



CrisisWatch 2023 – November Trends and December Alerts

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** China and Japan continued maritime presence around disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in East China Sea, while their leaders held first direct talks in year.

China and Japan continued maritime presence around contested islands. As of 28 Nov, Japan spotted 98 Chinese navy vessels in Japan's contiguous zone and twenty vessels in its territorial sea. Chinese Coast Guard 1 Nov reported that three Japanese vessels and several patrol boats "illegally" entered "territorial waters" near disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Chinese Coast Guard ships 1-5 Nov entered Japanese waters around Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and four such vessels 9 Nov entered Japan's territorial waters off islands, which prompted Tokyo to lodge protest with Beijing. Chinese Coast Guard 28 Nov reported that it warned off Japanese ships in waters surrounding islands.

China and Japan held high-level dialogue. Marking their first direct talks since Nov 2022, Chinese President Xi and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida 16 Nov met in U.S. city San Francisco on sidelines of APEC summit. Kishida expressed serious concerns about China's frequent military activities near Japan, including cooperation with Russia, and reiterated importance of peace and stability in Taiwan Strait. Kishida also strongly urged China to remove buoy set up in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone in East China Sea. Chinese FM Wang Yi 9 Nov met sec gen of Japan's National Security Secretariat Takeo Akiba ahead of Xi-Kishida meeting; Wang urged counterpart to translate intention to improve ties into concrete action. FMs of China, Japan and South Korea 24 Nov held trilateral meeting first time in four years.

Japan courted closer defence ties with partners. Kishida 11 Nov stated that with increasing military activities of China and Russia, Japan is in most severe and complex security environment since World War II. Japan and Philippines 4 Nov announced negotiations on deal to deploy troops on each other's territory. Japan and UK 7 Nov reaffirmed their comment to strengthen security cooperation. During visit to Australia, VP of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party 13 Nov urged Japan, U.S. and Australia to unite against any forceful change to status quo; Aso proposed inclusion of Japan in AUKUS framework, suggesting "JAUKUS" alliance.

➡ **Korean Peninsula** North Korea successfully launched satellite and abrogated 2018 military agreement with South Korea, removing important safeguard against risk of cross-border clashes.

North Korea put satellite into orbit on third attempt of 2023. North Korea 21 Nov launched military reconnaissance satellite in country's third launch attempt this year, following previous failures in May and Aug, and first since North Korean leader agreed with Russian President Putin in Sept to conduct unspecified collaboration in field of satellite launches; there is no evidence, however, that Russian help was determinative in launch. Pyongyang detonated first stage of rocket in mid-air to ensure it could not be retrieved from sea. If satellite will function as intended, it will provide north with upgraded surveillance of South Korean and U.S. militaries, although South Korea asserted scepticism of North's technology.

Inter-Korean military deal collapsed, heightening conflict risks at border. In response to satellite launch, South Korea next day announced suspension of one-part of 2018 military agreement with Pyongyang – designed to ease bilateral tensions during period of diplomacy in 2018-19 – thus permitting Seoul to restore full aerial reconnaissance and surveillance along inter-Korean border. North Korea next day abrogated whole deal, accusing South of “frontal challenge to the spirit of the agreement”. Collapse of agreement heightens risk of accidental or deliberate cross-border clashes in coming months as North Korea is now likely to begin rebuilding border guard posts destroyed during 2018, bringing soldiers into closer contact; Pyongyang could redeploy soldiers to Kaesong Industrial Complex and tourism resort at Mount Kumgang, as well as step up drone activity near border and cross-border propaganda leafleting and loudspeaker broadcasts.

North Korea continued close engagement with Russia. North Korea's minister of external economic relations Yun Jong Ho and Russia's natural resources minister Alexander Kozlov 15 Nov met in North Korean capital Pyongyang to discuss implementation of agreements reached between leaders Kim Jong Un and Putin in Sept; Kozlov noted agreement on joint geological explorations in North Korea in search of gold, iron, and rare earth metal deposits, intention to increase Russia's agricultural exports and bring bilateral trade back to pre-pandemic levels.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** China continued military activity around island as presidents Biden and Xi discussed Taiwan face-to-face, while Beijing issued warning ahead of Taiwan's Jan 2024 general elections.

