

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan U.S. and Japan held military exercise, Chinese maritime incursions continued around disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and Russian military activity increased around disputed Kuril Islands.** Japanese and U.S. troops 13-25 March held amphibious exercise practicing for enemy invasion of remote Japanese island. As of 28 March, 91 Chinese vessels had entered waters surrounding disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands during month; notably, four Chinese coast guard vessels 16 March passed through territorial sea of islands. Russia 10 March conducted military exercises on two Kuril Islands, controlled by Russia and claimed by Japan; six Russian vessels 14 March reportedly transited Soya Strait. One Russian vessel 14 March transited Tsugaru Strait and four Russian tank-landing ships 15-16 March reportedly transited strait toward Sea of Japan; Japanese Defence Ministry 17 March said vessels were possibly carrying equipment to Ukraine. In response to sanctions imposed by Japan for its invasion of Ukraine, Russia 21 March announced its withdrawal from dialogue to establish joint economic activities in Southern Kurils as well as peace treaty talks. Meanwhile, Chinese FM Wang Yi 7 March advised Japan to avoid “serious disruption” in bilateral relations, pointing to “major sensitive issues such as history and Taiwan”, and urged countries to be “partners, not threats”. After former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe late Feb urged Japanese govt to discuss possibility of nuclear sharing with U.S. (hosting U.S. nuclear weapons), citing potential threats from “neighbour that has no qualms about using armed force”, PM Fumio Kishida 7 March called idea “unacceptable”; senior lawmakers in ruling Democratic Party, however, continued discussions on idea, including shared decision-making in event of crisis.

↓ 🇰🇷 **Korean Peninsula North Korea tested components of military reconnaissance satellite and decisively ended self-imposed ban on long-range missile testing, raising prospect of provocative space launch in April.** March saw pivot toward North Korean activities aligned with country’s ambition to launch military-reconnaissance satellite. Following similar test late Feb, North Korea 5 March launched components of satellite to operational altitudes. Leader Kim Jong-un 10 March visited National Aerospace Development Administration and next day Sohae Satellite Launch Centre, signalling focus on provocative space launch that may take place on or around 15 April – 110th birth anniversary of state founder Kim Il-sung. Experts debated whether Pyongyang is focussed on satellite deployment or, as U.S. 10 March asserted, developing “new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) system” that launches have utilised; Washington 12 March announced fresh sanctions in response to tests. Pyongyang then moved to undisguised ICBM launches; state 16 March launched missile that exploded shortly after take-off near Sunan international airport; South Korean military 20 March said North Korea same day fired short-range multiple rocket launcher. Pyongyang 24 March successfully launched older type of ICBM, which decisively ended self-imposed moratorium in place since April 2018. Meanwhile, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies 7 March published report

suggesting “very early signs of activity” at North Korea’s sole nuclear test site in Punggye-ri (north east), which was ostensibly “destroyed” in 2018 as part of diplomatic process with U.S. and South Korea. South Korean military intelligence 27 March claimed that restoration work at Punggye-ri has been accelerated, raising possibility of nuclear test sooner than anticipated. In South Korea, former prosecutor and conservative candidate Yoon Suk-yeol 9 March won general election. In early moves likely perceived negatively in Pyongyang, President-elect Yoon’s transition team altered name of “foreign, security and unification” by omitting “unification”, signalling reduced focus on inter-Korean engagement and reflecting scepticism within now-ruling party toward utility of Ministry of Unification. Yoon 20 March decided to move presidential office to vicinity of Ministry of National Defence in Yongsan district, capital Seoul.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** **Taiwan raised concern over Chinese threats in light of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, while Beijing expanded its defence budget and continued military activity in region.** War in Ukraine following Russia’s invasion drew attention to potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Chinese FM Wang Yi 7 March said Ukraine and Taiwan “are not comparable at all”, asserting Taiwan is not sovereign state. Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen 12 March said war in Ukraine proved Taiwanese defence depends on “the unity of our people”, following 2 March extension of reservist training period. China’s Taiwan Affairs Office 16 March argued U.S. unwillingness to commit troops to Ukraine is evidence Taiwan’s ruling party should not “rely on the United States to seek independence”. China 5 March announced planned defence budget increase of 7.1% to \$230bn and same day reiterated commitment to “solving the Taiwan issue in the new era.” Chinese aircraft flew into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone throughout month, totalling 48 planes as of 27 March. Chinese aircraft carrier *Shandong* 18 March sailed through Taiwan Strait, tailed by *USS Ralph Johnson*. Taiwan remained point of contention between U.S. and China. Following 14 March meeting between U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Politburo official Yang Jiechi, Beijing said it was “gravely concerned about and firmly opposes” current U.S. approach to Taiwan. In call with U.S. President Biden, Chinese President Xi 18 March reiterated discontent over administration’s “mishandling of the Taiwan question”, noting some in U.S. are sending Taiwan “very dangerous” signals. Several U.S. former officials, including former Sec State Mike Pompeo, 1-2 March met President Tsai in Taiwan; Pompeo 4 March said U.S. should offer diplomatic recognition to Taiwan; China same day described proposal as “lunatic remarks”.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan Taliban expanded security operations against National Resistance Front (NRF) and reversed pledge on girls’ education, while rising global food prices aggravated humanitarian crisis.** Taliban continued to appoint loyalists, including appointments 4 March in defence sector and judiciary and 13 March in civilian and technical positions. Following 25 Feb Taliban large-scale search operations in north, specifically in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan and Panjshir, in attempt to forestall spring offensive by NRF, Taliban early March expanded operations to Logar and Laghman provinces

