



## Asia

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### North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan** China maintained naval activity in East China Sea and held high-level talks with Tokyo, while Japan sought to strengthen defence ties with Western partners.

*Beijing continued maritime presence.* As of 27 May, Japan reported 104 Chinese vessels in Japan's contiguous zone, while Japanese coast guard 8 May detected four Chinese vessels in Japan's territorial waters off disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands; one vessel was reportedly armed with automatic cannon. Japan coast guard 19-20 May detected two Chinese vessels in Japan's territorial waters and 24 May detected four Chinese vessels in Japan's territorial waters. Ten-month impasse persisted over China's deployment of buoy in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone in East China Sea, as Tokyo demands its removal. Meanwhile, Japan, U.S. and New Zealand 11-13 May conducted trilateral maritime exercise in East China Sea.

*Tokyo and Beijing held high-level talks.* Senior Chinese diplomat Liu Jianchao and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida 29 May met in Japanese capital Tokyo, where pair discussed bilateral relations and issues such as Taiwan and discharge from Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant into sea. Earlier, Tokyo 22 May lodged protest with China after Chinese ambassador to Japan reportedly warned that Japanese people would be dragged into fire if they supported Taiwan independence (see Taiwan Strait).

*Japan sought enhanced defence cooperation with Western partners.* Defence ministers of Japan, Philippines, U.S. and Australia 2 May met in U.S. to deepen cooperation; officials confirmed Japan will work closely with U.S. and Australia to introduce counter-strike capabilities, while Japan and U.S. cabinet ministers will start talks on Japan's "extended deterrence" capabilities, including nuclear weapons. Japan and France 3 May commenced talks on new security agreement on reciprocal access. U.S. senators 8 May introduced bipartisan bill requiring "AUKUS" – trilateral security partnership between Australia, UK and U.S. – officials to engage Japan on its potential inclusion under second pillar for advanced technology projects; China in April expressed "grave concern" over alliance's expansion.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** South Korea hosted China and Japan at first trilateral summit since 2019, which North Korea protested by attempting fourth spy satellite launch in two years.

*Seoul hosted summit with China and Japan.* Leaders of South Korea, Japan and China 26-27 May met in capital Seoul, marking first such meeting since 2019. In joint

statement dominated by shared economic concerns, trio reconfirmed three issues – respectively reflecting China’s, South Korea’s and Japan’s concerns – regarding North Korea, saying that they “reiterated positions on regional peace and stability, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the abductions issue”; all noted that “maintaining peace, stability and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia serves our common interest”. Pyongyang responded that discussion of denuclearisation was “insult never to be pardoned and a declaration of war”.

*North Korea attempted satellite launch and launched missiles.* Responding to first day of South Korea-hosted summit, which saw meeting between South Korea and Japan, North Korea 26 May announced its intention to launch a satellite (using banned ballistic missile technology) in window spanning 27 May to 4 June. Pyongyang next day launched satellite that failed due to technical issue; video taken by Japanese journalists from Chinese city of Dandong on North Korean border showed rocket exploding two minutes after launch. Leader Kim Jong-un 28 May condemned South Korea drills involving fighter jets near border. South Korea’s military 29 May reported around 260 North Korean balloons carrying waste were found countrywide, in apparent retaliation for South Korean activists flying leaflets across border into north. North Korea 30 May fired ten suspected short-range ballistic missiles into waters off east coast.

*Seoul and Tokyo imposed sanctions on Russia-North Korea arms trade.* Japan 25 May announced sanctions on eleven organisations and one individual linked to military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow, while South Korea same day designated “seven North Korean individuals and two Russian vessels” for “involvement in the provision of materials and financing for North Korea’s nuclear and missile development”.