Chinese military continued operations around island. As of 28 Nov, Taiwan spotted 324 Chinese military aircraft around island, of which at least 98 crossed unofficial “median line” or were detected in Taiwan's de facto air defence identification zone. Taiwan reported 171 sightings of Chinese navy vessels in surrounding waters. China's Shandong aircraft carrier group conducted exercises southeast of Taiwan and 8 Nov traversed Taiwan Strait. U.S. navy destroyer *USS Rafael Peralta* and Royal Canadian frigate *HMCS Ottawa* 1 Nov transited Taiwan Strait. Australian warship *HMAS Toowomba* 23 Nov passed Taiwan Strait.

U.S. and Chinese leaders held in-person meeting and discussed Taiwan. During meeting between U.S. President Biden and China's President Xi on sidelines of APEC summit in U.S. city San Francisco, Xi 15 Nov stated that Taiwan is “most important and sensitive issue” in U.S.-China relations and called for Washington to stop arming

Taiwan and support China's peaceful unification, while Biden described talks as constructive and effective, and reiterated "one China" policy remained unchanged. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin 17 Nov said U.S. will continue to develop military ties with Taiwan amid resumed dialogue with China. Earlier, G7 FMs meeting in Japanese capital Tokyo 8 Nov concluded with joint statement reaffirming importance of peace and stability in Taiwan Strait and supporting Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations.

China warned Taiwan's presidential candidates of consequences of independence. Ahead of Jan presidential and legislative polls, China's Taiwan Affairs Office 15 Nov warned that "Taiwan independence" means war, adding that Beijing sees combination of incumbent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)'s candidate Lai Ching-te and running mate Hsiao Bi-Khim – Taiwan's de facto representative to U.S. – as "independence plus independence". Taiwanese premier Chen Chien-jen 14 Nov claimed security agencies had detected China's interference in upcoming elections. Attempts by Taiwan opposition parties Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) to run on joint ticket fell apart. Meanwhile, Taiwan's President Tsai 30 Nov assessed Chinese invasion was unlikely as Beijing is overwhelmed with internal challenges.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan Tensions mounted between Taliban and Pakistan as Islamabad forcibly deported hundreds of thousands of Afghans, while Islamic State's local branch targeted ethnic minority Hazara community.**

Tensions continued to rise with Pakistan amid Afghan exodus. Relations between Kabul and Islamabad continued to face strains as pair traded public criticism and Pakistan forcibly deported hundreds of thousands – and perhaps soon millions – of Afghans to Afghanistan ahead of harsh winter months, which could overwhelm Taliban authorities ill-prepared for massive influx amid one of the world's largest humanitarian crises and as country reels from devastating earthquakes, economic challenges and sanctions. Some of those forced by Pakistan to cross border fled Taliban rule after group's takeover in August 2021 and could risk Taliban reprisals (see Pakistan). After Pakistan's caretaker PM stated that relations will improve when "a legitimate government is established in Kabul", Taliban 17 Nov responded that ties will improve when "there is wise leadership in Pakistan". Taliban-affiliated media during month continued to imply that Pakistan is supporting anti-Taliban armed groups inside Afghanistan.

Islamic State targeted ethnic minority Hazaras. Reeling from losses inflicted by security forces in recent months, Islamic State Khorsan Province (ISKP) maintained low-level activity, opting to target unarmed Hazara civilians whom group sees as soft target. Notably, ISKP 7 Nov targeted van in the Hazara enclave of Dasht-e Barchi in western neighbourhoods of Kabul, killing at least seven and wounding over dozen. Taliban intelligence forces 6 Nov reportedly targeted ISKP cell in Suki district, Kunar province (east).

Taliban convened high-level meeting to address economy and Pakistan ties. Taliban's Emir 19 Nov held meeting with de facto cabinet in Kandahar city, which

appeared to be primarily concerned with economic direction of govt as well as deteriorating relations with Pakistan; although exact details are unknown, such meetings are significant as key govt policies are often decided.