(east), Baghlan province (north), and Herat and Badghis provinces (west); rumours rose of imminent large-scale operations in Nangarhar province (east). Risk of Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) and NRF resuming operations in warmer weather remained. Meanwhile, Taliban continued restrictions on civil dissent and media freedom. Tolo News 18 March reported authorities had ordered all networks to stop broadcasting foreign drama series; Taliban's intelligence branch same day briefly arrested senior Tolo News figures. NGO Afghan Journalist Safety Committee 19 March stated that authorities had arrested eleven journalists and media workers within past two days. In first sign of willingness to hold elections, authorities 9 March held municipal poll in one district of capital Kabul. Meanwhile, Taliban introduced economic policies to address unfolding humanitarian crisis; Kabul municipality 6 March imposed price caps on essential commodities and Ministry of Finance 12 March announced tax, arrears and penalty waivers for small taxpayers. Ministry of Education 17 March announced that all schools, including girls' secondary schools, would open on 23 March; in last-minute reversal, Taliban 23 March decided to close secondary schools to girls, prompting chaotic scenes and widespread international condemnation as female secondary school students took to streets to demand their right to education. On humanitarian front, World Bank 1 March announced plan to use \$1bn from Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund to address urgent needs in education, health, agricultural and communal livelihood sectors; humanitarian crisis could however further worsen in coming months as donor states consider how to respond to Taliban's decision on girls' secondary schools and rising global food prices affect 23mn people on brink of famine.

➔ **Bangladesh** **Protests against rising prices prompted clashes across country, violence within ruling party persisted, and deadly violence continued in Chittagong Hill Tracts.** Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supporters and others 2-13 March rallied against rising commodity prices, prompting clashes with Awami League (AL) ruling party's activists; reports revealed dozens of protesters injured across country, including in Patuakhali, Narayanganj and Lalmonirhat districts and in Chattogram city. BNP supporters 9 March clashed with police and AL supporters, leaving around 50 people injured. AL's student organisation 21 March also accused of attacking Left Democratic Alliance's protest against price increases in Chattogram city. Dhaka court 2 March ordered arrest of BNP joint sec gen, for charges filed in late 2012 under "Special Powers Act" and "Explosive Substances Act". Controversial International Crimes Tribunal 24 March sentenced former Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh legislator to death for 1971 war crimes. Fighting within ruling party persisted, leaving 15 injured during 1 March post-poll violence in Golpalganj district, and ten injured in 9 March clashes between party factions in Bogura district. Violence between rival militant groups in Chittagong Hill Tracts also continued. Unknown attackers 5 March killed former activist of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) political faction in Chittagong Hill Tracts' Bandarban district; locals 6 March found four bodies near Bandarban's Sangu river, reportedly shot dead during clashes between rival armed groups previous day. Militant group United People's Democratic Front accused PCJSS of killing one of their members on 15 March in Bandarban's Sadar sub-district. Gunfight between rival militant groups 22 March killed three near Rangamati-Bandarband border. Meanwhile, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 11, 19 March respectively arrested suspected Ansar al-Islam member in capital Dhaka and ten alleged Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants in

