

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan Tensions continued between China and Japan over disputed island chain in East China Sea while Japan concluded annual defence review.** Chinese coastguard vessels 2-5 July twice entered Japanese territorial waters around disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, staying for periods over 30 hours; Tokyo 6 July said it lodged diplomatic protests with Beijing. China early July conducted military exercises, including live fire, in East China and Yellow Seas. Japanese ruling Liberal Democratic Party 3 July drafted resolution calling on PM Shinzo Abe to cancel planned state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tokyo. Japanese govt 14 July published annual white paper on defence policy, accusing China of “relentlessly continued unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion” around Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Japanese media 19 July reported Tokyo’s Air Self-Defence Force has adopted policy of scrambling fighter jets against all military aircraft taking off from Chinese base in Fujian province near contested islands. Chief cabinet secretary 22 July said Chinese ships were spotted near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands for 100th straight day. In joint statement following 9 July virtual meeting, Abe and Australian PM Scott Morrison reiterated “strong opposition to any coercive or unilateral actions that could alter the status quo or increase tensions in the East and South China Seas”. U.S. envoy for North Korea Stephen Biegun 9-10 July met Japanese officials in Tokyo to “reaffirm the strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance” and promote “free and open Indo-Pacific”; U.S. 9 July approved sale of 105 F-35 fighter jets to Tokyo; Chinese state media *Global Times* 12 July called purchases “worrying” and raised concerns “Japan will break its peaceful constitution”. Commander of U.S. forces in Japan 29 July said Washington “steadfast” in support for “situation in Senkaku”, offering reconnaissance support of Chinese coastguard vessels around islands; in response, Beijing same day reiterated claim to islands and said it was its right “to patrol these waters and conduct law enforcement”. China 1 July released Japanese man detained in 2015 and sentenced to prison in 2018 on spying charges.

➔ **Korean Peninsula Tensions continued amid Seoul’s reshuffle of security team, while North Korea cast doubt on potential third U.S.-DPRK summit.** South Korean President Moon Jae-in 3 July reorganised his national security team, including appointing Suh Hoon as national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong as special advisor, former lawmaker Park Jie-won – imprisoned from 2006-2007 for secretly sending money to Pyongyang to hold inter-Korean summit in 2000 – as intelligence chief and nominating ruling Democratic Party lawmaker Lee In-Young as unification minister. U.S. President Donald Trump 7 July said he believes Pyongyang wants meeting between DPRK and U.S. and he would join if “helpful”; top official and sister of DPRK leader Kim Jong-un Kim Yo-jong 10 July released statement reiterating Pyongyang’s lack of interest in another Trump-Kim summit, saying preconditions for talks had changed from previous demands of sanctions relief and end to joint U.S.-South Korea military drills to expanded position that Washington must end all “hostilities”, including rhetoric and criticism;

