

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan Tokyo expressed concern over new Chinese Coast Guard Law as Beijing deployed vessels to waters around contested island chain in East China Sea.** After new Chinese Coast Guard Law – authorising “all necessary means” to deter threats posed by foreign vessels in waters “under China’s jurisdiction” – came into effect 1 Feb, Tokyo 3 Feb said it had conveyed “strong concerns” to Beijing over legislation; China 4 Feb claimed new law is in accordance with international law. Japanese govt officials 25 Feb indicated that Japan Coast Guard could directly fire on foreign official vessels aiming to land on Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Meanwhile, Japan Coast Guard reported several incursions of Chinese vessels into disputed waters around Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, including: two Chinese vessels 6 Feb; four Chinese vessels 15-16 Feb, one of which armed with cannon-like weapon; and two Chinese coast guard vessels 20-21 Feb; in each instance, Japan Coast Guard deployed vessels to area to protect fishing ships while urging Chinese ships to leave territorial waters; Tokyo 8 Feb confirmed it had protested to Beijing over recent incursions. Japan 15 Feb announced that it will build three transport ships designed to supply ammunition, fuel and provisions to troops stationed on its outlying islands. Japanese and U.S. coast guard patrol vessels 21 Feb conducted joint exercises and operations near Ogasawara Islands. On diplomatic front, Japan and UK 3 Feb issued joint statement urging all parties to “exercise self-restraint and refrain from activities likely to raise tensions” in East and South China Seas. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken and Japanese FM Toshimitsu Motegi 10 Feb discussed concerns over increasing Chinese assertiveness around disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and reaffirmed strength of U.S.-Japan alliance. In first meeting since Oct, top diplomats of Australia, India, Japan and U.S. 18 Feb met for virtual “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue”, during which they agreed to “strongly” oppose any actions by China to alter status quo in region by force, according to FM Motegi. Japanese defence ministry 20 Feb announced French Navy vessel will conduct surveillance in East China Sea until early March aimed at supporting sanctions on North Korea.

➔ **Korean Peninsula UN report revealed North Korea had funded nuclear and missile development through stolen virtual assets, while U.S. reaffirmed commitment to denuclearising peninsula.** Panel of UN experts monitoring sanctions on North Korea 8 Feb concluded in confidential report to UN Security Council that Pyongyang had developed its nuclear and ballistic missile programs throughout 2020, in violation of international sanctions, funded with virtual assets estimated at \$300 mn that had been stolen through cyberattacks. U.S. Department of Justice 17 Feb indicted three North Korean computer programmers responsible for numerous hacks. U.S. President Biden and South Korean President Moon 3 Feb agreed in first phone call to work on joint comprehensive North Korea strategy to achieve denuclearisation on Korean Peninsula. Seoul and Washington D.C. 5 Feb said officials from both countries held eighth round of negotiations on defence cost-sharing agreement after talks stalled

