

# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➡ **China/Japan Tensions continued between Japan and China over contested island chain in East China Sea.** Japanese Defence Minister Taro Kono 9 Sept said China was “national security threat” to Japan, while FM Motegi same day expressed concern over China’s actions in South China Sea at summit of South East Asia regional organisation ASEAN. Some 100 lawmakers from Japanese ruling-Liberal Democratic Party 17 Sept called for joint U.S.-Japan military drills around Nansei island chain, which includes disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands; in response to group’s call, Chinese MFA same day said islands are “China’s inherent territory”. Yoshihide Suga 16 Sept assumed office as Japanese PM, replacing Abe who resigned in Aug citing health reasons, with continuity in foreign policy expected; Suga same day appointed Nobuo Kishi as defence secretary, placing Kono in charge of administrative reform; Chinese state-run *Global Times* newspaper 20 Sept said “strategic framework of China-Japan relations will remain unchanged”; Suga and Chinese President Xi 25 Sept held phone call and agreed to continue high-level contacts but did not discuss Xi’s suspended state visit to Tokyo. Japan and India 10 Sept signed agreement for “closer cooperation between the Armed Forces of India and Japan”; during call same day, Indian PM Modi and PM Abe welcomed agreement, saying it would strengthen contributions to “peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region”. Japanese defence ministry 30 Sept announced draft budget with 8.3% increase, largest rise in two decades.

➡ **Korean Peninsula Tensions remained high following North Korea’s killing of South Korean official at sea and amid concerns that North Korea might test weapon in Oct.** Concerns grew that Pyongyang may intensify provocative actions as North Korean soldiers 22 Sept shot and killed South Korean fisheries official at de facto maritime border; Pyongyang warned of tensions if South Korean naval operations continued search for body; DPRK 25 Sept apologised for shooting. Pyongyang may display or test new or advanced weaponry, including possible submarine-launched ballistic missile, in lead up to 10 Oct military parade to celebrate North Korea’s 75th anniversary; Pyongyang is yet to demonstrate “new strategic weapon” announced in Dec 2019. Analysis platform 38 North 14 Sept reported satellite imagery showing four new temporary structures that may be storage units for large missile systems, including launching vehicles. Vice chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff John Hyten 17 Sept said North Korea possesses “small number” of nuclear weapons with “capabilities that can threaten their neighbours” or U.S. Ahead of 21-24 Sept International Atomic Energy Agency conference in Vienna, U.S. 19 Sept called on international efforts to achieve “fully verified denuclearization of North Korea”. Amid continued international concern over North Korea breaking UN sanctions limit on importing fuel, South Korean Yonhap news agency 2 Sept reported findings from data analytics firm Kharon alleging Russian companies Gazprom and Rosneft shipped oil worth \$26mn to Pyongyang in 2018 and 2019. U.S. govt 11 Sept also accused two Hong Kong companies of acquiring over \$300mn worth of communications equipment for DPRK, violating UN sanctions. Amid economic and humanitarian difficulties in North Korea due to COVID-19

concerns and floods, U.S. Deputy Sec State Steve Biegun 11 Sept said Washington will ease restrictions for U.S. aid workers traveling to country. South Korean vice FM Choi 10 Sept announced Washington and Seoul had agreed to launch a high-level dialogue channel in Oct to run parallel to U.S.-South Korean Working Group; however, U.S. state department reportedly only said they would “positively consider” move, leading to domestic criticism of Choi.

↓ **Taiwan Strait Cross-strait tensions spiked amid heightened Chinese military activity and senior U.S. official’s visit to Taiwan.**