↓ **Taiwan Strait Cross-strait tensions rose as new Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te articulated tougher cross-strait posture in inaugural address, prompting China to issue threats and launch major military drills.**

*Incoming president signalled new posture, triggering China’s “punishment” drills.* Marking start of unprecedented third term for Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), President-elect Lai Ching-te 20 May assumed office and gave inaugural address in which he firmly asserted Taiwan’s sovereignty and refrained from reaffirming predecessor Tsai Ing-wen’s conciliatory nod to Beijing’s “one China” position; he urged China “to cease their political and military intimidation against Taiwan” and cautioned that so long as Beijing does not renounce use of force its “ambition to annex Taiwan will not simply disappear”. In response, China next day described Lai as “disgraceful” and remarked “all Taiwan independence separatists will be nailed to the pillar of shame in history”. In first such drills since April 2023 when then-U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy visited Taiwan, China 22 May commenced two-day military exercises in five zones encircling Taiwan as well as around Taiwan’s islands of Kinmen, Matsu, Wuqiu, and Dongyin near Chinese coast. Chinese law enforcement vessels took part in exercises around Taiwan’s outlying islands, as well as to Taiwan’s south west and east. Beijing said activities were aimed at “punishing” Lai and testing Beijing’s ability to “seize power” and “occupy key areas”. U.S. 25 May expressed deep concern and urged Beijing to act with restraint.

*Domestic political tensions rose in Taiwan.* Legislation tabled by opposition parties Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) to grant legislature increased scrutinising powers over the executive passed 28 May; ruling DPP sees bill as attempt to undermine its control of executive and said it would seek constitutional review of bill. Protests took place over multiple days, totalling tens of thousands outside parliament, over opposition's attempt to fast-track bill's passage and its contents.

*U.S. continued support for Taiwan.* Reports 14 May revealed that U.S. and Taiwan in April conducted unofficial joint naval drills in Pacific to boost cooperation, involving multiple military assets and basic operations. Since Lai's inauguration, two U.S. congressional delegations visited Taiwan.

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## **South Asia**

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➡ **Afghanistan** **Afghanistan and Pakistan engaged in sporadic clashes along disputed border, killing two soldiers, as Islamic State continued attacks and thousands in north east protested Taliban's poppy eradication campaign.**

*Deadly border hostilities resumed between Pakistan and Taliban forces.* Pakistani aircraft 10 May conducted strikes inside Afghanistan, killing at least four suspected Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. As Pakistani forces 13 May tried to fortify positions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district, clashes erupted with Taliban forces, which lasted six days and killed at least one Pakistani soldier and Taliban forces member; sides 18 May agreed to ceasefire reportedly negotiated by tribal elders. Notably, Taliban rocket 15 May struck Pakistani border post, causing aforementioned fatality. Tensions with Afghanistan could escalate further if another major militant attack within Pakistan is traced back to Afghan havens (see Pakistan).

*Islamic State targeted Taliban and foreigners.* Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) 8 May claimed bomb attack in Faizabad city, Badakhshan province (north east). ISKP gunman 18 May shot at two buses carrying foreign tourists in Bamiyan province (centre), killing three Spanish nationals and injuring others. ISKP militants 20 May hurled grenade at bus carrying Taliban members in Kandahar (south), killing at least four.

*Thousands protested in north east against Taliban.* In Badakhshan province, local residents early May staged protests against Taliban's poppy eradication campaign in province. Taliban security forces 3-13 May killed several, prompting thousands in region, namely Argo and Darayim districts, to hold protests to demand halt to eradication effort, livelihood support for poppy farmers and compensation for eradicated crops as well as slain protestors; senior Taliban delegation visited region, reportedly agreeing to compensate families of victims but insisting eradication efforts will persist unabated. Authorities mid-May deployed reinforcements to region and resumed destruction of opium fields.

*Taliban continued to clamp down on independent media.* Taliban authorities 8 May attempted to restrict reporting by Afghanistan International – overseas-based media channel that emerged immediately after Taliban's takeover and became most-viewed

media outlet inside Afghanistan – by ordering Afghan journalists to stop all forms of collaboration with outlet.

