



Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** China maintained maritime presence in East China Sea as Japan conducted military exercises with partners and allies.

Military activity intensified in East China Sea. As of 26 June, Japan had spotted 92 Chinese vessels in Japan's contiguous zone and detected eight vessels within Japan's territorial sea. Japan, U.S., Australia and Canada 3 June held three-day joint exercise for first time in East China Sea, which involved five vessels, including Japanese destroyer *JS Shiranui*. China and Russia 6 June conducted joint aerial patrol over Sea of Japan and East China Sea, marking sixth such joint patrol this year; aircraft reportedly entered South Korea's air defence identification zone, prompting Japan and South Korea to scramble fighter jets in response. Japan's military and coast guard 22 June rehearsed joint response to armed attack for first time, in line with new guidelines for cooperation. China 13 June held military exercises in East China Sea.

Chinese President Xi referenced southern Japanese islands. During visit to China National Archives of Publications and Culture, Chinese President Xi 4 June made rare mention of China's historical connection to Japan's Ryukyu Islands (located close to Taiwan), which observers suggested could be intended as subtle warning to Japan to roll back its increasingly forward position on Taiwan Strait issue (see Taiwan Strait).

➔ **Korean Peninsula** After failed satellite launch, North Korea fired short-range missiles as U.S. and South Korea concluded major live-fire drills; Pyongyang commemorated Korean War's start with anti-U.S. rally.

North Korea responded to U.S.-South Korea exercises with missile launches. U.S. and South Korea mid-June concluded fifth and final round of large-scale live-fire drills near border to mark 70th anniversary of alliance, which North Korea responded to 15 June with two short-range ballistic missiles that landed in waters inside Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone; launches came just over two weeks after Pyongyang conducted failed satellite launch. In first visit of its kind in years, nuclear powered submarine *USS Michigan* 16 June arrived at South Korea's south-eastern port of Busan. U.S. and South Korea late June held aerial drills involving bombers and fighter jets.

North Korea marked anniversary of Korean War's outbreak. Some 120,000 people and ruling-party officials 25 June attended major rally at Pyongyang's May Day

Stadium to mark “day of struggle against U.S. imperialism”, otherwise known as anniversary of outbreak of Korean War. As is customary, smaller events were held countrywide. Maintaining 73-year-old illusion that North Korea did not start 1950-53 war, state media directed antipathy toward “U.S. imperialists’ war of aggression” and said country sought “strongest absolute weapon” in order to “punish the U.S. imperialists”.

Pyongyang returned hawkish figure to front-line politics. In signal that it intends to deepen its hard line toward South Korea, North Korea 19 June returned veteran conservative Kim Yong-chol to front-line politics at plenum of ruling Korean Workers’ Party, appointing him alternate member of Politburo and advisor to United Front Department (counterpart of South Korea’s Ministry of Unification); decision to restore infamous Kim, who is believed to have been behind attacks on South Korean targets in 2010 that arguably brought peninsula to brink of war, follows South Korea’s decision in May to appoint hardliner general to presidential committee charged with reforming military.

► **Taiwan Strait China maintained military activities around Taiwan amid near-collision incident with U.S. and Canadian ships, while U.S. ruled out Taiwan independence during high-level talks in Beijing.**

China continued aerial and maritime activities. As of 27 June, Taiwan had spotted 298 Chinese military aircraft entering its air defence identification zone (ADIZ), of which at least 84 either crossed unofficial “median line” or were detected in south-western ADIZ; notably, Taiwan 8 June detected 37 Chinese planes in its ADIZ, one day after China conducted joint air patrols with Russia in Sea of Japan and East China Sea (see China/Japan); 11 Chinese aircraft 30 June crossed median line as U.S. congressional delegation visited capital Taipei. Taiwan sighted 138 Chinese naval vessels in surrounding waters; Chinese aircraft carrier group led by *Shandong* 21 June transited strait. In worrying incident, as Canadian *HCMS Montreal* and *USS Chung-Hoon* 3 June conducted joint “freedom of navigation” transit through Taiwan Strait, Chinese warship made course to cut across bow of *USS Chung-Hoon*, risking collision; *Montreal*’s commander called move unprofessional, while Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu said move aimed to prevent operations being used “to exercise hegemony of navigation”.