statement came days after U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper 7 July listed North Korea among “rogue states”. Former South Korean FM and UN Sec Gen Ban Ki-moon 8 July urged govt not to “beg” North Korea during speech to National Assembly, describing Moon administration’s policies toward North as “astounding and deplorable”. North Korean state media 11 July announced reinstatement of Kim Yo-jong to political bureau of central committee in Pyongyang; Kim Yo-jong was removed from position in 2019. South Korea’s military 30 July reported Pyongyang 6 July fired missile as part of naval exercises. Amid ongoing dispute between U.S. and South Korea over sharing cost of maintaining 28,500 U.S. troops on Korean peninsula, *Wall Street Journal* newspaper 17 July reported U.S. Defence Department had presented Trump administration with options to reduce number of troops, raising concerns in South Korea and Japan over potential impact on security. UK 6 July announced sanctions against two North Korean ministries for reportedly running prison camps. Analysts at Middlebury Institute of International Studies 8 July reported suspected undeclared nuclear facility in Wollo-ri village near Pyongyang.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** **Cross-strait tensions persisted amid Taiwan’s annual military exercises, while Taipei announced diplomatic ties with Somaliland.** Taiwan 13-17 July held annual live fire war games simulating defence against invasion of island involving all branches of armed forces, including navy 15 July firing first live torpedo since 2007; two Chinese reconnaissance vessels same day sailed near eastern coast of Taiwan. Earlier, Chinese military aircraft 4 July entered Taiwan’s air defence identification zone, which prompted Taiwanese fighter jets to scramble in response. U.S. State Department 9 July approved sale of upgrades to PAC-3 air defence missiles system to Taiwan; in response, China 14 July announced it will impose sanctions on U.S. arms company Lockheed Martin, which produces the weapons system. U.S. Congress member 29 July introduced bill to authorise U.S. to use military force if China attacks Taiwan. Taiwanese govt 1 July announced establishment of diplomatic ties with and representative offices in Somaliland, a self-declared independent region of Somalia, following Feb 2020 meeting in Taipei between two entities; Chinese foreign ministry 6 July said Beijing “firmly opposes the establishment or any form of official exchange between” Taiwan and Somaliland. FM 22 July said China is sending military planes close to Taiwan with increasing frequency, accusing Beijing of “unceasingly preparing to use force to resolve the Taiwan problem”.

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## South Asia

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➡ **Afghanistan** **Month saw deadly attacks on both sides; Taliban’s ceasefire and govt’s release of prisoners in later part of month raised prospects intra-Afghan peace process could start in Aug.** Despite international expectations intra-Afghan dialogue could begin in July, peace process remained on hold for most of month with attacks on both sides and delays in further govt release of prisoners. Taliban intensified attacks on major highways in north, including assault along Kabul to Mazar-e Sharif highway in Sar-e Pul province 7-14 July and clashes on Shibergan-to Mazar highway in Jawzjan province and Kabul-Kunduz highway in Baghlan province (north). While Taliban continued to refrain

from attacks on large cities, some major attacks took place. Notably, Taliban 13 July bombed govt intelligence agency in Aybak, capital of Samangan province (north), killing ten and injuring over 50, in first high-profile Taliban-claimed attack on provincial capital since Feb U.S.-Taliban agreement; also launched 13-17 July series of suicide vehicles bombings in Kandahar (south) and Wardak (centre) provinces, with group justifying attacks as “retaliations” for violations of agreement by govt forces, blaming U.S. for not preventing govt attacks. Meanwhile, govt increased airstrikes against suspected Taliban targets with reported high civilian toll; govt air raids 22 July reportedly killed some 45 people, including civilians, in Kham Zaiarat area, Herat province (west); U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalizad next day condemned airstrikes as well as “recent Taliban attacks”, urging “all sides to contain the violence”. Taliban 18 July reshuffled negotiating team and restructured political office in Doha ahead of future talks, incorporating figures from differing wings of movement. Domestic political stasis continued despite President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah’s May agreement to form inclusive govt; Ghani 18 July reappointed hardline interior and defence ministers who hold tough stance toward Taliban; many provincial governors and ministerial positions remained unfilled. In major step forward and following U.S. pressure, Taliban 28 July announced second three-day ceasefire for Eid holiday and govt responded, declaring final hundreds prisoners of total 5,000 to be released, raising prospect intra-Afghan dialogue could begin in August.