↓ **Bangladesh Conflict in Myanmar’s Rakhine state fuelled recruitment drive by Rohingya armed groups in Bangladesh’s refugee camps, raising prospect of greater spillover to come.**

*War in Myanmar reverberated in Bangladesh’s refugee camps.* In Myanmar, Arakan Army (AA) continued advance in northern Rakhine state after months-long campaign against regime and allegations of abuses against Rohingya community, including extrajudicial killings, torching villages and forced relocations (see Myanmar). In response, Rohingya armed groups – notably Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) – stepped up mostly forced recruitment in refugee camps in Bangladesh, including potentially several thousand young men and children as young as 14, with some refugees reportedly transferred to Myanmar military for training. Forced recruitment triggered wave of panic across camps; since 17 May, refugees staged nightly gatherings to oppose recruitment, in some cases beating RSO members. Fighting in Rakhine likely to escalate, forcing larger numbers of Rohingya across border or sparking wider conflict between AA and Rohingya armed groups as latter build up their forces further to curtail AA’s advance. Meanwhile, turf war in refugee camps between RSO and rival Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) resurged, with five killings reported mid-May.

*Insecurity persisted in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in south east.* Security forces continued operations targeting Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) – which claims to represent six Kuki-Chin subgroups, largest of which is Bawm. Security forces 17 May announced detention of chief coordinator of KNF’s women’s wing in Bandarban’s Sadar district. Shootout 23 May killed two KNF members in Sadar. Human rights group Amnesty International 22 May said over 100 Bawm had been arbitrarily detained amid anti-KNF crackdown. PM Sheikh Hasina 23 May claimed there was international conspiracy to establish “Christian state” in CHT. Govt official in India’s Mizoram state mid-May said 127 Bangladeshis fled into Mizoram in previous week due to anti-KNF operation; state now hosts 1,368 refugees from CHT.

*Opposition boycotted local polls.* Authorities 8 May held first phase of local polls for districts known as upazila parishad, which saw voter turnout of 36% – lowest since voting was introduced in 2009; opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party boycotted vote and claimed people had rejected election.

➡ **India Ethnic conflict in Manipur in north east marked first anniversary, national elections entered final phases amid suspicions of voting irregularities, and security forces continued deadly anti-Maoist operations.**

*In Manipur, ethnic conflict entered second year amid ongoing violence.* Conflict in Manipur 3 May reached one-year mark with 67,000 displaced in 2023 and over 220 killed; Kuki and Meitei communities show no sign of compromise and hill areas remain beyond state govt’s control. In Kangkokpi district, leader of United Kuki National Army 5 May was reportedly killed by bodyguard. In Bishnupur district, security forces 17 May rescued 75 Meitei women from Kuki militants. In Imphal West district, unidentified gunmen 18 May killed labourer. In sign of conflict spilling

across regional borders, *The Hindu* 14 May reported National Agency Investigation had charged “China-Myanmar module” of militant group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) – presently in peace talks with New Delhi – of facilitating infiltration of Meitei militants into Manipur to “destabilise state”; NSCN-IM rejected allegations and accused Indian forces of supporting Kuki insurgents in Myanmar to target Meitei rebels.

*Elections neared completion.* Ahead of completion of seven phases of national elections on 1 June, media in May continued to report allegations of voter exclusion of Muslims. Election Commission’s decision not to share polling in real time fuelled suspicion of potential voting manipulation in favour of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Meanwhile, BJP continued polarising and communal-based campaign speech: notably, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh 18 May declared Pakistan-administered Kashmir would become part of India within six months of BJP’s next term.

*Anti-Maoist security operations continued.* In Chhattisgarh state (centre), security forces 10 May killed twelve Maoists in Bijapur district and 23 May killed seven Maoists on border of Narayanpur and Bijapur districts; 34 Maoists 25 May surrendered in Bijapur. In Maharashtra state (west), security forces 13 May killed three Maoists in Gadchiroli district.