Khulna city. At U.S.-Bangladesh “Partnership Dialogue”, govt 20 March urged withdrawal of sanctions on RAB; U.S. rejected request. Earlier in month, police 6 March detained suspected head of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army-linked Ulema Council Moulvi Zakaria for allegedly ordering Sept killing of Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah. Fire 8 March erupted in Cox’s Bazar’s Kutupalong refugee camp, killing child and burning around 300 homes.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir) Ruling party won majority of constituencies in five state elections, Maoist violence continued, while military held new round of talks on disputed border with China.** Ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) retained power in four of five state assembly elections – specifically Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur and Uttarakhand states – according to 10 March results. In Punjab, where BJP won only two out of 117 constituencies, relative newcomer Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man’s Party) claimed victory. Elections were seen as bellwether for national elections scheduled for 2024. Maoist-related violence continued. Notably, in Chhattisgarh state (centre), bomb blasts 14 March killed one security personnel and injured two more in Narayanpur district; Maoists 19 March allegedly killed pastor on suspicion of being police informer in Bastar area. Director general of Central Reserve Police Force 17 March cautioned that “we don’t have roads” connecting police camps that are growing in quantity in areas of Maoist activity. Amid ongoing war in Ukraine following Russia’s invasion (see Ukraine), Foreign Ministry 2 March held briefing for opposition parliamentarians on situation; opposition attendees reportedly praised govt’s efforts and endorsed India’s abstention at UN votes. Relations between govt and China remained strained over disputed boundary known as Line of Actual Control (LAC). Asked whether China might step up aggression along disputed border following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, FM S. Jaishankar 2 March reportedly responded “India is no Ukraine.” Officials 11 March held 15th round China-India Corps Commander Level Meeting at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on Indian side in Ladakh region, with no breakthrough during talks; India had sought to resolve friction points of Patrolling Point 15 at Hot Springs and areas of Demchok and Depsang plains. Chinese FM Wang Yi 24 March arrived in capital New Delhi in first visit by high-ranking Chinese govt official since Galwan border clash in May 2020.

➡ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Inadvertent Indian missile strike sparked tensions between Delhi and Islamabad; militant attacks persisted in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K).** Indian air force 9 March fired accidental missile into Punjab province’s Mian Channu district, damaging civilian property. Pakistan’s military next day condemned “flagrant violation”. India’s Defence Ministry 11 March admitted “technical malfunction led to accidental firing of a missile”. Pakistan’s National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf 11 March demanded closer investigation, India’s Defence Minister Rajnath Singh 15 March said review “is being conducted in the wake of this incident”. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation foreign minister’s meeting 22-23 March in Islamabad invited detained Chairman of separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference in Kashmir Mirwaiz Umar Farooq to attend. Indian Foreign Ministry 17 March criticised invitation, Pakistan’s foreign office 18 March rejected India’s “baseless” objection, said India could not claim J&K was its “internal matter”. Meanwhile, concerns about security situation in J&K came to fore as opposition parties 14 March demanded answers from Indian govt about budgetary allocations for J&K; one

parliamentarian noted “73 per cent allocation of the budget has been earmarked for law and order. It shows that the situation has not improved”. Amid rising militancy, India’s Home Affairs Ministry 2 March announced revival of Village Defence Groups; Kashmir valley-based parties 3 March criticised decision, former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti 3 March tweeted “J&K is far from any semblance of normalcy”. Counter-insurgency operations and militant attacks persisted, including return to earlier trend of targeting village-level elected representatives. Notably militants 2-11 March killed three heads of village, two in Kulgam district’s Adoora village, one in regional capital Srinagar. Other violence continued: militants 6 March killed two civilians in Srinagar; 8 March reportedly launched bomb blast, which killed one in Jammu region’s Udhampur town; 12 March killed security forces personnel in Shopian district; 20 March killed Kashmiri man in Budgam district and street vendor in Pulwama district. Meanwhile, security forces 10 March killed two alleged Lashkar-e-Tayyaba militants in Pulwama, same day killed alleged Pakistani in Srinagar; 11 March killed four militants in security operations in Pulwama, Kupwara, Ganderbal districts, and 16 March killed three militants in Srinagar.