➡ **Bangladesh Govt crackdown on opposition continued ahead of Jan elections, protests by garment workers turned deadly and Rohingya refugees fled country amid dire conditions and rampant insecurity.**

Govt continued pressure on opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). After security forces broke up BNP's "grand rally" in capital Dhaka on 28 Oct, opposition claimed authorities subsequently arrested at least 13,200 activists and leaders. In response to crackdown, BNP organised series of "blockades" and "hartals" throughout Nov aimed at inflicting economic damage to pressure govt to give way to neutral govt ahead of vote, leading to confrontations between police and opposition supporters that killed paramilitary officer and several civilians. Ruling Awami League dispatched stick-wielding supporters to keep roads opens and employed harsh rhetoric: PM Sheikh Hasina 4 Nov instructed supporters "burn the hands of those who are out to set vehicles on fire". U.S. ambassador Peter Haas 13 Nov sought political dialogue between main parties but govt rejected offer, claiming "the ship has sailed". With BNP certain to boycott poll, Awami League is trying to entice or pressure wavering parties to participate and enhance election's credibility.

Garment workers staged protests, leading to deadly clashes. Tens of thousands of garment workers starting late Oct demanded higher wages to meet rising living costs, forcing hundreds of factories to close; garment sector accounts for 80% of exports. Near-daily clashes between police and protestors killed four before protests 14 Nov ended amid police crackdowns, threats from employers and govt pressure.

Prospects of Rohingya refugee repatriation appeared dim. Resumption of heavy fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine state mid-Nov dashed govt's hopes for repatriation (see Myanmar). Rohingya continued to flee dire conditions in camps and pay people smugglers to flee across Bay of Bengal: five vessels carrying 866 people 14-19 Nov landed on Indonesia's Aceh province after two months at sea. UN estimated over 3,500 refugees took the perilous journey in 2022, up from 700 year before.

Dialogue resumed in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Militant group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) and govt's Peace Establishment Committee 5 Nov held first face-to-face meeting and first dialogue since July ceasefire; KNF reiterated demands for greater autonomy ahead of further talks in Dec.

➡ **India Instability and violence persisted in Manipur in far northeast, border talks with China continued, and Maoist militants targeted Chhattisgarh state poll.**

In Manipur, militants targeted Indian security forces and Kuki community. Around 700 armed men 1 Nov attacked police camps in state capital Imphal and looted assault rifles, over 600 rounds of ammunition, and at least six vehicles. Meitei militant organisation People's Liberation Army 16 Nov attempted to ambush Indian security forces in Tengnoupal district but Indian personnel escaped unhurt. Meitei militants 20 Nov killed two Kuki men in Kangpokpi district, raising death toll since outbreak of hostilities in May to at least 183 with more than 30 missing and thousands displaced. Meanwhile, Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum representing

Kuki community 15 Nov declared “self-rule” in Tengnoupal, Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts, citing demand for separate administration from Manipur govt that central govt has not addressed; body intends to instate separate chief minister and officials from community who were forced out of Imphal when hostilities began. In response, state police filed sedition case against tribal body, raising prospect of clashes between pair, particularly if central govt fails to heed body’s demands and replace state’s chief minister.

Military dialogue continued with China over border. After twentieth round of military talks between pair in Oct witnessed no progress, both sides early Nov reportedly began talks ahead of winter to rule out any incident as troop deployments are readjusted for harsh months ahead.

Maoist attacks continued in centre. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), bomb blast by Maoists 6 Nov injured two and killed one in Kanker district, one day ahead of state assembly elections. Bomb blast 17 Nov killed security forces member in Gariaband district during second phase of state assembly elections. State police of West Bengal (east) 18 Nov arrested two Maoists and recovered weapons in Murshidabad district.

↓ India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Indian and Pakistani border forces exchanged heavy fire in violation of 2021 ceasefire amid uptick in militant infiltration attempts, while security operations in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) triggered deadly gun battles.

India and Pakistan exchanged fire, violating Line of Control ceasefire. After India claimed Pakistani border troops late Oct opened fire unprovoked in RS Pura and Arnia sectors of border in Jammu region, which led to exchange of heavy fire and shelling, Indian forces 9 Nov claimed Pakistani border troops opened fire again in Arnia and Ramgarh sectors of border in Jammu region. Move prompted Indian forces to retaliate, killing one Indian security forces member; gunfire marks another violation of ceasefire since 2003 agreement was renewed indefinitely in Feb 2021, which brings total violations in 2023 to six. New Delhi also claimed uptick in attempted infiltrations of militants from Pakistan in Rajouri and Poonch sector in Jammu region and Kupwara and Baramulla sectors in Kashmir region, which may further increase ahead of harsher winter weather; border troops 15 Nov killed two alleged infiltrators in Uri sector.