U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken visited China and discussed Taiwan. In first visit by U.S. sec of state to China in five years and becoming highest-ranking Biden administration official to visit, Blinken 18-19 June met with China’s FM Qin Gang, State Councillor Wang Yi and President Xi Jinping; U.S. called talks “candid, substantive and constructive” as Blinken assured his Chinese counterpart that U.S. does not support Taiwan’s independence, while China urged U.S. to fulfil its promise. Taiwan and U.S. 1 June signed initial agreement under U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade. U.S. House Armed Services Committee 14 June said it is exploring possibility of joint weapons production with Taiwan.

China hosted annual non-political conference. Beijing 16 June held 15th Straits Forum in Fujian province, which saw participation of 5,000 people from various backgrounds, including Andrew Hsia, vice chairman of Taiwan’s opposition Kuomintang party; in letter to forum, President Xi urged people from both sides of

Taiwan Strait to work together to “safeguard the overall interests of the Chinese nation”.

South Asia

➔ Afghanistan Islamic State killed senior Taliban official in north, satellite imagery revealed dramatic reduction in opium production, and UN slashed aid budget amid Taliban’s draconian restrictions on women.

Islamic State’s local branch conducted deadly attacks on Taliban in north. While violence countrywide remained at historic lows, Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) continued to menace Taliban. After two-month hiatus in attacks, ISKP 6 June carried out vehicle-borne IED strike in Badakhshan province (north), killing provincial deputy governor; ISKP suicide attack 8 June struck funeral procession of deputy governor, killing another senior Taliban member. Attacks in Badakhshan indicate ISKP may have capitalised on ethnic grievances and Taliban’s crackdown on Islamists to build network in province. Taliban 3 June reportedly killed senior ISKP commander in unspecified eastern province.

Signs emerged of Taliban’s crackdown on opium production. Private satellite imagery and analysis published 6 June indicated 99% reduction in poppy crops in main opium cultivation areas of country, such as Helmand province (south), leading to projections of 80% decline in national production of drug. If confirmed, it would mark most significant reduction of poppy cultivation in world history. Switch to alternative water-intensive crops, however, could contribute to water shortages and exacerbate disputes with neighbouring countries, while economic status of tens of thousands of labourers who previously relied on poppy cultivation remains unclear.

UN cut aid budget for country and UN rapporteur accused Taliban of “gender apartheid”. UN and humanitarian agencies 5 June revised Afghanistan’s aid plan for 2023 from \$4.6bn down to \$3.2bn, citing “changing operating context” following Taliban restrictions on female aid workers. UN special rapporteur for Afghanistan mid-June published report accusing Taliban government of “widespread and systematic discrimination” against women and alleging Taliban “may be responsible for gender apartheid”. In annual report, World Bank same day ranked Afghanistan among bottom 11 economies based on laws that affect women’s economic opportunity.

Tensions cooled with Iran. Following water dispute and border escalation in May, Iranian envoy 17 June stated Taliban permitted Iranian experts to visit Kajaki dam, signalling renewed dialogue.

➔ Bangladesh Tensions persisted between ruling Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), while violence and insecurity continued in Rohingya camps and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Tensions remained elevated between govt and opposition ahead of 2024 election. BNP 6 June announced sit-ins at electricity offices across country to protest recent power outages. Awami League supporters 8 June attacked BNP members in Pabna city, injuring ten. BNP plans to step up demonstrations in July following Islamic Eid holiday. PM Sheikh Hasina 13 June cautioned her party members that “development

and the country will be destroyed” if Awami League loses power. Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami 10 June held large rally in Dhaka – its first political gathering in decade – echoing BNP’s call for caretaker government to oversee election. BNP sec gen 19 June asserted that there would be no elections without caretaker govt; law minister 21 June stated that constitution did not include provisions for caretaker govt. Ahead of city polls in Rajshahi on 21 June that Awami League candidate won by large margin, clashes between rival supporters 18-19 June injured over 30.