*Relations with China remained tense.* China’s new ambassador 10 May arrived in New Delhi, declaring “our two countries are each other’s development opportunities and not threats”. FM S. Jaishankar 14 May described China’s deployment of forces at Line of Actual Control as “very abnormal”.

➡ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Militant attacks and security operations increased in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), while authorities held first ballots in region since 2019 as part of national elections.**

*Militant attacks and security operations intensified after winter lull.* In Jammu division, security forces 1 May killed alleged infiltrator from Pakistan in Samba district; militants 4 May attacked Air Force convoy in Poonch district, injuring four and killing one. In Kashmir division, security forces 6-8 May killed three Resistance Front militants, including top commander, during three-day operation in Kulgam district; security personnel 16 May allegedly killed four militants trying to infiltrate Line of Control in Kupwara district; militants 19 May shot dead ruling Bharatiya Janata Party worker in Anantnag district.

*Voters cast ballots in three parliamentary constituencies representing J&K.* Citizens had first chance to cast ballots in J&K since govt abrogated special status in 2019, with polls held in three parliamentary constituencies as part of national election (see India). In Srinagar city on 13 May, voter turnout reached 38%, highest since 1989; PM Narendra Modi next day claimed “abrogation of Article 370 has enabled potential and aspirations of people to find full expression”, prompting opposition political parties People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and National Conference next day to reject declaration, claiming vote reflected people’s expression against administrative changes made by New Delhi since 2019. In Baramulla on 21 May, voter turnout reached 59% – highest in four decades. Voter turnout in Anantnag-Rajouri election 25 May reached 54.3%, highest in 35 years.

*Proscribed Islamist group announced intent to contest assembly elections.* Prohibited socio-religious organisation Jamaat-e-Islami, banned by govt in 2019, 13 May announced it would contest assembly elections – mandated to be held by 30 Sept – if govt lifted ban; militant group The Resistance Front condemned group's decision as betrayal of people's wishes, while former chief minister Omar Abdullah welcomed announcement and urged govt to overturn ban.

➡ **Pakistan** **Pakistan and Afghanistan engaged in sporadic border clashes, killing two soldiers, while militant attacks continued in border provinces and protests over prices turned violent in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.**

*Deadly border hostilities resumed between Pakistan and Taliban forces.* Pakistani aircraft 10 May conducted strikes inside Afghanistan, killing at least four suspected Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. As Pakistani forces 13 May tried to fortify positions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district, clashes erupted with Taliban forces which lasted six days and killed at least one Pakistani soldier and Taliban forces member; sides 18 May agreed to ceasefire reportedly negotiated by tribal elders. Interior minister and top counter-terrorism chief 26 May held Pakistani Taliban responsible for 26 March suicide attack that killed five Chinese engineers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Sangla district, requested Kabul to arrest or hand over alleged planners along with TTP leadership; minister warned of "unilateral action" if Kabul does not cooperate.

*Militant attacks continued in border provinces and spread into Punjab.* In sign of expanding Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attacks into Punjab province, heavily-armed militants 1 May attacked checkpoint in Taunsa district, injuring seven police constables, and gun battle between police and TTP militants in Rawalpindi city same day killed constable. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, two militant attacks 11 May killed seven military personnel in North Waziristan, marking one of deadliest attacks of May. Military 27 May said operation previous day killed 23 militants in Peshawar's Hassan Khel area. In Balochistan province, suspected Baloch militants 9 May shot dead seven Punjabis in Gwadar district.

*Unrest erupted in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.* Alliance of civil society organisations 11 May commenced protest march over high prices of flour and electricity. Clashes lasted several days with security forces, killing five, including constable, and injuring over 100. PM Sharif 14 May accepted demands for subsidies to offset high prices.