Security operations inside J&K triggered deadly clashes. Marking uptick in lethality, security forces 16-17 Nov killed five militants in two-day gun battle in Kulgam district and security operation 22-23 Nov left two LeT militants and five security personnel dead in Rajouri district. Earlier, security forces 1 Nov arrested four alleged militant associates of Laskhar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) in Baramulla district and 2 Nov arrested two alleged militant associates of Al-Badr militant outfit in Srinagar city. Security forces 9 Nov killed one militant of The Resistance Front in Shopian district; 17 Nov killed alleged militant in Rajouri.

High Court granted bail to imprisoned journalists. High Court of J&K 17 Nov granted bail to Fahad Shah, editor of news portal The Kashmir Walla imprisoned since Feb 2022 under anti-terrorism laws for publishing article in 2011; court quashed some charges, such as “abetting terrorism, waging war against the country and promoting enmity” under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. Court 9 Nov

granted bail to journalist Sajad Ahmad Dar, arrested in Jan 2022 under Public Safety Act.

➡ **Pakistan Authorities set Feb 2024 election date, deadly attacks continued in Afghan border provinces, and govt faced international rebuke for forcibly deporting hundreds of thousands of Afghans.**

Apex election body set election date amid political jostling. After weeks of delay and finally compelled by Supreme Court, Election Commission 4 Nov announced election had been set for 8 Feb 2024; all political parties welcomed decision, although former PM Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) bemoaned unlevel playing field and Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) accused caretaker govt of bias in favour of Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League. PTI continued to face significant crackdown, particularly in main political battleground Punjab province, as provincial authorities refused party permission to hold public gatherings. Khan, who remained in prison, submitted petitions to Supreme Court for post-arrest bail and to overturn indictment regarding misusing diplomatic cables; Islamabad High Court 21 Nov accepted Khan's petition ruling out trial in prison. Open trial will resume 1 Dec but within prison premises, ostensibly on security grounds.

Militant attacks and military operations continued, primarily in Afghan border provinces. In one of most lethal attacks in recent months, Baloch militants 3 Nov killed fourteen soldiers in Balochistan province's Gwadar district. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, bomb blast targeting police and military 3 Nov killed five civilians and soldier in Dera Ismail district, while militants 6 Nov killed two police constables. During military operation in Khyber district, militants 6 Nov killed four soldiers, including Lieutenant Colonel. In Punjab province, affiliate of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 4 Nov assaulted Pakistan Air Force training base in Mianwali district, leaving all nine attackers dead.

Govt continued forcible deportation of Afghans en masse. Govt had reportedly forced more hundreds of thousands of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan (see Afghanistan). In attempt to justify policy, caretaker PM Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar blamed "illegal immigrants" for "spreading insecurity" and cited Taliban's failure to take action against "anti-Pakistan terrorists". International rights group Amnesty International 10 Nov condemned Pakistan's use of Afghan refugees as "political pawn" and UN human rights chief 16 Nov expressed concern over reports of "ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detention, destruction of property and personnel belongings and extortion".

➡ **Sri Lanka President Wickremesinghe presented ambitious 2024 budget ahead of next year's presidential polls, while Supreme Court ruled on former presidents' economic mismanagement and anti-terrorism regulations.**

Govt's 2024 budget goals met with scepticism. Ahead of presidential elections set for late 2024, President Wickremesinghe 13 Nov presented to parliament 2024 budget. Extremely ambitious target of raising revenue by 47% was widely questioned given govt's failure to make sufficient progress raising chronically low revenue, which fell about 15% below International Monetary Fund's projections in 2023.

Budget also boosts govt workers' pay, increases state pensions and proposes new taxes and crackdown on tax avoidance.

Supreme Court issued landmark judgment on former presidents' economic mismanagement. Supreme Court 14 Nov found former presidents Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and other top officials, responsible for economic mismanagement between 2019-2022, which violated public trust and Sri Lankans' constitutional rights. Judgment brought no immediate legal repercussions, though opposition called for Rajapaksas to be barred from holding office in future. In another important ruling, Supreme Court 14 Nov ordered state to pay 1mn rupees (\$3,000) to Muslim social media activist Ramzy Razeek, whose detention for five months on charges of breaching often-abused International Convention on Civil and Political Rights Act violated his fundamental rights.

