

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** **China conducted series of maritime and aerial military drills and dispatched scores of vessels into Japan's contiguous zone, while Tokyo stepped up overseas engagement.** Chinese Liaoning aircraft carrier group comprising eight vessels 2 May sailed near main Okinawa island and transited Miyako Straits towards Philippine Sea, holding three-week-long naval drill and conducting some 300 plane and helicopter sorties; in response, Japan immediately dispatched aircraft carrier Izumo to monitor movements. Chinese navy 3 May released details of “realistic combat exercise” in East China Sea; navy also held sea and air drills 5-8 May to south east and south west of Taiwan (see Taiwan) and naval drills in Yellow Sea 15 May with largest destroyer Type 055 Lhasa. As of 19 May, 102 Chinese vessels had entered Japan's contiguous zone, including eight identified in Japan's territorial sea. China 13 May voiced discontent over EU-Japan joint statement mentioning dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Japan's foreign ministry 20 May lodged protest against China's unilateral gas field development in East China Sea. Japan 24 May scrambled jets as Russian and Chinese aircraft conducted joint area patrol near its airspace, coinciding with meeting same day of “Quad” countries, U.S., India and Australia in Japanese capital Tokyo; Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi called Russia-China action “provocative”. USS Ronald Reagan 17 May conducted joint exercises off Japanese coast with Japan's maritime self-defence force. Meanwhile, Japan boosted international engagement during month with high-level overseas trips, highlighting Indo-Pacific regional stability and Ukraine crisis; notably, PM Fumio Kishida 29 April-6 May travelled to Europe and Southeast Asia 5 May, warning that “Ukraine may be East Asia tomorrow”; China next day accused Tokyo of “hyping up the so-called China threat”.

➔ **🇰🇷 Korean Peninsula** **Pyongyang acknowledged COVID-19 outbreak for first time, and continued missile testing as concerns rose over possible nuclear test in coming weeks.** U.S. and South Korea issued warnings through month of potential seventh North Korean nuclear test. U.S. State Dept 6 May warned satellite imagery showed nuclear test preparations underway, possibly linked to U.S. President Biden 20-22 May Seoul visit for first meeting with South Korean President Yoon, who was inaugurated 10 May. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan 19 May said intelligence presents “genuine possibility” of “long-range missile test or a nuclear test or frankly both”. Seoul 13 May said North Korea appeared ready for first nuclear test, while saying ICBM test appeared “imminent”; risk remained by end of month of nuclear test taking place within next two weeks. Meanwhile, North Korea 12 May acknowledged COVID-19 outbreak for first time amid lockdowns in multiple cities, most importantly in capital Pyongyang; state media set death toll at 65 as of 20 May, with over 2.2mn cases; decision to publicly acknowledge outbreak may indicate first major COVID-19 crisis in Pyongyang or desire to solicit Chinese assistance. U.S. 12 May said it had no plans to share vaccines but would support “provision of critical humanitarian aid”; South Korea next day announced intention to provide vaccines. As of 27 May, North Korea had not responded to aid offers; China 16 May sent at least three planeloads of protective gear and medication. North Korea also continued controversial missile

