



## Asia

---

### North East Asia

---

➔ **China/Japan** China maintained maritime presence in East China Sea and conducted drills with Russia, as Japan and NATO deepened ties.

*Military activity continued in East China Sea.* As of 25 July, Japan had spotted 98 Chinese vessels in its contiguous zone over course of month, detecting six vessels in its territorial sea over just two days. Chinese flotilla comprising five warships 16 July set off to join Russian naval and air forces in drill in Sea of Japan aimed at “safeguarding the security of strategic waterways”, according to China’s defence ministry; China and Russia 23 July completed joint naval drill Northern/Interaction 2023 in Sea of Japan. Following four-year hiatus due to coronavirus pandemic, exchange program between Japanese and Chinese military personnel 16 July resumed. At NATO summit in Lithuania on 12 July, NATO and Japan announced new partnership program intending to advance cooperation in areas such as cybersecurity and to increase NATO’s engagement in Indo-Pacific region. Chinese embassy in Japan 24 July said NATO’s plan to expand into region violates UN rules and urged Tokyo to avoid actions that jeopardise trust.

*China protested Japan’s activities at nuclear plant.* China announced its opposition to Japan releasing treated water from its Fukushima nuclear plant as both China and Hong Kong placed restrictions on seafood imports from Japan; Japan has cited International Atomic Energy Agency assessment that its activities are consistent with international safety standards and that treated water will have negligible radiological impact on people and environment.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** North Korea successfully tested solid-fuelled inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) for second time and threatened to down U.S. spy jets, while U.S. serviceman defected to north.

*North Korea launched solid-fuelled ICBM.* Pyongyang 12 July launched its three-stage solid-fuelled Hwasong-18 ICBM for second time after first launch in April; missile, which marked most lofted North Korean ICBM flight test to date and one with longest flight time at 74 minutes, fell into sea east of Japanese territory. Justifying launch, Pyongyang cited various frustrations related to U.S. and South Korea, including Washington Declaration announced in April, Nuclear Consultative Group and deployment of U.S. strategic assets to peninsula. North Korea 24 July fired two short-range ballistic missiles into waters off eastern coast.

*North Korea threatened to down U.S. spy planes.* Kim Jong-un's sister Yo-jong in vitriolic statement 10 July warned that North Korea would shoot down U.S. reconnaissance aircraft that violate country's claimed exclusive economic zone, following earlier statement published by defence ministry. Both statements accused U.S. of "crossing the Korean Maritime Military Demarcation Line", referring to inter-Korean maritime border, "and invading [DPRK's] economic zone from the sea"; Kim's statement asserted U.S. had violated North's Exclusive Economic Zone on 10 July, entering periphery of 200-nautical mile zone in far south east; U.S. denied allegations.

*U.S. serviceman fled across border to North Korea.* Private Second-Class Travis King, 23-year-old U.S. serviceman, 18 July fled across inter-Korean border during tour of Korean War truce village of Panmunjom, marking first defection to North Korea by member of U.S. military in decades. North Korea did not comment on case during July.

*Chinese and Russian delegations visited North Korea.* On anniversary of North's "victory" in Korean War on 27 July, Russian delegation led by Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chinese delegation led by Politburo member Li Hongzhong visited North Korea, marking first high-level visits to Pyongyang from any country since outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic; trips also signalled Beijing and Moscow's implacable support for North Korea.

➡ **Taiwan Strait China maintained military activities around island and vowed stern response as presidential candidate of Taiwan's ruling party planned U.S. visit in August, raising prospect of heightened tensions.**

*China continued military activity as Taiwan held military drills.* As of 26 July, Taiwan during month had spotted 411 Chinese military aircraft entering its air defence identification zone (ADIZ), of which at least 156 either crossed unofficial maritime demarcation "median line" or were detected in south-western ADIZ; Taiwan detected 162 Chinese navy vessels in surrounding waters throughout month. Notably, China 21-22 July sent 37 aircraft and seven navy vessels around Taiwan. Earlier, Taiwan 3-4 July test fired anti-tank and Stinger missiles. China 12-14 July conducted large-scale exercises with fighter jets, bombers and warships south and south west of island; during drill, U.S. Navy patrol plane flew through Taiwan Strait. Taiwan's army 13 July deployed armoured vehicles, drones and Javelin anti-tank missiles while rehearsing for anti-landing drill scheduled for 27 July in Bali, New Taipei – beach vulnerable to attack by China. Taiwan 24-27 July held its annual Han Kuang military exercises. U.S. House of Representatives 14 July passed National Defense Authorization Act 2024, \$876.8bn bill that includes provisions for U.S. to "help Taiwan meet its self-defense needs."