for almost one year. Former first National Security Adviser Chung Eui-yong 8 Feb took office as new FM; U.S. Sec State Blinken 9 Feb had call with Eui-yong during which he reaffirmed commitment to denuclearising Korean peninsula; Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi 16 Feb also spoke with new FM to discuss enhanced communication and coordination from all parties to resolve tensions on peninsula. Moon 28 Feb said Tokyo Olympics may be “chance for dialogue” between regional parties. Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un 8-12 Feb chaired plenary meeting of ruling party’s central committee during which he accused cabinet of drafting plans with “no big changes” from previous ones that “failed tremendously on almost every sector”; he further reviewed action plans for new five-year strategy, and criticised Seoul for offering cooperation in “non-fundamental areas”. UN 2 Feb released report detailing acts of torture and forced labour in North Korea’s prisons – amounting to possible crimes against humanity – and calling for UN Security Council to refer North Korea to International Criminal Court.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** **Cross-strait tensions remained high amid persistent Chinese and U.S. military activity in region.** U.S. President Biden 10 Feb raised concerns over Beijing’s pressure on Taiwan in first phone conversation with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping; Taiwanese govt 11 Feb thanked Biden for comments. Taiwanese de facto Ambassador to U.S. Hsiao Bi-khim 10 Feb met with acting U.S. Assistant Sec State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Sung Kim in Washington D.C., in first publicly acknowledged formal meeting under new U.S. administration. Taiwanese Presidential Office 19 Feb announced reshuffle of top officials in charge of defence, national security and China policies. Meanwhile, Taiwanese defence ministry claimed series of Chinese military aircraft entered Air Defence Identification Zones (ADIZ) throughout month, including: one Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft 1 Feb; one Y-8 electronic intelligence aircraft and one Y-8 reconnaissance aircraft 4 Feb; two Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircrafts 7 and 18 Feb; one Shaanxi Y-8 reconnaissance aircraft 6, 18, 22 and 23 Feb; two J-16 fighter jets 8 Feb; one Y-8 ASW anti-submarine aircraft and one Y-8 RECCE aircraft 13 Feb; one Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft 16 Feb; four J-16 strike fighters, four JH-7 fighter-bombers and one Y-9 EW electronic warfare aircraft 19 Feb; and two Chengdu J-10 fighter jets, two Shenyang J-16 fighter jets, four Xi'an JH-7 fighter-bombers, two Xian H-6K bombers, and one Shaanxi Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft 20 Feb. In response, Taiwan scrambled jets, broadcast radio warnings and tracked planes with air defence system on each occasion. U.S. continued military activity in region: four U.S. military aircraft 1 Feb flew through ADIZ; U.S. Navy 4 Feb sent guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain through Taiwan Strait, prompting China’s military 5 Feb to accuse U.S. of deliberately “creating tensions”. President Tsai Ing-wen 9 Feb confirmed in Lunar New Year message that U.S. military support remains firm.

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan** **Taliban continued deadly attacks, while U.S. reviewed Afghan strategy ahead of May deadline for foreign troop withdrawal.** Taliban launched deadly attacks in north and east while group continued slow-but-steady expansion of territorial lines in south as two district centres in Zabul province fell under its control. Taliban attack 3 Feb killed six police officers in

Badghis province (north west); separate attacks same day killed 11 security officers in Nangarhar (east) and Sar-e Pul (north) provinces. Taliban 5 Feb killed 18 govt forces while overrunning National Directorate of Security support base in Kunduz province (north); 8 Feb killed 11 soldiers in Balkh province (north); Taliban same day killed three security forces in Ghor province (centre). Five security forces 11 Feb also killed after coming under Taliban attack while escorting UN convoy from capital Kabul to Jalalabad city. Taliban 15 Feb killed seven pro-govt militia members in Kunduz province (north); 17 Feb killed ten pro-govt militia and police in Daikundi province (centre). Meanwhile, after intra-Afghan peace talks abruptly ended in late Jan, negotiators 22 Feb returned to Qatar's capital Doha to work on agenda. Priority for Afghan govt, U.S. and NATO is reduction in violence leading to ceasefire; Taliban so far have resisted all calls for ceasefire. U.S. Biden administration continued review of strategy in Afghanistan, including whether Taliban respected commitments under Feb 2020 agreement. In open letter, Taliban 16 Feb called on U.S. to honour 2020 agreement and to withdraw international troops by 1 May; U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken next day discussed strategic review in call with President Ghani, said that U.S. is committed to peace deal that includes "just and durable political settlement and permanent and comprehensive ceasefire". NATO defence ministers next day met, but no decision made on whether or when to pull out of Afghanistan; NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg said alliance would postpone final decision and work with U.S. Sec Def General Lloyd Austin on way forward. Austin next day told reporters that Biden administration had not yet made decision but would consult with allies and partners.