➡ **Bangladesh Amid ongoing govt crackdown on critics, security operations continued against alleged members of banned militant groups.** Police continued to detain people under controversial Digital Security Act in cases mainly filed by ruling Awami League (AL) supporters: police 3 July arrested member of AL student wing for criticising AL lawmaker in Facebook post in Manikganj district; 19 July arrested three, including two teachers, at Farakkabad college in Chandpur district for defaming govt ministers through fake social media account. In continued anti-militancy efforts, security forces 9 July arrested suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir member in Khulna district and next day arrested alleged Ansarullah Bangla Team militant in capital Dhaka; police 17 July arrested woman in Dhaka for alleged involvement in women’s wing of Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), including fundraising and recruitment; paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion 19 July arrested six suspected members of JMB in Savar district near Dhaka; 24 July three alleged Allahr Dal members in Dinajpur district; and 27 July, five suspected Ansarul Islam militants in Dhaka’s Dhamrai region. Explosion at Pallabi police station in Dhaka injured at least four police officers and one civilian 29 July, with police claiming they later defused two further explosives; Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility but police 30 July declared claim “false”. Govt faced rising COVID-19 cases bringing total to 237,000 on 31 July, making Bangladesh 17th worst coronavirus-hit country globally. In north, mass flooding, which began late June in Jamalpur, Kurigram, Gaibandha and other districts, affected 1.5mn people, killing dozens and submerging thousands of villages. NGO Human Rights Watch 9 July urged govt to move 300 Rohingya refugees from Bhashan Char island in Bay of Bengal amid longstanding concerns that island is prone to flooding and lacks services.

➡ **Kashmir Militant attacks and counter-insurgency operations inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued at high intensity, while clashes persisted across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir).** In J&K, militants 1 July killed one paramilitary soldier in Baramullah district, and incident also left one man dead; controversy emerged over cause of additional casualty as Indian officials claimed militant gunfire killed man, while his family said security forces shot him. Militant and paramilitary member killed in clash in regional capital Srinagar 2 July; next day two militants killed in Kulgam district. In Pulwama district, bomb blast injured soldier 5 July and clash 7 July killed soldier and two militants. Next day, amid widespread strikes in Kashmir Valley to honour Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani, whom security forces killed in 2016, militants killed local leader of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Bandipora district and two members of his family. Security forces killed three militants in Baramullah district 12 July, two in Anantnag district next day and three militants, including commander, in Kulgam district 17 July. Police reported killing two militants in gunfight in Ranbirgarh area of Srinagar 25 July. Tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad continued after reciprocal allegations of espionage saw half of diplomats in both capitals return home 30 June; India's external ministry 2 July criticised announcement by Pakistan's election commission on same day to hold local elections in Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly part of J&K; Pakistan's foreign ministry next day responded India "remains in illegal occupation of parts of" J&K. Pakistani PM Imran Khan 14 July inaugurated building of dam in Gilgit-Baltistan, undertaken with Chinese assistance; New Delhi 16 July protested construction on "Indian union territories" J&K and Ladakh. Meanwhile, cross-LoC clashes between India and Pakistan continued; Islamabad claimed firing by Indian forces killed child 1 July; injured five civilians 5 July; injured six civilians 12 July and injured two civilians 17 July; New Delhi accused Pakistani forces of killing soldier 10 July and killing three civilians 17 July.

➡ **Nepal Pressure on PM KP Oli grew within Nepal Communist Party (NCP) while bilateral tensions with India continued.** Faction of senior NCP leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal reiterated calls for Oli's resignation. President Bidya Bhandari 2 July prorogued parliament on Oli's recommendation, preventing potential no-confidence motion. After several rounds of unsuccessful talks with Dahal, Oli 18 July proposed holding NCP's first general convention in Nov/Dec where Dahal would be appointed sole party chair in exchange for Oli retaining prime ministership; talks drew criticism from other senior NCP leaders who alleged move neglected their grievances. Dahal, Nepal and other senior leaders 28 July held long-awaited NCP standing committee meeting despite Oli's absence; leaders criticised Oli's flouting party rules but stopped short of demanding his resignation from office. NCP vice chair Bamdev Gautam 28 July floated proposal similar to Oli's – allowing him to finish his five-year PM term while Dahal would assume NCP leadership. Meanwhile, bilateral tensions with India continued. Govt 9 July banned Indian news television broadcasts, purportedly in response to insults and allegations against Oli; govt 12 July partially repealed measure after civil society criticised ban for undermining press freedom; head of govt's press oversight body 13 July stated that "press freedom has its limitations". Oli 13 July accused India of "cultural aggression" and claimed that notable Hindu deity was born in Nepal instead of India; Oli's statement next day drew rebuke from NCP leaders, former ministers and diplomats for further straining relations with Delhi.