Rohingya refugees demanded repatriation as violence in camps persisted. Tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees 8 June attended rally, which may have been backed or instigated by Bangladeshi authorities, in favour of repatriation to Myanmar. UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrew 8 June blamed authorities for using “deceptive and coercive measures” to convince refugees to return. In Cox’s Bazar camps, security forces 11 June arrested member of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) accused of six murders. Security forces 17 June accused ARSA of killing Rohingya leader. Police 19 June stated Rohingya man died following gunfight between ARSA and rival Rohingya Solidarity Organisation.

Chittagong Hill Tracts remained restive. Military 1 June raided Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) camp in Bandarban’s Ruma Upazila, killing soldier, while improvised explosive that army blamed on KNF 16 June killed soldier in Ruma; six soldiers have been killed in region in last six months. Following recent spike in violence, ethnic minority leaders 6 June held rally in Mymensingh to mark 25-year anniversary of peace treaty and to demand its full implementation.

► **India Violence and signs of instability continued in Manipur state after deadly escalation in May, while Maoist violence in centre and tensions with China persisted.**

Manipur state remained restive. Following ethnic violence that erupted in Manipur state bordering Myanmar in north east in May – which killed at least 98 people, injured over 300 and displaced some 37,000 – insecurity, violence and instability continued across region, albeit at reduced intensity. Notably, improvised explosive device in Bishnupur district 22 June injured three people, while unknown gunmen same day injured two soldiers in Imphal West district. Security forces 23 June intercepted group of militants who fired automatic weapons in Imphal East district. Police 24 June said arsonists torched private property of Manipur minister in Imphal East district and previous day fired tear gas to prevent mob from setting ablaze property in same district belonging to another minister. Army 26 June said women activists accompanying armed rioters were blocking routes used by forces. Shooting 29 June killed two on outskirts of state capital Imphal. Several local organisations called on federal govt to dismiss regional govt, which is run by ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, and impose direct rule. Amid opposition criticism of state and local govt’s handling of crisis, Congress party Rahul Gandhi 29 June commenced two-day visit to region.

Maoist violence persisted. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), security forces 12 June killed Maoist woman in Kanker district; suspected Maoists 20 June killed policeman on leave in Bijapur district, taking Maoist-related police casualties in state to 19 in 2023.

Border crisis continued with China. FM S. Jaishankar 8 June said India and China “are deploying very close to each other, and this proximity can escalate tensions towards violence, as we witnessed in Galwan”.

PM Narendra Modi visited U.S. Modi 21 June commenced three-day state visit to U.S. which notably produced memorandum on joint production of fighter jet engines for Indian aircraft; U.S. and India jointly called on Pakistan “to ensure that no territory under its control is used for launching terrorist attacks”; Pakistan called remarks “unwarranted, one-sided and misleading”. White House 26 June criticised online harassment campaign against U.S. reporter who asked Modi about govt’s human rights record at joint press conference with President Biden.

➡ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Tensions persisted between India and Pakistan as insecurity continued in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), which marked five years without elected government.**

Hostile rhetoric continued between India and Pakistan. Answering questions about Pakistan at press briefing, Indian FM S. Jaishankar 8 June said India would not tolerate “cross-border terrorism from Pakistan” and “Pakistan knows what it needs to do” to move bilateral relations forward; regarding objections from Pakistan to new map installed at Indian parliament, Jaishankar retorted “We don’t have hope in Pakistan for understanding [this matter]”. Joint statement late June with U.S. following Indian PM Narendra Modi’s state visit called on Pakistan to prevent terrorist attacks (see India). Indian border security forces 5 and 10 June allegedly shot down drones carrying drugs into Punjab province from Pakistan.