➡ **Nepal Ruling parties opted to continue alliance into upcoming local elections in bid to undermine prospects of opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist).** Nepali Congress 29 March decided to contest local polls in May jointly with three other parties comprising ruling alliance, despite calls by some senior Nepali Congress leaders to compete independently; PM Sher Bahadur Deuba described decision as necessitated by current political balance of power and amid concerns of resurgence of opposition Unified Marxist Leninist party, which won 45% of seats during last local elections in 2017. Geopolitical engagement intensified following parliament’s Feb ratification of U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation grant; Chinese FM Wang Yi 25-27 March visited capital Kathmandu and signed several agreements boosting economic, technical cooperation and infrastructure development. At UN, govt 2 and 24 March voted in favour of two U.S.-led General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

⚠️ **Pakistan Islamic State and Baloch militants launched attacks which killed dozens, while PM Khan saw most serious challenge to his premiership, raising risk of worsening political instability.** In worrying signs of resurgent home-grown militancy, Islamic State Khorasan 4 March claimed responsibility for suicide attack on Shia mosque in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province’s capital Peshawar, killing 63 and wounding 200, marking most serious sectarian attack in city’s history. Local police 9 March identified suicide bomber as Afghan refugee, claimed to have killed three involved in attack; another alleged accomplice killed 24 March. Two soldiers killed in militant attack 21 March in Bajaur district; four soldiers killed overnight 23-24 March in North Waziristan district in cross-border attack claimed by Pakistani Taliban. Targeted militant attacks on police stations continued in KP; notably, militants 19 March killed police officer in Lakki Marwat district. In Balochistan province, Baloch militants continued to launch attacks on security personnel; notably, militants 2 March killed three including senior police officer in bomb blast in capital Quetta; suicide bomber 9 March killed six security personnel; bomb blast 15 March killed four paramilitary personnel in Sibi district, where another soldier killed in 26 March

security operation. Global terrorist financing watchdog, Financial Action Task Force, 4 March kept Pakistan on grey list. PM Khan faced risk of ouster after nine-party opposition alliance spearheaded by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam 8 March submitted no-confidence motion amid perception that ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) no longer had military's backing; Khan same day said "army stands with me", while military 10 March responded "army has nothing to do with politics". Amid govt efforts to curb party dissidents from supporting no-confidence vote and counter opposition with raids and arrests, National Assembly speaker (from ruling party) 25 March postponed debate. No-trust motion submitted in National Assembly on 28 March; legislature adjourned till 31 March, with vote due no later than 4 April. Khan, resorting to anti-U.S. rhetoric, 27 March claimed he had proof of opposition-backed "foreign conspiracy" to oust him; comments risk harming relations with West, already strained over govt's refusal to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine.

↓ **Sri Lanka Economic crisis worsened and triggered unprecedented outburst of public anger in capital Colombo, placing govt under increasingly severe pressure.** On economic front, month witnessed thousands in long queues to purchase dwindling supplies of petrol, food, medicine and other essential imported products; govt 23 March deployed soldiers to oversee distribution at fuel stations. School postponed exams and newspapers suspended print editions for lack of paper. Daily power cuts grew more frequent and as long as 10 hours due to inability to purchase oil needed for electricity plants. Govt 9 March removed dollar-peg of rupee that had depleted hard currency reserves, leading rupee to fall from 200 to nearly 300 against one U.S. dollar, adding to already rampant inflation. Govt same day limited imports in bid to save hard currency. In long-awaited U-turn, cabinet 14 March formally approved "discussions" with International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address currency and debt crises; IMF delegation 14-15 March met President Rajapaksa and senior officials and agreed meeting next month; financial support unlikely to materialise before further economic and political damage. Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa 17 March secured \$1bn credit line from India, reportedly in exchange for agreeing to Indian-led energy projects in north and east and maritime security arrangements that have drawn criticism from opposition parties. Economic strains led to protests. Main opposition Sama Jana Balawegaya party 15 March held large protest outside president's office in capital Colombo. Daily street protests against political class in middle class and upscale sections of capital Colombo grew larger. In unprecedented show of defiance, hundreds of protesters 31 March gathered outside president's residence demanding his resignation; rally was largely peaceful until police used teargas and water cannons to clear protests; over 50 arrested, some reportedly beaten and tortured. Meanwhile, at 49th session of Human Rights Council, UN High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet 4 March bluntly criticised govt, noting "surveillance, harassment and intimidation of civil society", "deepening" "militarisation of civilian government functions", and "unwillingness to pursue accountability"; India beseeched govt to "fulfil its commitments ... to protecting the interest of Tamils", while Catholic Archbishop of Colombo 7 March called 2019 Easter Bombings "part of a grand political plot".