activity. South Korea 4 May reported North Korean ballistic missile launch. North Korea 7 May tested alleged submarine-launched ballistic missile; in response, Japan condemned launch as “absolutely unacceptable”. North Korea 12 May fired three missiles off east coast. As U.S. President Biden concluded five-day trip in region, North Korea 25 May launched three missiles, including presumed Hwasong-17 inter-continental ballistic missile; U.S. and South Korea same day replied by launching two missiles. On diplomatic front, China’s Korean Affairs envoy 1 May expressed disapproval of “actions by any party that could escalate tension.” U.S. 3 May signalled desire to push UN Security Council vote on boosting sanctions against North Korea and 11 May warned “silence and restraint have not worked”. U.S. brought forward new UN Security Council resolution; Russia and China 27 May however vetoed it.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** **China continued incursions into Taiwan’s air defence zone and conducted rare breach of unofficial median line, while U.S. President Biden vowed to intervene in event of attack.** Chinese aircraft continued incursions into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone through month, totalling 74 planes as of 19 May over 14 consecutive days; notably, 18 Chinese planes 6 May entered zone. Taiwanese defence authorities 5-8 May reported 31 aircraft sorties south east and south west of island, coinciding with Chinese Liaoning aircraft carrier group drill east of Taiwan, near Japan’s Okinawa islands. USS Port Royal 11 May transited Taiwan Strait in second such passage of U.S. vessel in two weeks. Taiwanese defence ministry same day reported rare crossing of Chinese attack helicopter over median line of strait. Taiwanese annual military exercises 17 May commenced simulating defence against possible Chinese invasion and incorporating lessons of Ukraine war. China continued to warn U.S. of rhetoric and actions supporting Taiwan. U.S. State Dept 5 May updated factsheet on its website without usual statement that U.S. “does not support Taiwan independence”; China urged U.S. to abide by “one-China principle”. Chinese Politburo official Yang Jiechi in 18 May phone call with U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan reiterated centrality of Taiwan issue in U.S.-China relations, warning recent U.S. actions have been “widely distant from its statements.” In notable statement during five-day trip to Asia, U.S. President Biden 23 May said U.S. was willing to intervene militarily to support Taiwan in event of attack; U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin same day confirmed “our One China policy has not changed” and that Biden’s statements reiterated “commitment...to help provide Taiwan the means to defend itself”. Chinese foreign ministry same day expressed “strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition” over statements. Chinese military 25 May announced second large-scale military exercise around island. Meanwhile, media reports 1 May indicated U.S. and U.K. officials had held talks on contingency planning over conflict in Taiwan for first time. Taiwanese FM Joseph Wu 13 May revealed increasing talks with NATO and potential for greater cooperation.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan** **Taliban imposed further restrictions on women’s rights, opposition stepped up deadly attacks in north, and authorities engaged in regional de-escalation initiatives.** After March decision banning girls’ access to secondary schools, govt 7 May announced new restrictions with “hijab” ruling requiring face veil for women when in vicinity of non-family male

members; move immediately prompted Western condemnation, further complicating aid efforts. Some govt officials suggested ruling was necessary to appease hardliners, while Minister of Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani 17 May stated girls' secondary education will resume shortly without stipulating timeline. Leaked decree 16 May also suggested govt had dissolved multiple commissions, including Independent Human Rights Commission. Meanwhile, UN 13 May warned that it will have to reduce number of Afghans it is helping from 38% to 8% due to lack of funding; UN human rights rapporteur in Afghanistan 14 May conducted visit to country 15-26 May, expressed concerns about "serious human rights challenges", including severe restriction on women's freedoms. Opposition continued to launch stepped-up attacks in north. Notably, violence early May rose in Panjshir province after video surfaced on social media of Taliban fighters dancing near mausoleum of senior resistance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud during Eid celebrations 1-2 May. While Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid 5 May distanced govt from these actions, by next day rumours had emerged of serious fighting between National Resistance Front (NRF) fighters and Taliban in Takhar, Panjshir, Badakhshan and Baghlan provinces. Govt initially denied reports, but over coming days sent significant reinforcements to north and began claiming victories over rebels. Recent fighting reinvigorated opposition, with High Resistance Council for Saving Afghanistan holding gathering condemning Taliban injustices and calling fighting in north "legitimate" without explicitly endorsing NRF. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) continued attacks during month; notably, ISKP 8 May reportedly fired Katyusha rockets into Tajikistan. Regionally, tensions with neighbours eased somewhat. Pakistan 18 May participated in Taliban-hosted talks with Pakistan Taliban group (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP) (see Pakistan); Iran 12 May hosted Taliban delegation following another round of border clashes prompted by videos purporting to show mistreatment of Afghan refugees and Afghan immigrant stabbing three Iranian clerics in Mashhad city.

➡ **Bangladesh Tensions between ruling Awami League party and opposition persisted, authorities arrested dozens of suspected jihadist militants, and more Rohingyas refugees entered country.** Political tensions between opposition and ruling party continued ahead of elections due by Dec 2023. Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Sec Gen Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir 8 May said "There's no question of holding an election if the Awami League [AL] regime does not resign and power is handed over to a completely neutral government". Ruling AL Gen Sec Obaidul Quader same day warned BNP they might cease to exist if they do not participate in election. Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal 10 May said making elections inclusive was not his institution's job, main responsibility is "to conduct a fair and impartial election". Authorities continued to arrest suspected jihadist militants. Notably, police 17 May detained 49 suspected members of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir in Chittagong city. Information Minister Hasan Mahmud 5 May accused NGO Reporters Without Borders of "continuously publishing reports against Bangladesh with malicious intent" after NGO 3 May published new World Press Freedom Index 2022 report ranking Bangladesh 162nd, lowest ranking among any South Asian country. Rohingya refugees continue to flee to Bangladesh from Myanmar amid concerns about Rohingya children's rights. Police 11 May arrested 29 Rohingyas in Moulvibazar and Cox's Bazar districts, who had entered Bangladesh from India through Kulaura border. FM Momen 17 May expressed concern about influx of Rohingyas across border with India and said "We have to engage more