➔ **Bangladesh** **Deadly clashes over local elections persisted, and govt pressed Myanmar to continue repatriation of Rohingya refugees.** Violent clashes continued as final phases of local elections held across country. Election-related violence 8 Feb killed one in Tangail district (centre); series of clashes 10 Feb, and 13 Feb injured dozens in Thakurgaon (north west), Rajshahi (west) and Bogra (north) districts; internal Awami League clashes 15 Feb, 19 Feb and 28 Feb left three dead in Chittagong, Noakhali and Nilphamari districts. Scores 26-28 Feb took to street in capital Dhaka against 25 Feb death of journalist imprisoned under controversial Digital Security Act (DSA); scores injured and arrested as police cracked down on protests. Anti-terrorism police 3 Feb arrested two members of banned militant outfit Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in Chittagong city (south east) and five alleged Allah'r Dal militants in Dhaka. District court 4 Feb jailed 50 opposition activists, including former Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) parliamentarian, for up to ten years for 2002 attack on PM Hasina motorcade, and High Court 17 Feb upheld death sentences of ten militants convicted for assassination attempt on Hasina in 2000. Special anti-terrorism tribunal 10 and 16 Feb sentenced 13 Ansar al-Islam militants to death, and one to life in prison, for 2015 murders of secular publisher Foysal Aref and U.S.-based Bangladesh blogger Avijit Roy. Following Myanmar's military coup (see Myanmar), foreign ministry 1 Feb said it expected Rohingya repatriation to continue; border security forces same day on alert to secure borders with Myanmar. FM Momen 3 Feb said that Dhaka did not expect fresh influx of refugees; 5 Feb welcomed reports that Myanmar military commanders had visited Rohingya community in Myanmar's Rakhine State, said would "approach directly" new govt to resume talks about refugee repatriation as soon as possible. Approximately 3,000 Rohingya

refugees 15-16 Feb relocated from Cox's Bazar District to Bhasan Char, low-lying flood-prone island in Bay of Bengal, bringing total of number of refugees transferred to island to more than 10,000 since relocation started in December.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir) India and China struck deal to disengage along part of contested border, while Maoist violence and farmer protests continued.** Following nine rounds of talks between military commanders, India and China 11 Feb announced agreement on mutual withdrawal of military forces from Pangong Lake area on unofficial and disputed Himalayan border known as Line of Actual Control; joint communiqué 21 Feb confirmed "smooth completion of disengagement of frontline troops in the Pangong Lake area" as sides vowed to "continue their communication and dialogue". China 19 Feb confirmed death of four Chinese soldiers in border clashes in June 2020 – its first admission of any casualties in scuffle which had killed 20 Indian soldiers. Meanwhile, anti-Maoist security operations and Maoist violence continued throughout month. In Chhattisgarh state (centre), security forces 6 Feb killed senior Maoist commander in Dantewada district, while IEDs 7, 24 Feb killed soldier in Bijapur District and border guard in Narayanpur district, respectively; Maoists 15 Feb killed local village official in Naryanpur district and 17 Feb killed villager in Rajnandgaon district. In Bihar state (east), security forces 11 Feb killed Maoist in Lakhisarai district. In Jharkhand state (east), IED 16 Feb killed police constable in Lohardaga district. In Madhya Pradesh (centre), security forces night of 12-13 Feb killed two Maoists in Mandla district. Following violent unrest last month, farmers 6 Feb blocked national and state roads nationwide in protest of govt's proposed agricultural reforms; PM Modi 8 Feb urged farmers to end their over-two-month long protest and 10 Feb invited farmers to talks. Police in New Delhi 9 Feb arrested man accused of leading protesters who stormed historic Red Fort last month; police 13 Feb arrested climate activist for alleged role in spreading misinformation related to unrest. U.S. President Biden and PM Modi during 8 Feb telephone call agreed to continue close cooperation in Indo-Pacific to promote "stronger regional architecture through the Quad", referring to informal grouping of U.S., India, Japan and Australia (see South China Sea).

➔ **Kashmir India and Pakistan pledged to respect ceasefire agreement along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir); militant attacks continued in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).** India and Pakistan's directors general of military operations 25 Feb agreed to observe immediately all agreements and ceasefire along LoC; U.S. State Dept same day welcomed agreement, expressed support for direct India-Pakistan dialogue; Indian army northern commander 27 Feb said agreement would have no bearing on counter-terrorism operations in region. Earlier in month, Pakistan claimed Indian fire 2 Feb injured four, and India said Pakistani cross-LoC fire 3 Feb killed soldier in Rajouri district. Indian border forces 8 Feb claimed to have killed Pakistani intruder along international border in Jammu, 10 Feb said they killed another intruder near LoC. In briefing to foreign representatives visiting J&K, senior Indian army officials 18 Feb accused Islamabad of helping terrorists infiltrate across LoC by organising training camps; Pakistani FM 15 Feb said such "guided tours" are intended to divert international community's attention away from India's "egregious human rights violations". Meanwhile, militant attacks continued at high intensity in J&K: militants 6 Feb injured paramilitary soldier in