Militant attacks and security operations continued J&K. Security forces 1 June shot dead alleged Pakistani intruder in Jammu’s Samba district and next day killed militant in Rajouri district’s forest. Security forces 13 June killed two militants in Kupwara district. Security forces 14 June foiled infiltration attempt in Jammu’s Poonch sector. Security forces 16 June shot dead five alleged foreign militants near Line of Control in Kupwara district and 27 June killed an alleged Al Badr militant in Kulgam district. In major infiltration attempt, security forces 16 June killed five militants allegedly trying to infiltrate Kupwara district. Pakistan 24 June claimed Indian security forces killed two civilians in Sattwal sector along Line of Control. General Officer Commanding of Chinar Corps 1 June said there was no Afghan Taliban infiltration into Kashmir; his remarks addressed concerns about Taliban or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) weaponry left in Afghanistan following Taliban’s takeover in 2021.

J&K marked five years without elected state govt. Region 19 June reached five-year anniversary since state govt was dissolved following collapse of ruling coalition’s majority in state assembly; five years marks longest spell of central rule in J&K since peak of militancy in region in period 1990-96. National Conference party leader Omar Abdullah 19 June wrote, “Democracy ends where J&K begins”, while People’s Democratic Party of Kashmir 20 June called it “death anniversary”.

➡ **Pakistan Crackdown on former PM Imran Khan’s party deepened Khan’s isolation, insecurity persisted in provinces bordering Afghanistan and govt secured international funding amid debt default fears.**

Military-led crackdown intensified on Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). After large numbers of senior PTI leaders exited party following 9 May street unrest and authorities continued to detain many others, several journalists deemed sympathetic to PTI were disappeared during month, while others were detained and charged with crimes such as sedition and mutiny against state. Military 7 June called for "noose of law" to be tightened for masterminds of "politically driven rebellion", and reiterated intention to try civilians in military courts. Supreme Court 22 June began hearing several petitions challenging military trials of civilians. Military spokesman 26 June announced dismissal of at least three senior officers, including lieutenant general, and disciplinary action against 15 other officers, including three major generals, for failure to protect military installations on 9 May. Khan's isolation deepened as he faced charges that could result in disqualification from public office and his former close confidant 8 June launched Istekham-i-Pakistan Party with backing of almost 100 former PTI leaders, in likely bid to damage PTI's electoral chances ahead of polls.

Security operations and militant attacks continued in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. Pakistani Taliban 8 June claimed killing of two police constables in Swat district's Mingora city. Militants same day killed police constable in Lakki Marwat district. Gun battle in North Waziristan district 9-10 June killed three soldiers. Security forces 28 June killed three Islamic State militants in Bajur district. In Balochistan province, militant attack along border with Iran 1 June killed two soldiers; Baluch Liberation Army suicide bomber 24 June killed police officer in Turbat city.

Govt secured International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal. PM Shehbaz Sharif 9 June presented 2023-24 budget to parliament providing tax exemptions for several sectors, including IT and agriculture. Moody's Investor Services 14 June warned that Pakistan could fail to revive IMF program by looming expiration on 30 June, heightening risks of sovereign default. In effort to secure "standby arrangement" with IMF, govt removed subsidies and tax exemptions and reduced expenditures with revised budget passed by parliament on 25 June. IMF 30 June announced staff-level agreement with govt for \$3bn fund.

➡ **Sri Lanka Tentative signs emerged of economic improvement, UN Human Rights Council reviewed govt's accountability progress, and tensions surfaced in Tamil-majority Northern Province.**

Economic and humanitarian suffering eased slightly. Figures late month showed inflation in June fell to 12% from 25.2% in April. With rupee's value rising, Central Bank 1 June cut interest rates by 2.5%. UN and World Food Programme assessed that number of citizens who were "moderately acute food insecure" fell from 6.2m to 3.9m. Following brief visit, International Monetary Fund deputy managing director 2 June announced "economic recovery remains challenging" notwithstanding "tentative signs of improvement". World Bank 28 June approved \$700mn in budgetary and welfare support. Main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) 29 June announced it would vote against the govt's proposals for domestic debt restructuring, made public same day.