*Relations between former PM Imran Khan and military plummeted further.* Ahead of first anniversary of 9 May 2023 anti-military unrest led by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), military 7 May called on Khan to publicly apologise and abandon "politics of anarchy and hate". PTI same day condemned military's "irrational, illogical and venomous press conference".

➡ **Sri Lanka** **Civil war commemorations drew large crowds in eastern and northern provinces, UN criticised govt inaction over unsolved enforced disappearances, and proposed economic reforms divided parties.**

*Wave of events marked 15th anniversary of civil war's end.* Ahead of fifteenth anniversary of end of civil war on 18 May, known increasingly by Tamil activists as

“Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day”, Tamils in north and east of island, and in diaspora communities worldwide, organised series of commemorations: notably, police 12 May in eastern town of Trincomalee arrested four Tamil women serving “kanji” dish to commemorate Tamils killed in final weeks of 2009 war; other commemorations in north and east were allowed to proceed under tight police and military surveillance. Thousands 18 May gathered at Mullivaikkal beach, scene of final massacres of thousands of Tamil civilians and fighters in 2009; marking first ever attendance of international dignitary at war commemoration event, Amnesty International Sec Gen Agnès Callamard spoke at Mullivaikkal, criticising govt’s “clampdown on memory initiatives, including arrests, arbitrary detentions and deliberately skewed interpretations of Tamil community’s attempts to remember people lost to war”. Consortium of Buddhist and Tamil groups 17 May held first-ever inter-religious and inter-ethnic event in capital Colombo’s centre to commemorate all those killed.

*UN report highlighted enforced disappearances.* UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 17 May issued major report detailing decades of unsolved, un-investigated enforced disappearances of tens of thousands of people, urging govt to acknowledge involvement of “state security forces and affiliated paramilitary groups” and stating that “alleged perpetrators, including current and former senior officials and diplomats, continue to evade justice”; report criticised govt’s poor record in addressing issues and urged it to establish independent persecutorial authority.

*Govt’s economic policies courted criticism.* Cabinet 6 May approved twenty-year power purchase agreement for development of 484 MW of wind power generated by stations in north west; economists and opposition politicians criticised lack of competitive bidding for deal, as environmentalists highlighted threat to migratory birds. Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa 16 May attacked proposed sale of state-owned enterprises, a central pillar of International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) economic reform agenda.

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## South East Asia

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📌🔥 **Myanmar Arakan Army expanded control in west, fuelling communal Rakhine-Rohingya violence that could escalate further in coming weeks; regime lost further ground in north, while hostilities in centre killed over 50.**

*In west, Arakan Army’s (AA) headway against regime worsened communal violence.* In Rakhine state (west), AA made progress across Rakhine state as it sought to control northern townships of Buthidaung and Maungdaw, capturing former 18 May then launching offensive on latter, while also encircling military’s Western Command headquarters in Ann and pushing south into Thandwe. Regime responded to losses with artillery barrages and airstrikes. AA’s advance further stoked communal tensions with Rohingya amid allegations of AA extrajudicial killings, torching twenty villages and forced relocations. In response, Rohingya militias in Maungdaw 6-9 May targeted at least two Rakhine villages, burning dozens of homes and killing pregnant woman; allegations subsequently surfaced of AA

retaliation on Rohingya villages around Buthidaung, while AA 17 May allegedly shelled school in Buthidaung on 17 May, killing eighteen Rohingya; its forces were accused of burning thousands of Rohingya homes. Rohingya armed groups have ramped up their recruitment in Bangladesh's refugee camps (see Bangladesh). As Rohingya community increasingly becomes party to conflict, there is serious risk of large-scale communal violence and armed group atrocities against civilians (see Conflict in Focus).

*In north, Kachin forces made further gains against regime.* In Kachin state (north), Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied forces early May launched fresh wave of attacks against regime bases along Myitkyina-Bhamo highway and 5 May captured Sumprabum town in state's north. KIA 21 May captured light infantry base in Waingmaw, across river from state capital Myitkyina.