Chanapora area; son of Hindu restaurant owner 17 Feb shot and wounded in regional capital Srinagar, died 28 Feb. Encounter between militants and security forces 18-19 Feb killed one police in Budgam district. Security forces 19 Feb killed three militants in Shopian district; militants same day gunned down two police in Srinagar. In light of attacks, inspector general of Kashmir police 21 Feb directed an increase in security deployment at all vital locations in area. Security forces 24 Feb killed two militants in Anantnag district. Previously, police 13 Feb arrested militant allegedly responsible for killing three Bharatiya Janata Party workers in Kulgram district last year; security forces next day claimed to have foiled terrorist plot planned on anniversary of 2019 Pulwama attack which killed scores of Indian security personnel. J&K police chief same day disclosed arrests of two militant commanders on 6 and 13 Feb. High speed internet services, previously shut down on 4 Aug 2019, 5 Feb restored in J&K.

➔ **Nepal Supreme Court overturned PM KP Oli's decision to dissolve House of Representatives amid ongoing dispute between ruling party factions.** In landmark decision, Supreme Court 23 Feb overturned PM KP Oli's 20 Dec bid to dissolve House of Representatives – thereby reinstating parliament – and called for winter legislative session to be convened by 8 March; decision widely lauded for safeguarding constitutional framework of 2015 charter and preserving judicial independence. Despite renewed calls for Oli's resignation following verdict, PM refused to step down and his press adviser 23 Feb stated that while Court's ruling should be accepted, Oli would be “facing” House of Representatives. Discussions around potential no-confidence motion against Oli gathered pace following court's decision but were complicated by internal rift within ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP). Competition continued throughout Feb between Oli-led faction and faction led by former PMs Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal as both continued bids to be recognised as legitimate version of party after Election Commission refused in Jan to recognise either wing's legitimacy; Dahal-Nepal faction 2 Feb submitted new application to Election Commission that could have bearing on formation of new govt. Nepali Congress, second-largest party in parliament and touted as likely “kingmaker” once parliament reconvenes, 25 Feb announced it would not yet take sides despite appeals for support from both NCP factions.

➔ **Pakistan Violent clashes erupted during local elections, and militant attacks continued at high intensity.** Political tensions continued between PM Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt and Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), 11-party opposition alliance that includes Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). President Alvi 6 Feb signed Elections Amendment Ordinance 2021 to allow upcoming Senate elections to be held with “open and identifiable ballot” rather than secret ballots; PDM same day rejected ordinance, said it violated constitution while Pakistan Bar Council 8 Feb said it is based on “malicious intent”. Local by-elections held throughout Feb sparked low-level violence; notably, clashes between PTI and PML-N party workers 19 Feb killed two in one Punjab province by-election; Election Commission 25 Feb subsequently ordered re-election there on 18 March, said local polls had not been fair or transparent. Meanwhile, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, Pakistani Taliban 3 Feb killed two in North Waziristan district; militants 12 and 18 Feb killed nine soldiers in South Waziristan and 12 Feb killed Ahmadi doctor in Peshawar

city; Pakistan Taliban commander 22 Feb shot dead four female aid workers in North Waziristan; security forces next day killed militant commander, and 26 Feb killed another Pakistan Taliban commander in South Waziristan. Sindh police 26 Feb killed two alleged Pakistani Taliban militants in Sukkur city. Afghan Taliban commander 28 Feb shot dead in Peshawar city (KPK). In Balochistan province, explosions targeting Kashmir solidarity rallies 5 Feb killed two and injured at least 24 in Quetta and Sibi cities. Local security forces claimed militants shot dead three Punjabi labourers 8 Feb in Kalat district; militants 14 Feb killed soldier in Kech district, and 18 Feb killed five soldiers in Quetta and Kohlu districts. Inter-governmental body Financial Action Task Force met 25 Feb, said it would keep Pakistan on “grey list” until June plenary. Internationally, Army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa 19 Feb met visiting U.S. Central Command head General Kenneth McKenzie, and along with FM Qureshi same day met Russia’s Special Envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov to discuss Afghan peace process; FM Qureshi 26 Feb also met visiting Afghan president’s special envoy.