security forces to stop them”; Dhaka 21 May sent note verbale to New Delhi to halt entry of Rohingyas to Bangladesh. Meanwhile, NGO Human Rights Watch 11 May reported authorities were restricting Rohingyas freedom to move, work and study, said authorities 4-5 May temporarily detained 656 Rohingyas who had been celebrating Eid holidays outside Kutupalong camp. UN children agency UNICEF 1 May announced milestone of reaching first 10,000 children accessing learning centres across multiple Cox’s Bazar refugee camps; UNICEF is eventually due to support about 300,000 Rohingya refugee children.

➔ **India Military expressed both confidence and concern amid ongoing boundary dispute with China.** Northern Army commander Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi 6 May said situation along Line of Actual Control is “stable but it is in the state of heightened alert” to avoid repeat of April 2020 deadly clashes between Chinese and Indian forces, while citing regular hotline exchanges with Chinese counterparts and calibrated force deployment as ensuring “any misadventure by the adversary does not take place again”. Army chief Gen Manoj Pande 9 May said “China’s intent has been to keep the boundary issue alive” and said disengagement in areas such as Hot Springs, Depsang Plains and Demchok “can only be resolved through dialogue”; Pande also said Indian army’s intention “is to restore the status quo ante prior to April 2020”. Media reports 19 May indicated China had begun constructing second bridge across Pangong Lake in Eastern Ladakh, cutting distance between Chinese troops on north bank and eastern end of lake by around 150km. Meanwhile, authorities continued bulldozing houses and buildings in Muslim areas on pretext of illegal construction, notably in New Delhi’s Shaheen Bagh area - site of anti-govt protests Dec 2019-March 2020. Local court in Varanasi city, Uttar Pradesh state (north), 16 May directed administration to prohibit entry to Gyanvapi Masjid complex, where idol of Hindu god was reportedly found; Supreme Court next day ordered area protection, allowed Muslims to pray there till case is concluded. Recent events sparked concerns that move is reminiscent of controversial demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu right-wing activists. Media reports early month indicated security forces opened 20 new security camps to tackle Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh (centre) Jharkhand, Bihar (east), Maharashtra (west) and Telangana (south central) states in past six months. Rocket-propelled grenade 9 May hit intelligence wing headquarters of Punjab Police at night in Mohali, extension of Punjab state’s capital Chandigarh; Punjab police 13 May claimed pro-Khalistan militant outfit, Babbar Khalsa International, along with gangsters backed by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence, carried out attack.

➔ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Tensions rose after release of report seen as favouring Hindu constituency in proposed revised electoral constituencies for Jammu and Kashmir (J&K); militant violence across J&K continued.** Pakistan’s foreign ministry 25 May summoned Indian chargé d’affaires to condemn two consecutive life sentences on prominent Kashmiri separatist leader Yasin Malik in terrorism funding case. Delimitation Commission tasked with carving out new constituencies in J&K 5 May submitted final report: proposes to give six assembly seats to Hindu-dominated Jammu region and one to Muslim-majority Kashmir valley, taking total number of assembly seats from 83 to 90; move would skew electoral balance in favour of Jammu and provide advantage for ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, electorally strong in Hindu-majority Jammu region. Kashmiri political parties unanimously condemned proposals, called commission biased and tool to disempower people of Kashmir. Pakistan’s foreign

ministry 5 May conveyed categorical rejection of report. Meanwhile, militant attacks and counter-insurgency operations continued unabated in J&K. Notably, bomb blast 2 May injured two security forces personnel in Pulwama district; militants 7 May shot dead policeman in regional capital Srinagar; militants 13 May killed policeman in Pulwama district. Kashmir Tigers militants 12 May also entered govt office in Budgam district and shot dead Hindu revenue official. Following attack, Kashmiri govt employees protested, threatened to migrate again if govt does not provide them security and demanded transfers to Jammu region until security situation improved in Kashmir. Militant grenade attack on new liquor store 17 May killed one and injured three in Baramulla district; militant groups banned liquor stores in Kashmir valley in early 1990s, as they were seen as affront to local religious sentiments; security forces 19 May claimed to have arrested four alleged Lashkar-e-Tayyaba militants and associate linked to attack. Security forces 6 May killed three suspected Hizbul Mujahideen militants; 10 May killed two militants in Anantnag district; 11 and 13 May killed three suspected militants in Bandipora district. Security forces also claimed that a 22-year-old shopkeeper was killed 15 May during security operation in Shopian district; family members denied version, said police were “making up stories to save the personnel behind the cold-blooded murder”.