South East Asia

↓ **Indonesia** **Separatist violence peaked in Papua, with over a dozen killed, Rohingya refugees landed in Aceh, and counter- terrorism operations continued.** Separatists launched several deadly attacks in Papua province during month. Notably, in one of deadliest attacks in Papua in recent years, separatists 4 March killed eight technicians working on telecommunications tower in Puncak district; 3 March launched attack on military post in Dambet village, also in Puncak, injuring one soldier. In statement sent to Associated Press 4 March, separatists claimed both attacks, said they had warned civilians to leave area. Armed insurgents 26 March also attacked military post in Nduga regency, killing two marines and injuring at least six; commander of separatist armed group West Papua National Liberation Army in Nduga, Egianus Kogeya, next day claimed responsibility. Separatists also claimed killing soldier and his wife in Elelim village in Yalimo district 31 March. Separately, security forces 30 March killed separatist leader, Toni Tabuni, who was reportedly resisting arrest in Nabire district. Demonstrators protesting against planned administrative reforms 15 March clashed with police in Yahukimo district, Papua province, which left two dead. Army 1 March said it was investigating 22 Feb death of 12-year old boy reportedly at hands of soldiers in Sinak district, Papua province; Amnesty International 4 March called for independent investigation, echoing demands from human rights advocates since late Feb. Govt 2 March dismissed call from UN experts for “urgent humanitarian access to the [Papua] region...and independent investigations into abuses against the indigenous peoples”. In Central Java, counter-terrorism police 9 March killed doctor, allegedly connected to banned Jemaah Islamiyah militant group, who reportedly resisted arrest in Sukoharjo district, Central Java. Police said boat carrying over 100 Rohingya refugees from Bangladeshi camps arrived in Aceh, westernmost province, on 6 March.

➔ **Myanmar** **Clashes escalated between regime and resistance forces as well as ethnic armed groups, while U.S. declared anti-Rohingya violence as genocide.** Tatmadaw and aligned paramilitary forces from pro-military Pyusawhti networks stepped up counter-insurgency operations during month in central Dry Zone encompassing townships in Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway regions, burning hundreds of homes and killing dozens of civilians. Notably, military and paramilitary forces 1 March raided three villages in Gangaw township, Magway region, torching 275 homes and killing 11 people, including five People’s Defence Force (PDF) fighters; 8 March raided village in Khin-U township, Sagaing region, reportedly killing 11 PDF fighters and three civilians. Resistance forces responded with attacks on pro-military villages: in Sagaing region, PDF 6 March attacked two villages allegedly harbouring regime forces in Taze township, claiming over 30 military and paramilitary casualties; 9 March attacked military camped in village in Chaung-U township, reportedly killing five soldiers. In northern Shan state, military 1-2 March clashed with ethnic Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), ending two-week lull in fighting since death of MNDAA founder Peng Jiasheng on 16 Feb. Chinland Defence Force 7 March attacked regime convoy in southern southern Chin state. In far northern parts of Kachin state, regime forces 1 March launched airstrikes on Kachin Independence Army. In Kayah state, regime forces 13 March captured key

stronghold of Karenni Nationalities Defence Force in Demoso township, following fighting that reportedly inflicted heavy casualties on junta forces. In Kayin State, Karen National Union and PDF 7 March clashed with junta forces around Lay Kay Kaw village, Myawaddy township. Meanwhile, junta 5, 8 March cancelled citizenship of leading opposition figures and National Unity Govt (NUG) members. Worsening electric power shortages and rising commodity prices due to Russian invasion of Ukraine prompted factories to suspend operations, resulted in reduced bus routes and higher transportation fees for trucking companies. Internationally, NUG-aligned UN representative 2 March voted in favour of General Assembly resolution condemning Russian invasion of Ukraine, in contrast to regime's late Feb comments in support of Russia. U.S. 21 March announced formal determination of genocide for violence committed by military against Rohingya minority.