➔ **Sri Lanka UN Human Rights Council mulled new oversight resolution as govt continued to dismiss deeply critical UN human rights report.** Following late Jan report by UN High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet that noted “warning signs” of possible return of “grave human rights violations” and advocated “international action to ensure justice for international crimes” allegedly committed during 26-year civil war, UN Human Rights Council 22 Feb began Spring session where it will consider new resolution to pursue accountability and maintain international oversight over Sri Lanka as 2015 resolution approaches expiration. Govt reiterated harsh response to UN report; foreign affairs ministry 21 Feb labelled it “propaganda” and part of campaign of “premeditated attempts at vilifying Sri Lanka”. Seventeen former UN special rapporteurs and human rights experts 5 Feb issued joint statement expressing grave concerns about “continued reluctance of the Sri Lankan Government to meaningfully uphold the human rights of all”. Pakistani PM Imran Khan 23 Feb visited Sri Lanka, seen as attempt by Sri Lankan govt to court support from Muslim-majority states for countering new UN resolution; Khan welcomed govt’s 26 Feb announcement of reversal of widely criticised policy mandating cremation of bodies of COVID-19 victims; govt had yet to allocate land for burials by month’s end. Meanwhile, presidential commission of inquiry on 2019 Easter bombings 1 Feb submitted long-awaited report to President Rajapaksa, who 19 Feb appointed ministerial committee to look into how to respond to its recommendations, which have not yet been formally made public. Thousands of mostly Tamil and some Muslim demonstrators 3-7 Feb marched 400km from Pottuvil town in eastern province to Polikandy town near Jaffna in northern province in protest of land grabs and Sinhualisation of Tamil-majority areas, militarisation, forced cremations, disappearances, anti-terrorism laws and political prisoners. Govt 1 Feb unilaterally cancelled Feb 2019 agreement with India and Japan for public-private partnership to develop Eastern Container Terminal of Colombo port.

South East Asia

↓ **Myanmar Military coup sparked biggest political crisis in generation as police killed dozens in violent crackdowns on mass**

protests. Military 1 Feb staged coup after alleging fraud in Nov elections, declaring state of emergency for one year and handing power to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing after detaining State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other senior figures of National League for Democracy party. Police 3 Feb filed charges against Myint for alleged violation of COVID-19 protocols, and against Suu Kyi for alleged import infringements after finding six unauthorised walkie-talkies in her residence. Min Aung Hlaing 1 Feb pledged to hold new election and hand power to winner, without specifying date; medical staff, teachers, govt and private sector workers same day started civil disobedience campaign against military rule, and stopped working. Despite intermittent internet cuts, hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators took to streets nationwide throughout Feb, demanding release of Suu Kyi and end to military rule, including in capital Naypyitaw, Yangon, Mandalay and other cities and towns; police cracked down violently on protesters, killing dozens – including at least 18 on 28 Feb alone – while arresting over 1,000 people. Coup prompted stern international response: UN Security Council 4 Feb called for release of members of govt while UK and U.S. same day urged military to relinquish power. Numerous states imposed sanctions on military leaders, including New Zealand 9 Feb, U.S. 11 Feb, as well as UK and Canada 18 Feb. Ethnic armed groups differed in responses to coup. In Rakhine State, Arakan Army continued informal talks with military to solidify informal ceasefire, while some Arakan National Party members accepted positions in new local and national administrations. In northern Shan State, armed groups Restoration Council of Shan State and Ta-ang National Liberation Army 15-21 Feb clashed in sign of more assertive military posture. In Kokang region, military 2 Feb removed local leadership; as they left, rival Myanmar National Democratic Alliance attacked them, reportedly killing dozen, mostly civilians. Ten ethnic armed groups signatory to Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement 20 Feb announced they would suspend political talks with junta.

➔ **Philippines Low-level violence persisted in south between militant groups and security forces.** In Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in south, clashes between insurgents and security forces took place at relatively low levels throughout month: police 5 Feb led operation against Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) elements in Rajah Buayan municipality; police 9 Feb targeted suspected Dawlah Islamiya elements in South Cotabato, killing one militant; military operations continued in South Upi municipality, as military 12 Feb seized BIFF camp in Pilar village; govt forces 13 Feb overran camp of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked militants in Madamba municipality. Military operations against elements of ISIS-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continued early Feb in Zamboanga city; smaller cohorts of ASG members 7 and 18 Feb surrendered to govt, notably in Basilan province in Sulu archipelago. Meanwhile, clashes between armed forces and communist New People's Army (NPA) continued in Luzon in north, Visayas in centre and Mindanao in south, with at least 13 combatant and civilian casualties throughout Feb. In south, implementation of peace agreement with Moro Islamic Liberation Front remained stalled.