➡ **Pakistan Amid sustained militant violence, political tensions continued over govt's use of anti-corruption National Accountability Bureau (NAB) against opposition.** Sindh chapter of ruling-Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) 12 July announced it would report opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)'s Sindh provincial govt to NAB, alleging corruption in form of kickbacks from development schemes. NAB 14 July approved fresh inquiries into former Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) PM Nawaz Sharif and PML-N chair Shahbaz Sharif in undisclosed cases. Supreme Court justice 20 July accused NAB of "trampling of fundamental rights" and being "reluctant in proceeding against people on one side of the political divide" in response to June 2019 denial of bail in case brought against former PML-N minister Khawaja Saad Rafique and his brother; PML-N and PPP 21-22 July called for dissolution of NAB and development of new anti-corruption body. Unidentified armed men 21 July abducted journalist Matiullah Jan in capital Islamabad with some kidnappers reportedly in uniform; reporter released hours later; Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari same day described incident as "very disturbing". Following deadly attack in June on Karachi stock exchange claimed by Baloch separatist group, police 18 July announced they prevented another attack in Karachi after arresting six militants from Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar, another separatist group; police claimed group operated from Afghanistan with Indian backing. Militant attacks continued, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province: militants 8 July killed senior police officer in Swabi district; 11 July killed two civilians and next day killed four soldiers while security forces killed four attackers in North Waziristan district; 23 July 16 persons injured in a bomb blast at a market in the predominantly Shia Kurram district's capital, Parachinar. In Balochistan province, firefight 11 July injured two police officers in Mastung district; militant attack 14 July killed three soldiers in Panjgur district; 19 July Hindu local leader shot dead in Khuzdar district; 21 July one person killed in bomb blast at a local market in Turbat district; 25 July one soldier killed in clash with Baloch militants in Kech district; same day military killed an alleged Balochistan Liberation Army militant in another security operation in Kech.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir) Indian and Chinese officials made progress toward disengagement at disputed border while clashes increased between security forces and Maoist militants across country.** Following deadly clash in June along Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, India's national security adviser and China's FM 5 July agreed that both sides should "expeditiously" complete disengagement of troops along LAC, adding that "maintenance of peace and tranquillity" in border areas was "essential for the further development of (...) bilateral relations"; satellite imagery and officials indicated that Indian and Chinese forces disengaged in several areas. Military officials from both sides met 14 July and, according to Beijing, made progress in "further disengagement" and easing of border tensions. Indian defense minister 17 July said that "given the progress of the negotiations so far", border standoff with China "should be resolved", though India would not cede "an inch" of territory". Meanwhile, Maoist violence and anti-Maoist security operations increased across country. In Arunachal Pradesh (north east), security operation 11 July killed six Maoists in Longding district. In Bihar (east), Maoists 9 July killed two civilians in Munger district, and security operation 10 July killed four Maoists in West Champaran district. In Odisha (east), fighting between security forces and Maoists 5-23 July left seven Maoists dead in Kandhamal district. In Chhattisgarh (centre), Maoists 1-27 July killed two civilians and two security force

members in Dantewada, Bijapur, Sukma and Narayanpur. In Maharashtra (west), security operation 3 July left Maoist dead in Gadchiroli district, and Maoists 10 July killed civilian in Gadchiroli. In Andhra Pradesh (south east), police 26 July shot and killed Maoist in Visakhapatnam district. In Manipur (north east), armed group People's Liberation Army of Manipur 29 July ambushed security forces killing three in Chandel district. In West Bengal, Indian border security forces 4 July shot and killed Bangladeshi civilian who had crossed border into India; Bangladesh-based human rights group Odhikar 6 July said security forces had killed at least 25 Bangladeshi civilians in first six months of 2020. Govt-appointed Delhi Minority Commission 16 July said police had failed to protect Muslims during Feb Hindu-Muslim violence that killed 53.

