation against alleged members of Abu Sayyaf Group in Sumisip town, causing two militant casualties; Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) claimed some of targeted fighters were its own, in second such claim made by MILF in two months following clashes between military and alleged Abu Sayyaf Group militants. In Shariff Saydona Mustapha town, military 18 April killed MILF combatant in Datu Kilay village after rebels allegedly fired upon military; MILF accused govt of raiding community. Both incidents come amid stable but stalled peace process. Govt 8 April extended mandate of International Monitoring Team monitoring peace process with MILF until end of June 2022. Militant surrenders from other armed groups continued during April. Notably, two Abu Sayyaf Group militants 5 April laid down arms in Sulu province, while govt figures 12 April showed two Islamic State-affiliated Maute Group militants surrendered in Piagapo municipality, Lanao del Sur province. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist New People’s Army continued; in marked uptick from March, violence in Mindanao Island in south, Visayas Islands in centre and Luzon Island in north led to at least 25 combatant and civilian fatalities. In Marawi province, presidential candidate and son of former dictator Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. 2 April expressed confidence in rebuilding Marawi city before President Duterte steps down in June. Duterte 27 April signed into law measure that will provide tax-free monetary compensation for people who died and lost their properties during Marawi events in 2018. Preparations continued for general election scheduled for 9 May; polling conducted mid-to-late month showed Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. with comfortable lead in presidential race.

➔ **South China Sea** **Beijing stepped up diplomatic engagement with Philippines, while Manila and Tokyo expanded defence cooperation.**

Ahead of Philippines election in May, Chinese FM Wang Yi 3 April met Filipino FM Teodoro Locsin, urging Manila to avoid external “disturbances” to its China policy and prevent tension over South China Sea (SCS) disputes. Filipino President Duterte 8 April spoke to Chinese President Xi; both leaders called for restraint in SCS. Meeting coincided with conclusion of U.S.-Philippines Balikatan Exercise on 8 April involving 8,900 troops and aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln – largest iteration of annual joint drill since 2015. Japan and Philippines 9 April agreed to expand defence cooperation following first “2+2” meeting of foreign and defence ministers; official statement condemned “unlawful maritime claims, militarisation, coercive activities and threat or use of force” in SCS, without naming specific countries. China’s J-20 stealth fighter manufacturer 13 April confirmed jets had begun to be used to patrol SCS, generating concern among regional powers over balance of air in region amid growing militarisation. Chinese navy 23 April celebrated its 73rd anniversary 23 April and announced commissioning second Type 075 amphibious assault ship and sixth Type 055 large destroyer, as well as hinting that third aircraft carrier will be revealed soon.

↑ **Thailand** **Govt and main militant separatist group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) advanced peace talks and agreed to Ramadan ceasefire, notwithstanding continued deadly violence in deep south.**

Govt and BRN 31 March-1 April met for dialogue, with BRN for first time sending member of military wing, Deng Awaeji – indicating BRN effort to demonstrate internal unity. Both sides endorsed General Principles of Peace Dialogue Process previously discussed in Jan working group meeting, committing each side to “political solutions in accordance with the will of the Patani community under the Unitary State of Thailand in accordance with the Constitution”, public consultation and reduction of violence; both parties also agreed to reducing violence from 3 April to 14 May in Ramadan Peace Initiative. Despite pledge holding steady, violence continued in deep south throughout month. Notably, unidentified gunmen 5 April shot dead Malay-Muslim man in Mae Kaen district, Pattani province. Unidentified gunmen 10 April shot and killed Muslim leader in Nong Chik district, Pattani. IED 15 April killed civilian in Saiburi district, with second bomb targeting responding explosive ordnance disposal officers, wounding three; Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) president Kasturi Mahkota 16 April claimed responsibility, saying group named PULO G5 carried out attack due to PULO’s exclusion from BRN dialogue with govt. Member of Thai dialogue delegation next day said attack would not derail Ramadan Peace Initiative and that govt was “ready and happy to talk to all groups”. Meanwhile in capital Bangkok, unknown assailants 10 April threw two “ping pong bombs” into First Infantry Regiment compound, location of PM’s residence, with no injuries reported; police next day arrested seven suspects, including rapper and political activist Thanayuth Na Ayutthaya (alias Eleven Fingers), Patima Fakthong, and pro-democracy protest leader Pornpoj Chaengkrachang (alias Phet Phra Uma), along with four minors.

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## **Pacific**

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➔ **Solomon Islands Authorities signed security pact with Beijing, which provoked concern among U.S. and its allies over potential future Chinese military presence on islands.** After leaked draft surfaced in March of security pact between govt and China, which reportedly included provision on establishing permanent Chinese military base on islands, govt 1 April announced that it “is conscious of the security ramification of hosting a military base, and it will not be careless to allow such initiative to take place under its watch”. News of pact triggered international concern among U.S. and its allies. U.S. Deputy Sec of State Wendy Sherman 12 April held call with FM Jeremiah Manele about reopening U.S. embassy in capital Honiara after 29 years. Australian envoy next day visited Honiara and met PM Manasseh Sogavare, requesting govt “respectfully to consider not signing the agreement” with Beijing. Sogavare 20 April confirmed deal had been signed with China. U.S. National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink 22 April visited Honiara and met Sogavare; statement following meeting said U.S. would have “significant concerns and respond accordingly” if “steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation”. Australian PM Scott Morrison 24 April described Chinese military base as “red line” for Australia. Japanese Vice FM Kentaro Uesugi 26 April met Sogavare, reportedly expressing Japan’s concern over security pact.