*Beijing warned of strong reaction to U.S. visit by ruling party official.* Beijing lodged formal protest with Washington over ruling Democratic Progressive Party's presidential candidate William Lai Ching-te's planned stopover in U.S. in August en route to Paraguay, vowing "strong and resolute" action in response to "U.S. indulging and supporting Taiwan independence separatists". In response, U.S. Sec of State Antony Blinken cautioned Beijing against using transit as "pretext for provocative action"; China's warnings raise prospect of increased military activity.

*Taiwan's opposition articulated interpretation of "1992 consensus".* Kuomintang presidential nominee Hou Yu-ih 4 July affirmed his support for version of "1992 consensus" echoing party's long-held position of "one China, different interpretations"; he stated opposition to both "one country, two systems" and President Tsai Ing-wen's "stigmatisation" of consensus. William Lai Ching-te same day proposed four "pillars" of peace, beginning with Taiwan continuing to build up its defence capabilities.

---

## **South Asia**

---

➡ **Afghanistan** Countrywide violence remained at low ebb as UN warned of worsening humanitarian crisis, Taliban imposed new restrictions on women, and tensions grew with Pakistan.

*Shia religious commemoration passed without Islamic State attacks.* Amid Shia religious commemoration of Ashura, during which Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) targeted Shia Hazaras in past, interim authorities 18 July announced restrictions on large gatherings ostensibly as precaution against ISKP attacks. While ISKP did not claim attacks during July, British media 11 July reported arrest of two British brothers planning to travel to Afghanistan to join ISKP and Iran 21 July claimed senior Islamic State leaders from Iraq, Syria and Libya had moved to Afghanistan; Taliban rejected claim.

*UN sounded alarm over humanitarian crises.* UN early July stated that critical funding gaps were threatening country's humanitarian program; World Food Programme had stopped giving assistance to 8m food-insecure Afghans and additional 1.4m new and expecting mothers, toddlers and pre-schoolers are no longer receiving food. Additionally, estimated 7.6m people will lack access to life-saving health care. Acting FM Amir Khan Muttaqi 8 July dismissed claims country is facing economic crisis as "propaganda".

*Taliban imposed new draconian restrictions on women.* Minister for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice 2 July announced that approximately 12,000 beauty salons would be closed countrywide, which will cost 60,000 women their jobs. As authorities late July began enforcing ban, dozens of women who work in salons protested decree in capital Kabul, prompting security forces to disperse crowd with water cannons and firing in air. Afghan Examination Authority 19 July barred women from annual university entrance exams.

*Militant attacks in Pakistan strained Taliban-Pakistan relations.* Following deadly attacks on military installations in Pakistan's Baluchistan province mid-July (see Pakistan), senior Pakistani officials criticised Taliban for harbouring Pakistani Taliban (TTP). Taliban Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoub 21 July stated TTP relocated to Afghanistan during U.S. "occupation" and prior to Taliban takeover, Pakistan had never accused U.S.-backed Afghan govt of complicity in TTP activities. Pakistan's special envoy for Afghanistan 19 July met with Taliban FM.