➤ **Sri Lanka Ahead of August parliamentary elections, ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) led Sinhala nationalist campaign in attempt to obtain two-thirds majority and strengthen executive power.** Amid ongoing campaigning ahead of 5 Aug legislative polls, SLPP leader and PM Mahinda Rajapaksa 2 July said two-thirds majority was required to repeal 19th amendment to constitution, which limits presidential powers; PM 5 July described Samagi Jana Balawegaya opposition coalition, which includes Tamil and Muslim parties, as instrument for “communal parties” and their allegedly “extremist” ambitions, said 2019 Easter bombings had revealed dangerous consequences of “communal politics”; election campaign also featured anti-Muslim hate speech on social media. Main Tamil grouping Tamil National Alliance (TNA) 18 July released election manifesto underscoring its long-held demand for devolution of power to traditionally Tamil-majority regions; prominent hardline Buddhist monks 20 July warned that if Tamils “demand a separate state again, a river of blood will flow in the North and East”; PM 27 July claimed TNA continuing separatist project of defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In Northern province, amid reports of security forces targeting Tamils, former LTTE member 4 July fatally injured himself allegedly while building bomb; defence ministry claimed he was financed by Tamil diaspora to “revamp LTTE”. Attorney general 17 July approved draft regulations under controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act allowing suspects detained for holding violent extremist views to undergo “de-radicalisation” program. Prominent Muslim leader of opposition party All Ceylon Makkal Congress Rishad Bathiudeen 17 July filed petition with Supreme Court to prevent his arrest for alleged links to Easter bombings; 27 July summoned for further questioning by police in the midst of election campaigning. Police 27 July questioned former United National Party (UNP) minister Ravi Kurunanayake with regard to alleged 2015 Central Bank “bond scam”. Following rise in COVID-19 cases, leader of opposition UNP Ranil Wickremesinghe and SJB leader Sajith Premadasa respectively 12 and 13 July called for postponement of polls; PM 15 July dismissed fears of second wave of infections, claiming they were based on opposition rumours.

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## South East Asia

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➔ **Indonesia Amid small-scale violence in Papua, tensions over political status of region continued, while protests erupted against gov't controversial job creation bill.** In Papua province, soldiers 18 July shot and killed two men in Nduga regency; military claimed victims were armed separatists of West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA), which WPLA denied; hundreds 19 and 27 July gathered in Nduga's capital Keneyam calling for military to hand over bodies to family of those killed and demanding justice for past human rights abuses, including reported killing of over 200 civilians, amid military operations against armed separatists Dec 2018-July 2020. In late month, military accused of beating to death 18-year old Indigenous Papuan man arrested for theft in Boven Digoel regency, Papua province, near border with Papua New Guinea 24 July; military denied "beating", said investigation under way. Earlier in month, Papuan civil society groups under banner Petisi Rakyat Papua (Petition by Papuans) 5 July voiced opposition to continuation of Papua special autonomy status, due to be debated this year by parliament, asked for referendum to allow Papuans to decide their own fate; series of small-scale protests opposing gov't plan to continue special autonomy status took place, including 8, 11 and 14 July in Papua, Bali and Java. Demonstrators 1 July commemorated proclamation of West Papuan independence in South Sulawesi and East Java provinces, and Papuan students 6 July commemorated in Bali province 1998 "Biak massacre" during which security forces fired at peaceful protesters on Biak island, Papua. Thousands 16 July demonstrated against bill on job creation under parliament's consideration in capital Jakarta; protesters reportedly began throwing rocks at police who responded with tear gas and arrested 20 (all eventually released next day). President Joko Widodo 3 July signed presidential regulation placing State Intelligence Agency directly under his control.