Human Rights Council continued accountability oversight as govt pledged further progress. In oral update to 53rd session of UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) on 21 June, Deputy High Commissioner Nada Al-Nashif called on authorities to

“directly acknowledge past violations and undertake credible investigations and prosecutions, alongside other accountability measures”, with “the international community play[ing] a complementary role”. Ahead of meeting, President Wickremesinghe 8 June reviewed “progress of initiatives” on govt’s “Reconciliation Action Plan”. Justice Minister 18 June signalled Truth and Reconciliation Commission draft will be circulated in July. Eight prominent international human rights and rule of law NGOs 16 June strongly criticised “ongoing violations of fair trial rights” of lawyer and human rights defender Hejaaz Hizbullah, who was arrested in 2020 under Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Inter-communal tensions rose in Tamil-majority Northern Province. Tensions rose to dangerous levels over disputed area in Northern Province where Buddhist stupa – known as Kurundi Vihara – has recently been built with military assistance and against court orders, reportedly blocking access to long-standing Hindu pilgrimage site. Prominent Buddhist nationalist organisations 21 June gathered “in defence of” Kurundi Vihara. Police 7 June arrested Tamil legislator and Tamil National People’s Front Leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam at his Colombo residence on charges of “obstructing police duties” following altercation on 2 June with plainclothes police in Jaffna, in Northern Province.

South East Asia

➡ **Myanmar** **Deadly hostilities between military and resistance forces continued countrywide, regime curtailed relief operations following cyclone and Thailand sought high-level engagement with regime.**

Countrywide clashes continued between military and ethnic armed groups. In Sagaing region (north west), military 4 June raided People’s Defence Forces (PDF) camp in Budalin township and allegedly executed three detained fighters. Regime forces 5 June used 18 people from nine villages in Kawlin township as human shields, leaving at least nine dead. Around 80 soldiers 7 June raided PDF camp in Monywa township. Three resistance groups 9 June raided police station in Salingyi township, claiming to have killed eleven officers. After fighting escalated between regime and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in May, KNLA and resistance forces 1 June staged attack on bridge in Thaton township linking Mon and Kayin states, reportedly inflicting heavy casualties. In Bago region (south east), KNLA and allies 6 June destroyed major bridge in Kyaukkyi township. Assailants 7 June shot dead army major and village administrator in Kyauktaga township. Meanwhile, conflict intensified in Chin state (north west) as regime forces sought to clear resistance groups from strategic locations

Regime pursued peace talks with select armed groups. Regime peace negotiators 1-2 June met representatives of three ethnic armed groups (Arakan Army, Ta’ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army - MNDAA, which collectively make up Three Brothers Alliance) for first time since coup, with Chinese facilitation; no concrete progress was made and fighting erupted in Laukaing townships with MNDAA during talks.

Junta closely controlled relief following Cyclone. Amid aftermath of 14 May cyclone that was strongest ever to make landfall on Myanmar coast, regime 8 June rejected

UN aid distribution plan and rescinded existing travel authorisations; acting UN resident coordinator 12 June described restrictions as “devastating setback”. Consequently, only small amount of aid reached 1.6m affected people.

Thailand sought to boost engagement with junta. Thai FM 19 June hosted meeting of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) FMs with ultimate aim to “fully re-engage Myanmar at the leaders’ level”, to which only Myanmar and Laos sent respective FMs; ASEAN chair Indonesia criticised Thai initiative, reflecting lack of consensus within regional bloc.

➡ **Philippines Clashes in south continued between security forces and Islamist militants amid intra-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighting, while military battled communist rebels.**

Insecurity persisted in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. In Basilian province, security forces 6 June rescued Indonesian child from custody of Abu Sayyaf Group commander in Sumisip municipality; army 7 June killed two Abu Sayyaf fighters in Sumisip hinterlands. Military and unnamed armed group 18 June skirmished in Ungkaya Pukan town. In Marawi city, joint police-military operation 14 June killed Abu Zakaria, Islamic State’s emir in Philippines and leader of remnants of Maute Group – local branch of Islamic State-inspired militants in Lanao region. Ambush same day killed two police officers in Shariff Aguak town, Maguindanao del Sur province, which authorities blamed on Islamic State-linked militants. Elsewhere in Maguindanao del Sur, police-military raid 18 June killed seven persons in Datu Paglas town in operation aimed at members of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters; MILF claimed victims were its members. Members of MILF’s 105 and 118 Base Commands 20 June clashed in Datu Saudi town, marking fourth such round of fighting between groups this year. Militant surrenders continued: notably, in Sulu province, member of Abu Sayyaf and Egyptian militant 13 June surrendered.