➡ **Philippines** **Violence persisted at slightly elevated levels in south, while lethal clashes continued between military and communist rebels.**

In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, month saw uptick in both clashes between militants and authorities as well as clan violence linked to electoral disputes. In Lanao del Sur province, military 1 March launched airstrike and engaged in firefight against alleged Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated Maute Group militants, displacing 1,000 civilians and killing seven militants; Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) claimed some fighters belonged to them, while govt 3 March denied targeting MILF; incident comes amid stable but stalled peace process. In Sulu province, govt forces arrested wife of known ISIS-linked Abu Sayyaf Group sub-leader Mundi Sawadjaan. Clan-related violence also continued. Notably, in Maguindanao province, two families 10 March clashed in Matanog town, killing two and injuring three, while several shootings 17 March killed three in Datu Odin Sinsuat town, possibly linked to electoral disputes or clan-related issues. Militant surrenders continued through month. Notably, one Maute Group sub-leader 16 March surrendered to govt in Lanao del Sur. Govt figures 18 March showed 39 combatants from Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and its ISIS-inspired splinter groups surrendered in Maguindanao province. In Basilan province, one Abu Sayyaf fighter 20 March surrendered in Al-Barka town. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist New People's Army persisted; violence in Mindanao Island in south, Visayas Islands in centre and Luzon Island in north killed at least eight combatants and civilians, and injured six. In Marawi city, some 250 internally displaced families 3 March received permanent housing units in Barangay Gadongan through govt-led Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM). Ahead of elections in May, presidential campaign entered high gear, with Ferdinand Marcos Jr. leading polls.

➡ **South China Sea** **China conducted military drills in South China Sea (SCS), while Philippines protested Beijing's "incursion" in Sulu Sea and dangerous manoeuvres around disputed islands.**

China conducted naval drills 4-15 March in SCS approximately halfway between China's Sanya city, Hainan province, and Vietnam's Hue city, Thua Thien Hue province, with roughly half of area within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone; Hanoi 7 March beseeched China to "respect Vietnam's EEZ" and stop "any act that complicates the situation". Vietnamese journalist 6 March reported that Chinese air force Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft 1 March crashed into SCS during drills off Hainan; Taiwan's Defence

Ministry 10 March confirmed crash. China 23 March conducted aerial exercises over SCS with over ten recently upgraded J-11B fighter jets. Chinese FM Wang Yi 7 March said Code of Conduct on SCS could be concluded but urged South East Asia regional body ASEAN to resist “non-regional countries” that “meddle” in area and “do not want the South China Sea to be calm”. Philippines’ Foreign Ministry 12 March summoned China’s ambassador to explain “illegal incursion” by Chinese navy reconnaissance ship in Sulu Sea 29 Jan-1 Feb. Manila 27 March announced that Chinese Coast Guard ships had four times manoeuvred dangerously close to Philippine Coast Guard ships in vicinity of Scarborough Shoal, including incident 2 March when China Coast Guard ship drew within 20m of Philippine vessel. U.S. Admiral John C. Aquilino of Indo-Pacific Command 20 March decried Chinese militarisation of Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross in SCS. China 22 March said it had “a right ... in line with international law” to develop islands “on its own territory”. U.S. and Philippine armed forces 28 March started annual Balikatan joint exercise, due to end 8 April.

➔ **Thailand Govt sought unity among coalition parties amid continued speculation over early election before year’s end, while IED attacks persisted in deep south.** PM Prayuth Chan-ocha, deputy PM Prawit Wongsuwan and Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda 8 March summoned major coalition party leaders for meeting, stressing need for unity and pledging to finish term. Prawit 14 March hosted leaders of smaller coalition parties, reportedly saying there would be no cabinet reshuffle but election could be called after country hosts regional economic forum APEC summit in Nov. In response to questions from reporters on possible early election, Prayuth 15 March said: “It’s up to me”. Govt’s muted response to Ukraine crisis prompted Swedish Ambassador Jon Åström Gröndahl in 1 March tweet to urge govt to drop neutral language and condemn Russian aggression. Thai delegation to UN next day voted in favour of UN General Assembly resolution demanding end to Russian invasion. Student groups and foreigners in capital Bangkok staged regular protests in front of Russian embassy through mid-March. In deep south, roadside IED 10 March exploded alongside armoured patrol vehicle near school in Bannang Sata town, Yala province, wounding four rangers and two volunteers. In Pattani province, IED 16 March wounded four rangers in Mayo district. Gunmen 20 March shot and killed Muslim man at tea shop in Yarang district. IED 26 March wounded four rangers in Si Sakhon district, Narathiwat. Some 35 cloth banners with messages of “Free Patani” and “Patani is not Siam” 13 March appeared attached to helium balloons in three southernmost provinces (Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat) and four districts in Songkhla province, coinciding with 62nd anniversary of founding of Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), main militant separatist group. Plenary session of dialogue between Thai govt and BRN scheduled for 31 Mar-2 Apr in Kuala Lumpur.