Following Aug visit of U.S. health chief Alex Azar, U.S. State Under Secretary Keith Krach 17-19 Sept visited Taiwan for memorial service in highest level visit by U.S. cabinet official since 1979; Chinese MFA 17 Sept said trip “severely violates the one-China principle” and urged Washington to “immediately stop official exchange with Taiwan”. Beijing conducted live-fire exercises during visit, with Chinese state-run Global Times newspaper quoting experts who suggested drills are “rehearsal for a Taiwan takeover”; 18 Chinese jets, including H-6 bombers and J-16 fighters, conducted military drills in Taiwan Strait 18 Sept, with 19 jets, including a Y-8 anti-submarine plane, holding exercises next day; in response, Taipei scrambled jets and tracked jets with air defence system both days. President Tsai 20 Sept denounced drills, saying they demonstrated to regional countries “threat posed by China”. Prior to visit, Taiwanese military 4 Sept denied claims on social media that its forces had shot down Chinese jet, which crossed median line in Taiwan Strait – referring to de facto sea demarcation that both sides have generally observed for decades. Chinese jets 9-10 Sept entered Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone, while two Y-8’s entered zone 16 Sept. Beijing 14-20 Sept held navy exercises in Yellow Sea, while Taiwan 14-18 Sept conducted computer-aided “war games” as part of annual military drills. Taiwanese FM Wu 17 Sept called for international support to deter “China’s expansionist motivation” during interview. Tensions rose further when Chinese MFA 21 Sept announced that “there is no so-called center line in the Taiwan Strait”, referring to median line. Main Taiwan opposition Kuomintang party 14 Sept announced it would not send official delegation to annual cross-Strait forum following Chinese state media China Central Television 10 Sept headline that claimed party was coming to “plead for peace” amid Taiwan-China tensions. Reuters 16 Sept reported Washington plans to sell up to seven major weapons systems such as mines, cruise missiles and drones to Taipei.

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## South Asia

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↑ **Afghanistan Afghan govt and Taliban began long-awaited peace talks, while violence steadily increased across country.** Taliban and govt 12 Sept began intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha, Qatar’s capital, in ceremony attended by High Council for National Reconciliation chief Abdullah Abdullah, FM Hanif Atmar and international figures including U.S. Sec State Pompeo; despite some progress in establishing format and procedure of talks, issues emerged over role of religious minorities, such as Hazara community, and govt’s desire not to acknowledge Feb U.S.-Taliban agreement. Other contentious issues included Taliban’s opposition to govt’s open communication with national media, Taliban negotiators being more senior than their govt counterparts and domestic expectation

that levels of violence would quickly fall. Meanwhile, Taliban resumed attacks on district centres with at least seven large-scale assaults on urban areas and several on outskirts of provincial capitals; including 20 Sept attack on Afghan security forces convoy outside Maidan Shar, Wardak province (centre) that killed 31 soldiers and 22 Sept raid on Maruf district centre, Kandahar province (south) that killed at least 20 soldiers and wounded 20 others. Fighting intensified in northern regions and southern provinces of Kandahar and Uruzgan, including series of attacks in latter's Gizab district 17-22 Sept, while clashes continued on Shibergan to Mazar highway in Jawzjan province (north). Govt claimed its forces remained in "active defence" posture but deployed troops to contested areas and continued to conduct airstrikes that caused civilian casualties, including killing dozens of militants and at least ten civilians in Kunduz province (north west) 19 Sept. Govt made progress with political appointments after Abdullah did not object to President Ghani's 31 Aug decree nomination of several cabinet members; however, concerns continued over underlying Ghani-Abdullah tensions and role that Ghani-controlled state ministry for peace, ostensibly under purview of Abdullah's High Council, would play in peace process.