➡ **Bangladesh** Anti-govt rallies ahead of 2024 elections turned violent, deadly power struggle persisted in Rohingya camps, and ethnic militant group agreed to ceasefire in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

*Tensions between govt and opposition turned violent.* Ahead of polls slated for Jan 2024, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) 12 July gathered approximately 50,000 supporters in capital Dhaka, demanding govt's resignation and caretaker govt to oversee elections. Ruling Awami League same day held rally in Dhaka, reiterating PM Sheikh Hasina would oversee polls. BNP and Awami League 18-19 July held rallies in Dhaka and other cities, resulting in clashes that killed one BNP supporter and injured hundreds in Lakshmipur city; police claimed BNP supporters attacked officers and filed charges against 8,000 countrywide. Opposition accused police of arresting more than 500 supporters before "grand rally" in Dhaka on 28 July. Police 29 July violently clashed in Dhaka with BNP supporters. During Dhaka by-election, Awami League supporters 17 July allegedly attacked independent candidate as police stood by, fuelling opposition claims that free elections under govt are impossible. Twelve Western countries 19 July condemned violence against candidate; Dhaka 26 July summoned their ambassadors in protest. Police 20 July denied Jamaat-e-Islami permission to hold rally in Sylhet, citing threat of violence; police 28 July detained 21 Jamaat supporters in Chattogram.

*Deadly feuding between armed groups continued in Rohingya camps.* Clashes between Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation spiked. Ahead of visit by International Criminal Court prosecutor 6 July, ARSA allegedly killed sub-mahji facilitating meetings; Rohingya Solidarity Organisation next morning allegedly killed at least five ARSA members in retaliation. Camp violence has killed at least 48 Rohingya refugees in 2023, up from 40 in 2022. After UN coordinator 18 July raised security concerns, home affairs minister said govt was considering sending army to camps. Despite recent increases in U.S., EU, UK and Australian funding, Joint Response Plan remained chronically underfunded; health NGOs have warned of scabies outbreak.

*Local authorities in Chittagong Hill Tracts struck truce with militants.* Ethnic insurgent group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) 19 July agreed to ceasefire after negotiations with Bandarban District Council, with further talks likely; KNF emerged in mid-2022 and has killed at least five soldiers in recent months.

➡ **India Manipur state in far north east remained restive amid mounting evidence of widespread sexual violence, while tensions with China persisted over disputed Himalayan border.**

*Evidence of widespread sexual violence in Manipur sparked national outrage.* Video 19 July went viral showing mob of Meitei men parading and sexually assaulting two naked Kuki women on 4 May – one day after ethnic clashes erupted; families of assaulted women said they had filed case in May but no action had been taken. Internet shutdown had prevented evidence from surfacing but Manipur's chief minister 20 July said there were "hundreds of such cases" of sexual violence. Responding to shocking video, PM Modi 20 July finally addressed situation in Manipur but veered into vague political rhetoric. Meanwhile, region remained restive: Meitei men 6 July shot dead elderly Kuki woman, while radical Meitei outfit Arambai Tenggol 7 July allegedly killed and mutilated woman from Maring Naga community; following latter's killing, police arrested nine Meitei men, likely to prevent Naga tribes – which have largely remained on sidelines of unrest – from becoming involved.

*Relations with China remained fraught amid high-level meeting.* In third meeting since March, FM S. Jaishankar 14 July met Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on sidelines of East Asia Summit in Indonesia's capital Jakarta; Jaishankar called for troop disengagement along two remaining friction points on Line of Actual Control, while Wang Yi hoped to find solution "acceptable to both sides"; two sides agreed to hold military commander talks soon. Meanwhile, councillor from Ladakh's Chushul area 10 July alleged Chinese troops had erected four tents in eastern Ladakh's "buffer zone" and 12 July removed them following Indian army's objections.

*India boosted defence ties with France and U.S.* PM Modi 13-14 July visited France and finalised several arms deals, including purchase of 26 Rafale Marine fighter jets. U.S. 20 July said it was working with India on co-producing advanced weaponry to address China's "coercion and harassment".

➔ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) India approved land allotment scheme in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), Supreme Court addressed case challenging autonomy revocation, and security operations against militants continued.**

*India and Pakistan exchanged stern rhetoric.* India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh 26 July asserted "We can go to any extreme to maintain the honour and dignity of the country", and referenced "crossing the [Line of Contact]"; Pakistan same day replied India's practices of "stoking hyper-nationalism and reaping electoral gains need to end".

*Local politicians challenged central govt plan to allot land to landless people.* Federally run authorities of J&K 3 July approved plan to give 1,360 sq ft of land to each person identified under landless scheme; former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti 5 July alleged govt wanted to "settle outsiders" and "import slums", citing 2021 census that showed J&K's homeless population was only 19,045; govt clarified only 2,711 people on 2018-2019 list would receive land, but Mufti's party maintained govt's figures showing spike in homelessness were inflated. Given that land remains highly contentious issue in region, allotment policy could have far-reaching implications, such as legitimising militancy.