Calls mounted for new 2019 Easter bombings investigation. In interview with ABC Australia, former Deputy Inspector General of Police and head of Criminal Investigation Dept Ravi Seneviratne 16 Nov for first time publicly accused intelligence agencies of actively interfering with police investigations into 2019 Easter bombings; Sri Lankan Catholic Church next day repeated calls for new, independent investigation. Separately, Supreme Court 13 Nov ruled as unconstitutional anti-terrorism regulations on "religious extremism" introduced in 2021 but never applied, designed to process hundreds of Muslims arrested following 2019 Easter suicide attacks.

Tamils held commemorations. Thousands of Tamils across north and east took part in annual ceremonies in week leading to "Great Heroes Day" on 27 Nov, commemorating those who died in struggle for independent state; police disrupted or blocked numerous local gatherings, with at least one organiser arrested under anti-terrorism law.

South East Asia

📌 ⚡ **Myanmar** **Military faced largest battlefield challenges since Feb 2021 coup as ethnic armed groups conducted attacks on multiple fronts; regime may step up brutal response, including indiscriminate bombings, in coming weeks.**

Ethnic armed groups and resistance forces made major gains in north. After Three Brotherhood Alliance – comprising the three ethnic armed groups active in northern Shan State: Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Arakan Army (AA) – and allied resistance groups 27 Oct launched "Operation 1027", in Nov their forces seized over 130 outposts from regime, inflicted casualties (including Brigadier-General) and major materiel losses on military, captured string of towns in China border area, and destroyed or secured important bridges and blocked major highways, constituting significant strategic, economic and psychological blows to military. Military responded with airstrikes and artillery, which failed to counter operation but caused civilian casualties and displaced some 82,000 in Shan state and 335,000 nationwide (bringing total number of civilians displaced since coup to over 2m). In sign of

possibly greater inter-ethnic tensions to come, Shan State Progress Party 7 Nov clashed with TNLA in Muse Township, killing several.

Other groups took advantage on several fronts, threatening to overstretch military. In early Nov, one of largest ethnic armed groups – Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) – led assault together with people’s defence forces on north-western Kawlin town in Sagaing Region, which fell after several days of fighting. Additionally, resistance forces in Kayah State 11 Nov commenced “Operation 1111”, assaulting state capital Loikaw; they claimed to have shot down air force jet. Even more significantly, AA 13 Nov started series of attacks in Rakhine State, ending period of calm that followed informal ceasefire in Nov 2022. In western Myanmar, Chin forces 13 Nov attacked Rikhawdar town on India-Myanmar border, ultimately seizing it. For first time in decades, military will have to fight numerous, determined and well-armed opponents simultaneously in multiple theatres; it may double down on brutal efforts to reverse tide on battlefield, including scorched-earth tactics and indiscriminate bombing in coming weeks.

↑ **Philippines Govt and Communist rebels struck deal to restart peace talks after six-year hiatus; insecurity continued in south amid local feuds and targeted killings.**

Govt and communist militants agreed to reignite formal dialogue. Manila and National Democratic Front – umbrella organisation representing communist rebels, including main armed group New People’s Army (NPA) and Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) – 23 Nov struck deal following engagement in Norwegian capital Oslo, agreeing in principle to restart peace talks to achieve “peaceful resolution of the armed conflict”; formal talks between pair broke down in Nov 2017 under then President Duterte. Meanwhile, fighting persisted between govt security forces and NPA in Luzon Island (Mindoro) in north and Visayas Islands (Negros and Samar) in centre, killing at least ten combatants and civilians during Nov.

Insecurity persisted in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). In Maguindanao del Sur province, armed men associated with Moro Islamic Liberation Front’s (MILF) 118 Base Command and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) 7 Nov clashed in Tukanalipao village over existing feud; fighting lasted for days and injured six combatants as well as one civilian. In Basilan province, shooting attack 9 Nov killed member of Basilan Provincial Board near Sumisip District Hospital. In Sultan Kudarat province, gunmen 15 Nov killed school principal in ambush in Lambayong town. In Lanao del Sur and Sulu provinces, authorities 16 Nov arrested six suspected drug dealers and seized significant quantities of “shabu” (methamphetamines) during separate anti-drug operations. Bomb 25 Nov exploded in centre of Pikit town, wounding six Moro civilians.