➔ **Bangladesh Amid ongoing govt crackdown on critics, security operations continued against alleged members of banned militant groups.** Govt continued to suppress critics, particularly journalists; ruling-Awami League (AL) member 6 Sept filed defamation cases against four reporters, including newspaper editor over articles deemed critical of AL minister; NGO Reporters without Borders 7 Sept called on govt to dismiss charges against Cox's Bazar journalist who, despite being released in Aug after almost one year in prison where he reportedly suffered police torture, still faces several charges, including illegal possession of drugs and arms. Meanwhile, anti-militancy operations continued: in capital Dhaka, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 9 Sept arrested four suspected members of Ansar al-Islam and police next day arrested four alleged Neo-Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh members; RAB 16 Sept arrested two suspected Ansar al-Islam accused of recruitment through social media and police 18 Sept arrested another suspect; RAB 17 Sept arrested two alleged Allahr Dal members in Gaibandha district and two suspected Allahr Dal members in Rajshahi district on 23 Sept. RAB 29 Sept arrested alleged Ansar al-Islam member in Ashulia area near Dhaka. Govt 4 Sept extended by six months suspension on "humanitarian grounds" of prison sentence for Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP) chief Khaleda Zia, convicted on corruption charges. Govt 4 Sept organised visit for 40 Rohingya community leaders to Bhasan Char island to observe existing facilities, as part of plans to relocate refugees to flood-prone island post-monsoon; 8 Sept said security forces would construct barbed wire fences around Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district and increase electronic surveillance due to alleged money laundering and drug trafficking among refugees with international and NGO involvement. FM Momen 12 Sept called for international support to facilitate refugee repatriation to Myanmar, warning of "pockets of radicalisation" if situation remains unchanged. Bangladesh UN mission 15 Sept shared "aide-mémoire" with UN Secretary General on movement of Myanmar military close to Bangladesh border, seeking immediate UN Security Council steps to prevent escalation of situation.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir) Border tensions rose between India and China, prompting both sides to step up de-escalatory efforts.** After India and China late Aug accused each other of violating Line of Actual Control, sides 1 Sept again blamed each other for taking “provocative” actions. In first high-level meeting since standoff began in April, Indian and Chinese defence ministers 4 Sept held talks in Russian capital Moscow, but made no breakthrough; tensions escalated again as sides accused each other of firing warning shots at each other 7 Sept, in breach of decades-long observed protocol prohibiting use of firearms along border. Indian FM Jaishankar and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi 10 Sept agreed to five-point plan to de-escalate border standoff, agreeing border troops should “quickly” disengage and that both sides would abide by “all existing protocols”. Senior Indian and Chinese military officials 21 Sept agreed to stop further deployment of troops along border and to “refrain from unilaterally changing the situation on the ground”. Meanwhile, anti-Maoist security operations and Maoist violence continued in country’s centre and east, notably: in Telangana (centre), clashes between security forces and Maoists 3-23 Sept killed eight Maoists in Bhadrachalam and Asifabad districts; in Chhattisgarh (centre), Maoists 1-22 Sept killed nine civilians, two police officers and one forest ranger in Dantewada, Bijapur, Kanker and Sukma districts; in Odisha (east), clashes between Maoists and security forces 9 Sept killed five Maoists and two security personnel in Kalahandi district. India’s national counter-terrorism agency 19 Sept reported arrest of nine al-Qaeda militants in West Bengal and Kerala. Delhi police 13 Sept arrested activist Umar Khalid as “one of the main conspirators” of Feb Hindu-Muslim riots; over 200 academics, authors and filmmakers 25 Sept called for his release. Isolated incidents of anti-Muslim violence reported throughout month, including Hindu mob lynching Muslim youth suspected of theft in Uttar Pradesh’s Bareilly district on 3 Sept. Controversial agriculture legislation late Sept sparked nationwide protests by farmers. India 7 Sept became world’s second-worst-hit nation in terms of reported COVID-19 cases, which surpassed 6mn 28 Sept. NGO Amnesty International 29 Sept halted work in India citing govt’s “incessant witch-hunt”.

➡ **Kashmir Counter-insurgency operations and militant attacks inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued at high intensity, while clashes persisted across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir).** Notably, in J&K’s Baramulla district, clash with police 4 Sept killed three alleged Hizbul Mujahideen militants, police 11 Sept arrested three militants, and family members 16 Sept protested death in custody of youth in Sopore area. Hundreds 17 Sept protested and clashed with security forces in J&K capital Srinagar after police earlier that day shot dead civilian during operation that also killed three suspected militants. Army same day claimed to have averted a major militant attack in seizing 52kg of explosives in Pulwama district. Security forces 20-28 Sept killed militants in Srinagar, Budgam, Pulwama, Anantnag and Kupwara districts, while militant attacks in same period injured soldier in Budgam and killed civilian in Shopian district; unidentified gunmen 24 Sept killed prominent lawyer in Srinagar. Army 18 Sept reported three suspected militants killed in 18 July gunfight in Shopian were missing labourers from Rajouri, appearing to confirm case of extrajudicial killings. UN human rights chief 14 Sept criticised militant and security forces’ violence against civilians. Tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad continued with reciprocal allegations of cross-LoC fire: India accused Pakistan of cross-LoC fire that killed two soldiers 2-5 Sept and injured soldier 28

Sept. Pakistan claimed Indian fire was responsible for killing soldier 9 Sept, killing child and wounding seven civilians 13-17 Sept, killing three soldiers 23-26 Sept, and injuring two civilians 24 Sept. Islamabad and New Delhi traded rhetorical barbs in several international forums, including at UN Security Council meeting 3-4 Sept over Pakistan's wish to add two Indian nationals to sanctions list, and India's desire to remove Kashmir from council agenda. In UN General Assembly address 25 Sept, Pakistan's PM Khan warned India was planning another "ill-conceived adventure" to divert attention from its illegal actions and rights abuses in J&K; India's UN mission accused Pakistan of supporting terrorism and called on it to vacate all areas of Kashmir under its control. China and Pakistan 21 Sept condemned "unilateral actions that complicate the situation" in J&K.