*Supreme Court prepared to hear Article 370 case.* Supreme Court 11 July announced that from 2 August it would hear petitions in case challenging federal govt's 2019 decision to revoke special semi-autonomous status of J&K known as Article 370 and bifurcate J&K into two federally administered Union Territories. Govt 10 July filed affidavit claiming J&K has witnessed "unprecedented era of peace, progress and prosperity" since 2019; court, however, said filing would have "no bearing on the constitutional challenge" regarding revocation.

*Govt continued anti-militant operations.* Security forces 10 July foiled infiltration attempt from Pakistan and killed two militants in Rajouri district. Security forces 12 July arrested five Lashkar-e-Tayyeba associates in Budgam district. Militants 13 and 18 July killed five migrant labourers in Shopian and Anantnag districts. Militants 18 July killed one forest guard in Pulwama district. Security forces same day killed four militants attempting to infiltrate Poonch district; numerous infiltration attempts may indicate militants seeking to take advantage of inclement weather and annual Hindu pilgrimage to Amarnath cave that diverted security forces' attention.

➡ **Pakistan Govt maintained intense pressure on former PM Imran Khan as elections approached, while Islamic State killed dozens in suicide attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa amid spate of militant assaults.**

*Imran Khan faced raft of allegations and court cases.* Islamabad High Court 4 July ruled that case alleging Khan had concealed details of gifts received during his term as PM was “inadmissible” but Supreme Court 26 July rejected Khan’s plea to halt criminal proceedings. Supreme Court Registrar 10 July rejected petition to dissolve Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party following 9 May unrest; reports continued that govt was contemplating trying Khan and other PTI leaders in military courts for alleged roles in May unrest. Prosecutor 21 July told Anti-Terrorism Court Lahore that Khan was “guilty of inciting attacks” on military installations on 9 May, per Punjab police investigation; judge extended Khan’s pre-arrest bail until 8 August. In further blow to Khan, 57 members of PTI 17 July left to form new party ahead of elections. Interior minister 20 July warned Khan could be arrested if he did not cooperate with investigations into alleged use of diplomatic channels for political purposes; defence minister 21 July said Khan could be charged with treason and disqualified from election. Supreme Court 24 July barred authorities from arresting Khan until 9 August in case pertaining to killing of lawyer.

*Deadly militant attacks roiled provinces bordering Afghanistan.* In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Bajaur district, Islamic State suicide bomber 30 July detonated explosives at political rally of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party, killing at least 54 people and wounding 200. Elsewhere in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 20 July shot dead two police officers in Peshawar’s Regi Model Town area Two TTP suicide bombers 20 July attacked govt compound in province’s Bara neighbourhood, killing four police officers. In Balochistan province, TTP 2 July killed four security personnel after storming highway checkpoint in Zhob district. Militants belonging to newly established Tehreek-e Jihad Pakistan 12 July assaulted military base in Zhob, killing nine soldiers. Amid surge in attacks, Pakistan’s army 14 July expressed concern about militant safe havens in Afghanistan, vowing “effective response” (see Afghanistan).

➡ **Sri Lanka Govt hoped to show commitment to inter-ethnic reconciliation with new policies, which Tamil leaders, families of disappeared and rights groups criticised; govt pursued economic reforms.**

*Govt unveiled policies purportedly to resolve country’s ethnic conflict.* Ahead of President Wickremesinghe’s official visit to India 20-21 July, govt announced series of mostly repackaged policies designed to demonstrate its commitment to inter-ethnic reconciliation and lasting political solution to ethnic conflict. In meeting with Tamil parliamentarians on 18 July, Wickremesinghe presented 15-page document listing policies on land, detainees, missing persons, reparations and development initiatives for Northern and Eastern provinces; govt also included plan to strengthen provincial powers, established in Thirteenth Amendment that was drafted in 1987. Tamil leaders, who have almost universally criticised Thirteenth Amendment as inadequate, 18 July rejected proposal, which fell short of full implementation. Discussions at all-party meeting convened by president 26 July indicated lack of parliamentary consensus for his plans. Meanwhile, govt held series of meetings on proposed National Unity and Reconciliation Commission; families of forcibly

disappeared and human rights organisations denounced plan as designed to win international support without addressing underlying factors that generated civil war. Sinhala nationalist activists 23 July disrupted peaceful commemoration of 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo, which riot police later violently dispersed.