Deadly clashes continued between military and communist rebels. Military operations and militant ambushes by communist New People’s Army in Mindanao in south and Visayas Islands in centre killed at least 13 combatants and civilians and injured four during June.

➡ **South China Sea Claimant states and interested parties conducted range of military exercises.**

Military activity in region occurred at high intensity. Indonesia 5-7 June held multilateral naval exercises off South Sulawesi involving 36 nations, including both U.S. and China. Vietnam 8 June demanded Taiwan cancel live-fire drills near Taiwan-occupied Itu Aba Island, citing direct violation of Vietnam’s sovereignty over Spratly archipelago. U.S., Japan, France and Canada 9 June concluded integrated sea exercises near Philippine Sea; in response, China reportedly deployed reconnaissance aircraft to monitor activities. Chinese naval ship *Qi Jiguang* 14 June arrived in Philippine capital Manila for four-day good-will visit. Japan, U.S. and Philippines 16 June announced plans to stage regular joint exercises in South and East China Seas, aiming to produce formal strategy document by end of year; Japan also reaffirmed support to enhance Philippines’ military capabilities through official security assistance announced in April. U.S. aircraft carrier *Ronald Reagan* 25-30

June docked at Vietnam's port city of Danang, in third such visit by U.S. carrier since 1975.

In other important developments. Malaysia and Philippines 13 June signed agreements to end 18-year maritime border disputes in parts of Straits of Malacca and Sulawesi Sea. Philippine and Indian FMs 29 June urged China to abide by international law in South China Sea, most notably including 2016 ruling at Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, which found that China's declared "nine-dash line" has no legal basis.

► **Thailand Election winner Move Forward Party faced legal and political hurdles in quest to form govt, while deadly attacks continued in deep south amid controversial student-led independence vote.**

Move Forward leader battled for political survival. Following general election in May, uncertainty shrouded process for election-winning Move Forward Party and its leader Pita Limjareonrat to form new govt amid investigations into Pita by Election Commission and senate. Election Commission 9 June tossed out petition lodged 10 May by Palang Pracharath Party member alleging Pita was ineligible to run in election because he owned shares in media company, but announced it would investigate further; if convicted, Pita could face up to ten years in jail and 20-year ban from politics. Pita 6 June declared he had earlier transferred shares in defunct media company. Senate 23 June announced investigation of Pita's assets. Aside from legal complications, Move Forward and its eight-party coalition, which command 312 seats, face political challenge of securing 376 seats in joint sitting with 250-member senate to form govt; election commission 19 June endorsed all 500 newly elected MPs, paving way for first session of new parliament in early July.

In deep south, violence continued as student group held independence referendum. In Pattani province, IED attack 5 June wounded one army officer and civilian in Saiburi district; militants 10 June killed police officer in Khok Po district; militants 17 June assaulted police base in Muang district; IED attack 21 June wounded three defence volunteers and soldier in Raman district. In Narathiwat province, gunmen 17 June ambushed four villages in Chanae district, killing one. In Yala province, IED attack 15 June wounded four police officers and civilian in Raman district. Meanwhile, student group at Prince of Songkla University in Pattani province 7 June simulated referendum on Pattani independence during seminar that included two speakers from Move Forward's coalition. National Security Council secretary general 9 June informed PM Prayuth Chan-ocha about event and announced investigation, describing call for public referendum as "illegal". Commander of Fourth Army Area 12 June called proposal for referendum unconstitutional and threat to nation's territorial integrity.