➔ **Myanmar Amid clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and military in Rakhine state, gov't and armed groups agreed to hold fifth Union Peace Conference in Aug while election commission scheduled general elections for Nov.** In Rakhine state, two police officers 8 July went missing in state capital Sittwe. Army 11 July arrested six men suspected of links to AA in Ramree township, army claimed one committed suicide in custody, but body showed signs of torture. Clashes between military and AA 11-14 July killed at least four civilians and displaced more than 3,000 in Ponnagyun, Rathedaung and Maungdaw townships. NGO Amnesty International 8 July said military's killing of civilians in indiscriminate airstrikes on villages in Rakhine and Chin states "amount to war crimes" and urged UN Security Council to refer situation to International Criminal Court. In Shan state, after military late June allegedly shot and killed civilian and injured two others in Kyaukme township amid clashes with armed group Restoration Council of Shan State, more than 10,000 10 July protested in Kyaukme demanding justice for victims; military indicated same day that it would seek charges against organisers for illegal protest. In Kayin state, army 16 July killed civilian; in response, over 1,500 22 July and around 5,000 28 July demonstrated in Papun district calling for military's withdrawal. Negotiators of gov't and other signatories of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement 7 July agreed to hold fourth "Panglong-21" Union Peace Conference 12-14 August; Brotherhood Alliance – coalition of non-signatory armed groups AA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army – 21 July said it was "fully willing" to attend conference if invited and

that it wanted to resume “stalled negotiations” with govt. Election Commission 1 July announced general elections scheduled for 8 Nov. UK 6 July imposed sanctions on military chief and his deputy for their involvement in “systematic and brutal violence against the Rohingya people and other ethnic minorities.”

➔ **Philippines In south, violence continued unabated, while concerns over spread of COVID-19 delayed implementation of peace agreement.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), clan feuds continued, including: in Palimbang on Mindanao island before temporary ceasefire agreement reached on 11 July; in Tipo-Tipo municipality on Basilan island, where firefight involving members of local army and paramilitary 3 July broke out, killing four and injuring four; in Pigcawayan municipality in North Cotabato, Mindanao, where an ambush 10 July left four men dead; in Datu municipality, Minguadanao, Mindanao island, where members of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and local politician’s supporters 14 July engaged in tit-for-tat gunfights in Montawal municipality, wounding two combatants; and in South Upi municipality, Minguadanao, where tensions between members of MILF and indigenous Teduray natives over land persisted. In Maguindanao province, violence involving Islamist militants continued with slight escalation between govt and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters: notably, insurgents of Ansara Khilafa Philippines 1 July clashed with police operatives in Polomolok town in South Cotabato province, killing one militant; bomb explosion targeting police car 10 July killed two policemen and injured four in Shariff Aguak municipality; army infantry force 30 July exchanged fire with militants near Datu Salibo town, leaving two soldiers and about ten militants dead. Clashes between govt forces and elements of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group continued in Sulu province, including killing of five Abu Sayyaf members in Patikul municipality on 6 July. In south, concerns over spike in COVID-19 cases delayed implementation of peace agreement between govt and MILF as interim govt focused on responding to coronavirus. Efforts to rehabilitate Marawi city also stagnated once again due to govt’s focus on contagion; task force Bangon Marawi on 15 July announced govt however remained on track to complete city’s rehabilitation by Dec 2021. Govt 1 July signed agreement with EU for €25mn in Support to Bangsamoro Transition program to help Bangsamoro executive and parliament’s capacity during transition. Meanwhile, clashes between communist New People’s Army and armed forces in Visayas in centre, Mindanao in south, and Luzon in north continued at comparable levels as in June, killing at least 13 combatants and civilians in total throughout month.