*Parliament endorsed govt's debt plan and economic reforms.* Parliament 1 July approved govt's Domestic Debt Restructuring plan, designed to complement and encourage debt restructuring with international creditors that is needed to meet International Monetary Fund (IMF) target for debt reduction; plan has generated widespread criticism for effectively imposing losses on workers' retirement funds while leaving banks and their shareholders untouched. In brief visit 28 July, French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated support for expedited debt restructuring and economic recovery, a message echoed by Japanese FM Hayashi Yoshimasa during 29 July meeting with Wickremesinghe. Further progress was made in achieving reforms required by IMF's bailout plan as parliament 19 July passed anti-corruption bill and bill to guarantee independence of Central Bank.

---

## **South East Asia**

---

➔ **Cambodia Ruling party won national election that excluded opposition and leader Hun Sen announced resignation after 38 years in power.**

PM Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) claimed "landslide" victory in national elections held 23 July. U.S. same day called polls "neither free nor fair" and EU next day criticised elections that were held in "restricted political and civic space" and "excluded important sectors of the opposition"; Election Commission in May had ruled that main opposition Candlelight Party could not partake in polls on "concocted administrative grounds", according to Human Rights Watch. Hun Sen 26 July announced resignation as PM after almost four decades in power and intention to hand position to his son Hun Manet on 10 August, but said he would continue as head of ruling party.

➔ **Myanmar Regime troops battled resistance forces, junta extended state of emergency and delayed election, and Thai FM visited deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi in first contact since her 2021 detention.**

*Clashes continued in several parts of country between military and ethnic armed groups and post-coup resistance forces.* In south east, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and its allies continued to target roads and bridges. Following late June attack on bridge between Mon State's Thaton township and Bago region's Kyaukkyi township that killed four regime officials, KNLA and People's Defence Forces 6 July blew up 20m bridge from Kyaikto town to Kyaiktiyo Pagoda. In Kachin state (north), following mounting tensions amid growing military deployments in area, fighting early July erupted in area close to Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) headquarters, displacing around 500; military helicopter 8 July attacked KIO position as sides clashed for several days along main road from state capital Myitkyina to Chinese border. In Shan state (north), KIO launched offensive on Kutkai township, clashing with regime for first time in five months. In Yangon,

regime security forces 7 July shot two men arrested on suspicion of involvement in killing of pro-junta singer; activists alleged soldiers executed them.

*Regime hinted elections delay until 2025 before extending state of emergency.* Junta immigration and population minister Myint Kyaing 2 July said 2024 census and national ID cards are required for voter lists, suggesting national election will only take place after Oct 2024 census sometime in 2025; junta 31 July extended state of emergency by six months.

*Regime granted first meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, and discussed border unrest with India.* Thailand's FM Don Pramudwinai 11 July announced he met deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyitaw prison two days earlier. Statement by regional bloc ASEAN ahead of 14 July meeting said some members considered Don's efforts "positive development", implying others do not. Senior Indian officials 30 June-1 July met regime counterparts in Naypyitaw to discuss crime and unrest along shared border amid allegations that Kukis in India's Manipur state have received support from Chin brethren in Myanmar (see India).

➡ **Philippines Political and criminal violence continued in south, while military battled communist rebels.**

*Insecurity persisted in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.* In Jolo town, Sulu province, police 3 July busted gang that allegedly peddled illegal drugs and gave part of its earnings to Abu Sayyaf Group. Unidentified gunmen 12 July ambushed former mayor of Rajah Buayan municipality and her father in Lambayong town, Sultan Kudarat. Gun attack 13 July killed retired police officer and wounded his wife and brother-in-law in Isabela City, Basilan province. In Maguindanao, military 13 July seized camp of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters unit in village of Salman, Ampatuan town, Maguindanao del Sur province.