➔ **Nepal Ruling alliance secured first place in local elections, which saw reports of localised clashes and opposition's claims of rigged vote.**

Local elections 13 May proceeded without any major incidents. National Human Rights Commission 13 May, however, noted that clashes between party cadres had disrupted voting in several districts. Local reports indicated police fire killed one in Katari, Udayapur district and another sustained bullet wounds after police opened fire in Bhimsen Thapa Rural municipality 13 May. Further clashes between police and party members also reportedly took place next day. Ruling Nepali Congress won 325 mayoral and 292 deputy mayoral posts across 753 total units contested in local elections. Opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist, UML) came distant second among individual parties, winning 202 mayor and 234 deputy mayor posts; UML's tally was much lower compared to last local polls in 2017 when it secured 294 mayoral and 331 deputy mayoral seats. Ruling alliance member Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) won 121 mayoral and 127 deputy mayoral seats, while two other coalition members — the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) and Janata Samajbadi Party — won 50 mayoral seats combined. UML 15 May accused ruling coalition of rigging elections, claiming governing parties manipulated vote; Election Commission officials same day dismissed claims as unsubstantiated.

➔ **Pakistan Former PM Khan called off anti-govt march to capital Islamabad but warned of more protests; Pakistani Taliban and military temporarily halted hostilities but sporadic attacks continued.**

Khan 22 May announced protest march against U.S. “imported government”, which would reach Islamabad on 25 May and remain there till early elections announced and parliament dissolved. Govt 23 March banned march and police same day raided homes of opposition leaders in Punjab state, leading to officer being shot dead in one such raid. Police barriers on main communication routes from Punjab to Islamabad sparked clashes with Khan's supporters. Govt deployed military in sensitive areas housing key govt buildings and diplomatic missions in Islamabad. After barriers in Islamabad were removed following Supreme Court's directives 25 May, demonstrators continued to clash with police, leaving at least 30 officers injured;

Khan same day abruptly called off protest. Denying reports that his decision resulted from negotiations with military, Khan 27 May justified move due to fear of “bloodshed”; yet he warned of resuming his “jihad” against govt unless authorities set date for early elections within six days. Meanwhile, amid deteriorating economic situation, govt 26 May increased fuel prices, a key demand from International Monetary Fund (IMF), with finance minister warning of default in the absence of IMF \$6bn bailout package agreed in 2019. Govt same day passed key legislation, reversing Khan’s decision to use electronic voting machines in next general elections and restricting powers of controversial anti-corruption National Accountability Bureau. Pakistani Taliban militants (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) and military temporarily ceased hostilities for ten days to mark Eid religious holiday starting 3 May; Pakistani Taliban Govt 16 May agreed to temporarily extend ceasefire to 30 May. Sporadic incidents however occurred during latter part of month. Notably, two separate militant attacks 15 May killed three soldiers and five civilians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, and 17 May killed one intelligence official in Peshawar city. Meanwhile, militants launched separate bomb attacks in Sindh province’s capital Karachi, killing two and injuring 18 others 12 and 16 May; banned nationalist outfit Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army claimed responsibility for attacks.