➔ **South China Sea Tensions heightened between China and U.S, while SCS claimant parties stressed need to resolve dispute based on international law.** Following June announcement of Chinese military exercises around Paracel Islands 1-5 July, U.S. 3 July expressed concern and noted exercises in Philippines’ waters would be met with “severest response”. Chinese survey ship *Hai Yang Di Zhi 4* departed region of Vietnam’s EZZ 4 July; Vietnamese coast guard ship and U.S. Navy ship *USS Gabrielle Giffords 2* July sailed nearby. Chinese coast guard ship 5402 2 July sailed north of Vanguard Bank, within 200 nautical miles of Vietnam’s coast. U.S. military continued series of exercises in SCS: *Nimitz* and *Ronald Reagan* carrier strike groups 4 July began four days of exercises; at least one U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber 5 July participated in operation; guided-missile destroyer *USS Ralph Johnson 14* July conducted freedom of navigation operation,

sailing within 12 nautical miles of Spratly Islands; *Nimitz* and *Reagan* strike groups 17 July linked up in SCS; Chinese defence ministry 9 July called exercises “provocative acts” in pursuit of “navigational hegemony”. Two U.S. Air Force B-1B bombers 21 July conducted maritime integration operation with *Reagan* carrier group in SCS. China’s military 27 July commenced week-long live fire drills in SCS off Leizhou peninsula; 30 July completed bomber drill over SCS. In shift in U.S. stance, U.S. Sec of State Mike Pompeo 13 July said China’s claims to offshore resources “completely unlawful”; move puts U.S. in line with position of South East Asian claimants and UN Convention of Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In response to U.S. statement, Malaysian FM 16 July said disputes must be resolved based on international law. Vietnamese MFA 15 July affirmed support for UNCLOS; 16 July dismissed China’s claims of historical activities in SCS. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte 27 July said China is “in possession” of SCS. Australia 23 July submitted Note Verbale to Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf, aligning with U.S. position on UNCLOS and 28 July agreed to “increased and regularised maritime cooperation” with U.S. in SCS and Indian Ocean; Canberra 25 July rejected Beijing’s claims in SCS.

➔ **Thailand Protesters staged one of largest pro-democracy demonstrations since 2014 military coup while insurgents continued attacks against security forces in deep south.** In capital Bangkok, activist group Free Youth and Thai Student Union 18 July organised demonstration at Democracy Monument with estimated 2,500 people demanding dissolution of parliament, new constitution and end to harassment of govt critics; organisers said they would intensify rallies if govt failed to respond by 1 Aug. Students in Chiang Mai and in Ubon Ratchathani 19 July gathered, echoing Bangkok demonstration’s demands; about 200 protesters 20 July also demonstrated outside army headquarters in Bangkok accusing military of inappropriate spending and political interference, reportedly in response to army’s former spokeswoman criticism of anti-govt protesters. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 21 July said parliament could address protesters’ demands. Smaller pro-democracy protests 25 July took place in several provincial capitals; hundreds of protesters next day returned to Democracy Monument and continued demonstrations 26-30 July. In deep south, security forces 3 July raided house in Panare, Pattani, killing defence volunteer and suspected insurgent; that night, insurgents attacked ranger base in Sungai Padi, Narathiwat, with no casualties; next morning, bomb exploded near scene of previous night’s attack, with no casualties. Insurgents 8 July reportedly shot and killed ranger volunteer in Raman, Yala; 14-15 July reportedly detonated two bombs targeting security forces which killed one ranger and injured six rangers and four civilians in Mae Lan and Panare, Pattani. Four senior cabinet members including finance minister 9 July quit ruling Palang Pracharat Party and 16 July resigned from cabinet along with deputy PM Somkid Jatusripitak; PM same day said he would reshuffle cabinet by end of Aug. PM and Army Chief General Apirat Kongsompong 10 July met U.S. army chief James McConville in Bangkok, where Apirat and McConville signed “Strategic Vision” pact; U.S. embassy same day said meeting focused on “modernisation, interoperability, joint training and doctrine”.