➡ **Nepal Tensions with India persisted and new border issue with China emerged.** Tensions with India, which had abated in Aug, threatened to escalate again after Nepal's Ambassador to China Mahendra Pandey 28 Sept accused Delhi of encroachment into Nepali territory and blamed Indian media of spreading "fake propaganda" to undermine Nepal-China relations. Border issues with China arose with 23 Sept reports of Chinese security forces allegedly constructing several buildings inside Nepali territory in the northern district of Humla; Nepal's MFA and China's embassy in Kathmandu denied reports, contradicting local officials' accounts. Ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) 3 Sept nominated senior leader Bamdev Gautam to upper house of parliament in bid to ease internal party divisions; legal experts criticised decision for contravening 2015 constitution outlining that upper house appointments are partly in place to address under-representation of minority groups; Supreme Court 23 Sept issued interim order halting appointment, citing need for "serious constitutional explanation". During his address to UN General Assembly, PM KP Oli 25 Sept urged support for Nepal's re-election to UN Human Rights Council; human rights activists have persistently called out govt for curbs on civil liberties and for failing to deliver on human rights commitments made in 2017 prior to first Human Rights Council term. Federal govt 28 Sept took over control of policing within Kathmandu valley despite protests from provincial leaders that move infringes on their constitutional rights; move seen as latest govt effort to undermine federal structure and further shrink provincial authority.

➡ **Pakistan Govt continued to use anti-corruption cases to attack political opponents, sparking opposition efforts to unseat govt.** Govt pursued warrants and indictments against senior opposition leaders, including former Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) PM Sharif and former Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) President Zardari, leading to Islamabad High Court 15 Sept issuing warrant for Sharif's arrest and demanding he return from self-imposed exile in London by 22 Sept. In protest at govt's use of controversial National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for political ends, 11 opposition parties including PPP and PML-N 20 Sept organised "All Parties Conference" in capital Islamabad and online, calling for Khan to resign and agreeing on anti-govt action plan that includes public meetings in Oct and mass demonstrations in Jan. At conference, in online remarks from London, former PM Sharif called military "a state above the state", while opposition called for end to military's political interference. In response, govt 22 Sept disclosed that opposition leaders had 16 Sept held meetings with army chief, implying they had sought his backing; NAB next day summoned opposition leader Fazlur Rehman to respond to corruption allegations and NAB 28 Sept arrested PML-N President and parliamentary leader of opposition Shahbaz Sharif, and same day

indicted Zardari; NAB 29 Sept remanded Sharif in custody for 14 days. Internationally, PM Khan 11 Sept welcomed start of Afghan peace talks, and FM Qureshi next day attended opening ceremony virtually, calling for continued international support, including on reconstruction and refugee return; Afghan High Peace Council chief Abdullah Abdullah late Sept visited Pakistan to discuss peace process (see Afghanistan). Militant violence continued; notably, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, Pakistani Taliban claimed 3 Sept bomb blast that killed three soldiers and wounded four others in North Waziristan tribal district, and killed army officer 27 Sept in South Waziristan; violence also ongoing in Balochistan, including 5 Sept bomb blast that injured four in provincial capital Quetta. Sectarian tensions increased following 11-12 Sept protests in Karachi city by Sunni groups claiming Shia leaders made disparaging remarks about Sunni religious figures; unidentified gunmen 15 Sept killed two Shias in KPK capital Peshawar.