➔ **Sri Lanka** **Deadly clashes erupted between pro- and anti-govt protesters, forcing PM Mahinda Rajapaksa to resign as country faced possible extended period of political stalemate and instability.** Mahinda Rajapaksa 9 May resigned as PM after hundreds of his supporters violently attacked peaceful protesters stationed outside his official residence and at main “GotaGoGama” protest camp in capital Colombo; notably, pro-Mahinda supporters beat protesters and burned GotaGoGama site, injuring scores. Attack triggered large-scale counter-reprisals, first in Colombo and then across island, from groups aligned with anti-govt protest movement; anti-govt attackers 9-10 May torched over 100 houses and properties mostly owned by Rajapaksa family and ruling party members, resulting in eight killed and over 200 injured. Amid island-wide curfew next day, protests continued. In following days, police arrested scores for alleged role in violence, including activists reportedly not involved. President Rajapaksa 12 May appointed five-time prime minister and leader of United National Party Ranil Wickremasinghe as PM; protesters and political observers widely condemned move as Wickremasinghe seen as quintessential insider close to Rajapaksa family. Wickremasinghe 16 May told country “next couple of months will be the most difficult ones of our lives” and 19 May warned of risk of major food crisis in few months due to lack of fertiliser for current planting. Economic and humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate as foreign reserves remained near zero. Prices of essentials continued to rise rapidly, with official figures showing inflation at record 39 per cent and unofficial estimates indicating much higher increase; medicine grew increasingly scarce. Preliminary negotiations with International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank took place, with IMF virtual mission 9-23 May leading “discussions at the technical level”. World Bank 24 May announced no new financing “until an adequate macroeconomic policy framework is in place”. Wickremasinghe 25 May named finance minister, 31 May announced series of tax hikes. Wickremasinghe 29 May proposed series of major governance reforms granting more powers to parliament, as new cabinet - dominated by Rajapaksa supporters - 23 May discussed draft 21st amendment to constitution trimming president’s powers; draft fell short of including protesters and opposition’s demands to abolish executive presidency.

South East Asia

➔ **Myanmar National Unity Govt (NUG) accused pro-military groups of targeted killings against its members, hostilities rose in Kayah State, and U.S. and regional states urged progress on five-point consensus.**

Working committee of former ruling party, National League for Democracy, 10 May accused pro-military “death squads” of killing seven party members and seven supporters as of 5 May. Revenge attacks by resistance groups killed alleged death squad members during month; notably, resistance groups 10 May reportedly shot dead two death squad leaders in Tanintharyi and Mandalay regions. Fighting escalated in Hpruso Township, Kayah State, following relative lull through March-April. Regime forces 3 May allegedly fired indiscriminately into residential areas of villages along Demoso-Bawlakhe highway. Karenni Nationalities Defence Force next day retaliated with two attacks on military convoys on highway, reportedly killing three soldiers, and 7 May ambushed convoy heading to Bawlakhe town, reportedly killing at least 20 soldiers and destroying four vehicles. In Rakhine State, in sign of rising tensions with military, leader of ethnic armed group Arakan Army 6 May tweeted threat at head of military’s Western Command, said would “crush” forces if aggressive military stance, increased checkpoints and civilian harassment continued. At least nine armed groups by 9 May confirmed participation in peace talks proposed by State Administration Council Chairman Min Aung Hlaing in April; none of them however hold strong anti-military positions or are in active conflict with regime. Boat carrying around 90 ethnic Rohingya refugees from Rakhine State 21 May capsized en route to Malaysia, killing at least 17. Diplomatically, Min Aung Hlaing 2 May met Cambodian PM Hun Sen in first public meeting since late Jan; Cambodia called for “more speedy progress” on implementing five-point consensus agreed by Southeast Asia regional body ASEAN to address situation in Myanmar in April 2021. Myanmar remained key issue during 12-13 May U.S.-ASEAN summit with attendees pushing for five-point consensus implementation. Despite no formal invitation to summit, NUG FM Zin Mar Aung 12 May met with U.S. Assistant Sec of State Wendy Sherman and 14 May with Malaysian FM Abdullah Saifuddin. Myanmar regime 14 May objected to meetings and Myanmar-specific paragraph in U.S.-ASEAN summit communiqué.

➔ **Philippines Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. elected as new president, Bangsamoro witnessed local electoral violence, and clashes between govt and militants continued in south.**

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. 9 May won presidential elections with over 80% turnout by wide margin, while Sara Duterte-Carpio — daughter of incumbent President Duterte — won vice presidency. Bangsamoro Interim Chief Minister Ahod “Al Haj Murad” Ebrahim 13 May congratulated Marcos, assuring him of Bangsamoro govt’s continued “openness, cooperation and friendship”. Office of Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity same day assured next president would support peace agenda of outgoing Duterte administration; exchanges come amid stalled disarmament process, with several thousand Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters still scheduled to be disarmed. Election held relatively peacefully, although localised firefights, bombings and shootings were recorded in south. At least seven casualties and 30 injuries were reported in and around the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, while violence in some villages of Butig, Tuburan and Binidayan municipalities, Lanao del Sur province, necessitated repeat of election.