*In centre, regime and resistance attacks killed dozens.* In Magway region (centre), regime airstrike 9 May killed at least twenty in Saw township. In Mandalay region (centre), regime accused resistance forces of killing 32 villagers in Myingyan township; resistance group claimed residents were caught in crossfire.

*In south east, regime convoy sought to reinforce Myawaddy town.* In Kayin state (south east), after Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied resistance groups in April temporarily overran Myawaddy on Thai border, regime convoy to bolster forces made slow progress through Dawna mountain range.

➔ **Philippines Clan feuds and militant attacks continued in south as region geared up for 2025 elections, while govt forces battled Communist militants.**

*Insecurity persisted in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).* In Lanao del Sur province, five gunmen 1 May ambushed three militiamen in Marogong town in likely clan feud. In Basilan province, gunmen 4 May ambushed group of men in Akbar town, sparking firefight that wounded six, including municipal councillor of Tuburan town. In Cotabato city, assailants 19 May lobbed grenade at Catholics, injuring two. On political front, Bangsamoro Grand Coalition, composed of several parties representing ruling political clans in different provinces in BARMM, 18 May endorsed Sulu Governor Abdusakur Tan as their candidate for Bangsamoro chief minister in autonomous region's first elections scheduled for May 2025; Tan will be pitted against Bangsamoro interim Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim, supported by parties affiliated with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

*Clashes continued between security forces and Communist rebels.* Hostilities between military and Communist militants in Mindanao (Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato) in south and Visayas (Samar, Negros and Iloilo) in centre killed twelve combatants and civilians and injured three.

➔ **South China Sea Maritime encounters between Philippines and China in South China Sea (SCS) continued to fuel tensions and strain relations.**

*Maritime incidents ratcheted up tensions between Manila and Beijing.* Philippines 1 May accused China's coast guard of escalating tensions in SCS after Chinese vessels



fired water cannons at two Philippine ships en route to Scarborough Shoal, causing damage to both; U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin next day accused China of “irresponsible behaviour”. Reports surfaced mid-May that Philippines had deployed ships to monitor Chinese activity amid allegations Beijing had created artificial island on Escoda (Sabina) Shoal. Philippine National Security Advisor Eduardo Ano 10 May called for expulsion of Chinese diplomats over alleged leak of phone conversation between Philippine Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos and Chinese attaché in which former purportedly agreed to Chinese demands related to Second Thomas Shoal; Ano accused China’s embassy of “disinformation” to sow discord. Admiral Carlos 28 May denied making “secret deal” with China. Philippine civilian group Atin Ito (“This is Ours”) 14 May embarked on resupply mission to local fishermen in Scarborough Shoal despite threat of Chinese blockades; Chinese coast guard 16 May claimed it drove away flotilla near shoal, while Atin Ito claimed “major victory”. Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro 24 May called rules permitting Chinese Coast Guard to fire on foreign vessels in SCS “provocation”.

*U.S. and Philippines concluded annual exercises.* U.S. and Philippines 10 May concluded annual Balikatan military drills, which commenced 22 April, involving over 16,000 personnel and held in sensitive areas like Bashi Channel – critical waterway between Taiwan and Philippines. U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer 10 May sailed near contested Paracels to challenge “unlawful and sweeping maritime claims”; China, Vietnam and Taiwan claim island chain. U.S. Navy 26 May announced transit of SCS by Nimitz-class aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt* following Singapore port visit 24 May.

*In other important developments.* Group of twenty Taiwanese lawmakers of opposition Kuomintang and Taiwan People’s Party 18 May visited Taiping Island, urging President-elect Lai Ching-te publicly reaffirm Taiwan’s claim over island; island is also claimed by China, Vietnam and Philippines. Three Indian naval ships 7 May arrived in Singapore as part of deployment to SCS.