*Clashes continued between military and Communist militants.* Hostilities between military and communist New People's Army in Luzon Island in north (Bicol), Mindanao Island in south (Bukidnon, Caraga), and Visayas Islands in centre, especially Negros Occidental, killed at least eight combatants and civilians and injured one.

*Marawi rehabilitation continued.* Marawi Compensation Board 4 July began accepting compensation claims from families who lost properties and family members during 2017 Marawi siege; board chairperson said it has so far received around 12,000 claims for July and August.

➡ **South China Sea Philippines protested China's "dangerous" maritime harassment in South China Sea (SCS) as U.S. and EU showed support for Manila, while Beijing and ASEAN discussed code of conduct.**

*Tensions persisted between China and Philippines.* Philippine Coast Guard 6 July accused Chinese coast guard of "dangerous manoeuvres", as Philippine ships were "constantly followed, harassed and obstructed by the significantly larger Chinese coast guard vessels" near Second Thomas Shoal. In response to Chinese activities, Philippine Coast Guard 7 July said it will intensify patrols in Iroquois Reef, while military 13 July said it will deploy more assets to Kalayaan island group, eastern part of Spratly archipelago. China announced large no-sail zone for military exercises 29



July-2 August, spanning area including Paracel Islands and Macclesfield Bank. U.S. *Ronald Reagan* Carrier Strike Group 4 July transited SCS after conducting port visit to Vietnam 25 June.

*Manila received diplomatic support for position in SCS dispute.* Philippines 12 July marked seventh anniversary of its legal victory over China on South China Sea Arbitration at the Hague Tribunal, as FM Enrique Manalo said Tribunal's decision affirmed correctness of Philippines taking "the path of principle, the rule of law and the peaceful settlement of disputes"; U.S. and EU reaffirmed their support and stressed that ruling is legally binding. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen 31 July declared readiness "to strengthen the cooperation with the Philippines on maritime security in the region", following meeting with President Marcos, Jr. in Manila.

*Beijing and regional bloc inched toward code of conduct.* China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 13 July completed second reading of code of conduct for SCS at ASEAN Regional Forum. Joint working group had missed 2022 deadline to reach agreement but agreed to attempt to conclude accord within three years.

➔ **Thailand Parliament blocked election-winning Move Forward Party (MFP) from leading next govt, sparking protests in capital Bangkok as prospect of MFP's dissolution grew; insecurity persisted in deep south.**

*MFP failed to win parliamentary majority amid pressure from establishment.* MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat 13 July fell short in bid to become Thailand's 30th PM, securing 324 votes in lower house but support of only thirteen senators. As MFP sought to amend Article 112 of Criminal Code, or lèse-majesté law, to reduce penalties and permit only palace to lodge complaints, Constitutional Court 12 July accepted petition that claimed amendment was tantamount to attempt to overthrow democratic system with king as head of state. Election Commission 12 July referred to Constitutional Court case alleging Pita violated election law by running for office when he was aware that he was ineligible, which could result in up to three years' imprisonment. Pita 15 July said he would step aside and allow coalition partner Pheu Thai to take lead in forming next govt if he failed to win second round of voting. During second round on 19 July, parliamentarians voted that Pita could not be renominated because of regulation that prohibits resubmission of failed motion in same session; Constitutional Court same day suspended Pita from parliamentary duties while it decided election law case. MFP supporters 19 July gathered in Bangkok to signal displeasure with Constitutional Court, Election Commission and senate; further protests of hundreds occurred at various Bangkok locations over following days. Constitutional Court 25 July accepted petition to rule on constitutionality of second vote.

*Insecurity persisted in deep south.* Fourth Region Army commander Lt Gen Santi Sakuntanark 1 July said army planned to reduce troop numbers in four southernmost provinces and lift state of emergency over next four years. In Pattani province, dozens of rangers and police 5 July surrounded suspected insurgents in Khok Pho district but suspects opened fire, killing assistant village chief; returning fire, security forces killed one suspected insurgent. In Yala province, IED attack on

ranger patrol 15 July killed one ranger and wounded two others in Bannang Sata district.