Insecurity continued through month in Bangsamoro. Military 6 May clashed with suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants on outskirts of Isabela city, Basilan province, killing one militant; Special Forces intelligence team of Philippine army recovered high-grade explosives and IED components in aftermath of clash. In Sulu province, military 16 May clashed with alleged ASG militants of Radullan Sahiron faction in Indanan town, wounding three soldiers. In Maguindanao province, military 23 May launched offensive against militants in Shariff Saydona town, conducting airstrikes that killed at least one rebel. In Marawi city, Task Force Bangon Marawi 16 May said rehabilitation is 72% complete, inaugurated several unfinished infrastructure projects ahead of fifth anniversary of Marawi siege 23 May; UN Human Settlements Programme 19 May said one thousand houses have been turned over to internally displaced families. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist New People's Army continued at lower levels from April; violence in Mindanao Island in south, Visayas Islands in centre and Luzon Island in north led to at least seven fatalities and three injuries among both combatants and civilians.

➔ **South China Sea U.S. and Southeast Asia regional body ASEAN pledged deeper cooperation in South China Sea (SCS), while China imposed annual fishing ban.** U.S. and ASEAN 12-13 May held summit in U.S. capital Washington D.C., during which they elevated relationship to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership; 14 May published Joint Vision Statement recognising “benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, and prosperity” and committing “to advancing our cooperation in the maritime domain through ASEAN-led mechanisms”. U.S. 12 May announced \$60mn assistance, with which U.S. Coast Guard will train and help ASEAN countries combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. China 1 May began annual fishing ban covering waters of South China Sea north of 12 degrees latitude until Aug 16, Bohai Sea and Yellow Sea until 1 Sept, and East China Sea until 16 Sept, citing marine conservation; move proceeded despite Vietnam 29 April protesting ban, which they see as “violation of Vietnam’s sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction”. According to 13 May Nikkei Asia report, Indonesia considered making Natuna Islands special economic zone, in move likely aimed both at attracting investment and increasing maritime security against expanding Chinese activities in area. Philippines 31 May filed diplomatic protest over Chinese fishing ban in SCS, condemning Chinese Coast Guard activities as “clear violations of the Philippine maritime jurisdiction”. Meanwhile, Chinese naval frigates early May held “high-intensity multi-subject combat training exercise” at unannounced sea area. China and ASEAN due to finalise code of conduct agreement at meeting planned for June. U.S. navy’s USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group 9 May conducted deterrence exercises in Philippine Sea. “Quad” leaders of U.S., Australia, India and Japan 24 May reaffirmed commitment to meet “challenges to the maritime rules-based order” in “East and South China Seas” and condemned “militarisation of disputed features”.

➔ **Thailand Truce in deep south between govt and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) held as planned until late May, while Bangkok expanded defence partnership with Japan.** In deep south, Ramadan Peace Initiative – agreement concluded 31 March between govt and main militant separatist group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) for reciprocal reduction of violence 3 April-14 May – held steady, with no attacks attributed to BRN or major operations by security forces during month. After truce expired 14 May, militants 26 May attacked marine police station in Tak Bai border town, Narathiwat province, with IEDs and small

arms, wounding one police officer and two defence volunteers; authorities claimed drug traffickers and smugglers responsible for attack. BRN 1 May posted Hari Raya video marking end of Ramadan, criticised increased violence from Thai security forces and suggested Peace Dialogue Process did not conform to international standards; statements came in stark contrast to conciliatory tone expressed at meeting of Peace Dialogue Process working group 31 March-1 April. In Pattani province, in rare mass youth event, several thousand young Malay Muslim men 4 May attended youth event organised by Civil Society Assembling for Peace (CAP) at Wasukri Beach, Saiburi district, to celebrate end of Ramadan and take public oath to defend Pattani Malay culture and identity and “eliminate all forms of oppression”, with at least one BRN flag on display; young Malay Muslim women’s associations 10 May held similar event in Narathiwat province, attended by several thousand. Event organisers 17 May met secretary of Thai dialogue panel Lt Gen Thira Deawa in Pattani province, explaining oath had been mistranslated and that organisers did not authorise BRN flag display; Lt Gen Thira affirmed no legal action would be taken but urged organisers to inform authorities in advance of future events. Meanwhile, activists opposed to draft non-profit organisation bill 23 May began protest near Government House in capital Bangkok; critics say bill threatens civil society and free speech; police 30 May prevented hundreds opposed to draft bill from marching on Government House. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 2 May met Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, signing agreement on mutual transfer of defence equipment and coordination on regional issues.