➔ **South China Sea New Chinese Coast Guard Law prompted concern amid continued military activity in South China Sea (SCS) region.** China's Coast Guard Law adopted late Jan came into effect 1 Feb; law authorises

use of “all necessary means” to deter threats posed by foreign vessels in waters “under China’s jurisdiction”. After Philippine FM Teodoro Locsin in Jan filed diplomatic protest with Beijing against law, Chinese embassy in Manila 1 Feb defended it as “domestic legislation” that did not increase the risk of war. Filipino Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana 9 Feb said law was “alarming” and 19 Feb announced Manila will strengthen its naval presence in SCS; U.S. State Dept 19 Feb said it was “concerned” by law. Military activity continued. Chinese MFA 9 Feb denounced U.S. Freedom of Navigation operations in SCS as inconducive to regional peace and stability; USS Russell 17 Feb conducted Freedom of Navigation operation in Spratly Islands. French Defence Minister Florence Parly 8 Feb said French nuclear attack submarine and naval support ship completed patrol through SCS; French Navy Mistral-class amphibious assault ship and La Fayette-class frigate 18 Feb set sail on deployment to South China Sea and Japan ahead of joint exercise with Japan and U.S. in May. Chinese state media 24 and 27 Feb announced armed forces recently held maritime strike exercises. UK Royal Navy 27 Feb suggested carrier strike group will conduct freedom of navigation operation in SCS in May. Meanwhile, Locsin 8 Feb said SCS code of conduct currently being negotiated by South East Asia regional group ASEAN and China will not exclude Western powers such as U.S. from region. U.S. Sec Def Lloyd Austin 10 Feb reiterated commitment to uphold Mutual Defense Treaty with Philippines. In conversation with General Secretary of Vietnamese Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong, Chinese President Xi Jinping 8 Feb said that both countries must resist outside interference. In first meeting since Oct, top diplomats of Australia, India, Japan and U.S. 18 Feb held virtual conference for Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; according to Japanese FM Toshimitsu Motegi, parties agreed to oppose any Chinese actions to alter status quo in region by force.

➔ **Thailand Protest movement calling for constitutional reform resumed in capital Bangkok while violence returned in deep south after quiet month.** Criminal court 9 Feb imprisoned four protest leaders for violation of lèse-majesté law; ruling came day after panel of UN human rights experts expressed “grave concerns” over recent lèse-majesté charges and sentences. In Bangkok, protesters resumed rallies throughout month, calling for release of four jailed protest leaders, amendment of lèse-majesté law and reform of monarchy. Over 1,000 protesters 10 Feb gathered at Pathumwan intersection and scuffled with police; hundreds 13 Feb gathered at Democracy Monument; protesters later same day marched toward Grand Palace and clashed with riot police; separate group of pro-democracy protesters same day met at Nang Loeng police station, where police fired warning shots and media reported 23 protestors and 20 police officers injured during incident and 11 people arrested. Rally of several hundred 19 Feb took place near parliament. Police 28 Feb fired tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets in clashes with pro-democracy protesters in Bangkok; incident left 23 policemen and ten protesters injured, and police arrested 22 people. Meanwhile, lawmakers 9 Feb agreed that Constitutional Court should rule on legality of proposed constitutional amendments aimed at setting up charter drafting committee; opposition sees recourse to court as move to derail reform efforts; two proposed amendment bills 25 Feb passed second reading. Deep south witnessed uptick in violence after calmer Jan. In Narathiwat province, arsonists 1 Feb set fire to two cell signal towers before targeting police officers responding to fire with IED, wounding five in Si Sakhon district; gunmen 14 Feb fired shots at guard post

outside police station in Bacho district. In Pattani province, grenade 13 Feb exploded in parking lot of block of police apartments; militants 16 Feb fired two grenades at Marine outpost in Mai Khen district; gunmen 20 Feb shot and killed Malay-Muslim defence volunteer in Khok Po district. In first publicly acknowledged dialogue in over a year, govt representatives 3 Feb engaged with armed group Barisan Revolusi Nasional to discuss “how to handle peace talks during the COVID-19 time”.