Implementation of Bangsamoro peace deal progressed. President Marcos Jr. 14 Nov attended BARMM’s first local legislative general assembly, which he described as “historic” and “crucial to achieving our goal of achieving peace and progress” in region.

↓ **South China Sea Tensions continued to mount between Philippines and China amid maritime incidents near flashpoints in South China Sea (SCS).**

China sought to impede Philippines' access to disputed shoal. Philippine frigate 1 Nov entered waters near Scarborough Shoal, prompting China's navy to quickly dispatch warships and fighter jets to track and ward off vessel. As Philippines continued resupply mission to its grounded ship on Second Thomas Shoal – significant source of tension in recent months – Chinese and Philippine vessels 10 Nov engaged in another standoff near shoal as Chinese coast guard ships fired water cannon at Philippine boat; Manila accused China of “dangerously harassing” its ships. Manila 11 Nov announced China had deployed record 38 vessels near shoal, with eleven actively involved in intercepting Philippine boats. Philippine President Marcos Jr. 18 Nov met Chinese President Xi on sidelines of APEC summit in U.S., where former expressed concern over recent incidents. Marcos next day said SCS situation had become “more dire”, warning Beijing had “started to show interest” in building bases on reefs that were “closer and closer to the Philippine coastline”.

U.S. maintained support for Manila. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin 15 Nov met Philippine counterpart Gilberto Teodoro Jr; pair criticised China's recent harassment of Philippine vessels and confirmed commitment to Mutual Defense Treaty. Meanwhile, U.S. navy 3 Nov conducted freedom of navigation operation near Spratly Islands, marking first such operation in six months, and 25 Nov near Paracel Islands, which China protested. Manila 21 Nov held joint air and maritime patrols with U.S. in its northernmost province near Taiwan Strait, and held patrols for first time with Australia 25-27 Nov, during which two Chinese fighter jets orbited Philippine patrol aircraft.

Manila sought closer defence ties with regional countries. Following talks in Philippine capital Manila between Marcos Jr. and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, pair 4 Nov announced they will begin negotiations on deal to deploy troops on each other's territory. Japan reached agreements with Malaysia and Vietnam to deepen security cooperation. Marcos Jr. 20 Nov said Philippines is approaching Malaysia and Vietnam to discuss separate SCS code of conduct, citing lack of progress in ASEAN-China negotiations.

➡ **Thailand Violence persisted in deep south, as govt appointed new head in dialogue with main southern separatist group.**

Violence continued in southernmost provinces. In Narathiwat province, militants 3 Nov detonated 25kg IED targeting paramilitary rangers travelling in private vehicle in Tanyong Mas subdistrict, Rangae district. One ranger was killed 9 Nov after stepping on improvised mine in forested area of Tanyong Mas; militants 10 Nov fired small arms at security outpost in same subdistrict, causing no casualties. Authorities same day discovered and safely detonated IED in Bacho District, Narathiwat. Seven motorcycle-borne militants 12 Nov surrounded Muslim ranger officer, then on leave, who was travelling on motorcycle with his wife in Rueso district; they forced both to ground and shot officer more than ten times before fleeing. Media reports 27 Nov indicated that PM Srettha Thavisin appointed Chatchai Bangchud, deputy sec gen of National Security Council, to lead govt's delegation in dialogue with main militant group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN).

National politics remained in holding pattern. Since formation of Pheu Thai Party-led govt in Sept, national politics entered routine holding pattern marked by

opposition focusing on criticising govt policy proposals, such as 10,000-baht digital wallet.

In other important developments. FM Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara 1 Nov visited Qatar to meet Iranian FM Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in efforts to secure release of 32 Thai hostages held in Gaza (see Israel-Palestine); Hamas 24-28 Nov released nineteen Thai hostages but thirteen Thais remain in captivity. As fighting spread across northern Myanmar (see Myanmar), some 260 Thais on 19 Nov were evacuated from Shan State to China's Yunnan province; most are believed to have been victims of human trafficking, forced to work in scam call centres.