► **Thailand Deep south peace dialogue resumed amid militant attacks; activist’s death in detention sparked controversy and authorities convicted opposition MP and charged former PM Thaksin Shinawatra for lèse-majesté.**

*Deep south peace dialogue resumed as militants staged attacks.* Govt delegation and representatives of main southern separatist group Barisan Revolusi Nasional 19-21 May held 10th Joint Technical Committee Meeting of Joint Working Group Peace Dialogue Process (JWG-PDP) in Malaysia’s capital Kuala Lumpur; sides discussed reduction of violence, monitoring mechanisms and Terms of Reference for monitoring teams. Malaysian facilitator’s office 21 May declared itself “gratified” with progress. Meanwhile, in Pattani province, officers 1 May killed two suspected militants in Thung Yang Daeng district; IED secreted in motorcycle 6 May wounded two defence volunteers and two civilians in Muang district. In Narathiwat province, IED explosions 20 May killed two defence volunteers in Sukhirin district.

*Activist died in custody, as authorities used lèse-majesté to stifle dissent.* Following 110-day hunger strike, imprisoned activist Netiporn Bung Saneysangkhom 14 May died after suffering heart attack; Netiporn was awaiting trial on charges including lèse-majesté for conducting public opinion polls about royal motorcades. After PM

Srettha Thavisin 15 May pledged transparent investigation, lawyer next day said autopsy found her stomach empty, raising questions about treatment. Opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) MP Rangsiman Rome 15 May assessed “faith that people of Thailand have in our justice system is at an all-time low”. As Constitutional Court considered case to ban MFP, Court in Pathum Thani province 27 May convicted Chonthicha Jangrew, MFP parliamentarian, of defaming monarchy for 2021 speech calling for release of political prisoners. Office of the Attorney-General 29 May announced former PM Thaksin Shinawatra will be indicted on charges of lèse-majesté and computer crimes for 2015 speech in South Korea.

*Caretaker senators sought dismissal of PM.* Forty senators 17 May petitioned Constitutional Court to dismiss PM Srettha Thavisin and PM’s Office Minister Pichit Chuenban from office for ethics violations; senators maintain that Srettha’s appointment of Pichit breached standards as Pichit served six months in jail in 2008 for contempt of court. Pichit 21 May resigned.

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## **Pacific**

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### **↓ New Caledonia (France) France’s proposed voting reforms triggered worst unrest in four decades, killing at least seven.**

In New Caledonia – a special overseas collectivity of France – pro-independence alliance of parties 13 May organised protests in capital Nouméa against electoral reform bill debated in National Assembly in French capital Paris to expand voting rights in provincial polls; voting rights are restricted to Indigenous Kanaks and those who arrived from France before 1998, but bill proposed to include French residents who have lived in New Caledonia for ten years; Indigenous community – comprising around 40% of 271,000 population – widely fear bill would dilute vote share. Protests quickly morphed into worst riots and unrest since 1984–88 troubles, with widespread reports of torched vehicles, looting, erection of road barricades and clashes with police; after National Assembly 14 May approved reform, unrest intensified, leaving three young Kanaks and police officer dead. Paris 15 May declared state of emergency and announced deployment of additional 1,000 police officers and gendarmes. France 16-17 May accused Azerbaijan of meddling and identified Azeri social media accounts of spreading anti-French propaganda, and banned social media platform TikTok until 29 May. Police 18 May reported gun battle between unidentified groups killed one at roadblock in Kaala-Gomen, North Province. President Macron 22 May visited Nouméa and next day delayed voting reform after talks with leaders; Macron called for new political agreement on New Caledonia’s future, acknowledged widening inequality and described unrest as “unprecedented insurrection”. Police 24 May shot dead individual following group attack, bringing death toll of unrest to at least seven. Pro-independence Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front 25 May stated that solution must be “political and non-repressive”. France 28 May lifted state of emergency, but international airport remained closed.