➔ **Sri Lanka Govt tabled bill in parliament to remove constitutional checks on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.** Cabinet 2 Sept approved draft 20th constitutional amendment to replace 19th amendment which curbs presidential powers; new amendment would give president sweeping powers, including to appoint and control all state institutions, appoint and dismiss ministers, head ministries, dissolve parliament one year after its election, as well as full legal immunity. Proposed amendment sparked criticism from opposition, but also within ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party, prompting PM Mahinda Rajapaksa 12 Sept to appoint committee to consider changes. Govt 22 Sept tabled unchanged amendment bill in parliament amid protests from opposition. Supreme Court 29 Sept began consideration of petitions filed by opposition and civil society against amendment. Gotabaya 25 Sept directed officials to implement his future verbal orders as if they were formal written directives, adding that those who fail to do so “will face stern action”. Cabinet 3 Sept appointed nine-member “experts’ committee” headed by Gotabaya’s personal lawyer and featuring notable Sinhala hardliners to draft new constitution; State Minister of Provincial Councils and Local Government Affairs Sarath Weerasekera quoted 6 Sept in support of new constitution removing “detrimental aspects” of 13th amendment, which devolved power in 1987 to satisfy in part Tamil autonomy demands; during virtual summit with Mahinda, Indian PM Modi 26 Sept repeated longstanding calls for implementation of 13th amendment; Mahinda’s separate statement same day ignored the issue. Cabinet 29 Sept approved proposal by Mahinda to ban cattle slaughter, an industry run mostly by Muslims; imports of beef will still be allowed. UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept criticised draft 20th amendment and appointments to key civilian roles of senior military officials “allegedly involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity” and called for immediate end to “surveillance and intimidation of victims [of civil war], their families, human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers”; Sri Lanka 15 Sept dismissed Bachelet’s criticism of amendment as “unwarranted” and rejected “false and unsubstantiated allegations”. UK 17 Sept expressed concern over lack of “meaningful progress” in gov’t commitment to transitional justice.

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## South East Asia

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➡ **Indonesia Armed separatists led series of attacks on military in Papua.** In Papua province, armed separatist group West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA) 5 Sept claimed killing of eight soldiers in Nduga regency, while series of deadly attacks took place in Intan Jaya regency. Notably, in Intan Jaya's Sugapa district, WPLA 14 Sept shot and injured two civilians claiming they were intelligence officers, and military reported armed group 17 Sept killed one soldier and one civilian; in Hitadipa district, WPLA 19 Sept killed one soldier, and shortly after military allegedly shot and killed pastor, local army commander denied involvement and blamed WPLA. In Nabire regency, thousands 24 Sept took to streets protesting against extension of Papua special autonomy status set to expire in 2021; police briefly arrested over 150 demonstrators citing COVID-19 restrictions. In provincial capital Jayapura, hundreds of students 28 Sept also protested against extension of special autonomy status; police fired warning shots and tear gas to disperse protesters. In speech to UN General Assembly, Vanuatu PM Loughman 26 Sept said "the indigenous people of West Papua continue to suffer from human rights abuses", arguing there had been "little progress" in addressing violations; Indonesia rebuked speech saying it would defend itself from "any advocacy of separatism under the guise of artificial human rights concerns" and that Papua and West Papua's status as part of Indonesia was "final". In Aceh, police reported 297 Rohingya refugees believed to have been at sea for several months 7 Sept moored at Ujong Blang beach, near Lhokseumawe city.

➡ **Myanmar Clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and security forces continued to inflict heavy toll on civilians.** In Rakhine state, military 1 Sept allegedly shot and killed villager in Kyauktaw township; 3 Sept reportedly burned down nearly 200 homes in Kyauktaw and killed two villagers it claimed were AA insurgents. Two police officers went missing 5 Sept in Maungdaw township, mutilated body of one found two days later. Artillery shelling 8 Sept reportedly killed five villagers in Myebon township. Unidentified gunmen 10 Sept shot and injured police officer in Minbya township. Artillery shelling 11-17 Sept killed one villager and injured seven more in Rathedaung and Kyauktaw townships. Military 29 Sept announced extension of its nationwide COVID-19 ceasefire until end-Oct, but continued to exclude Rakhine state and Paletwa township. UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept said military's alleged targeting of civilians in Rakhine and Chin states may constitute "war crimes or even crimes against humanity". Canada and Netherlands 2 Sept issued joint statement indicating they would support Rohingya genocide case filed by Gambia against Myanmar at International Court of Justice. International news outlet *The New York Times* and NGO Fortify Rights 8 Sept reported on video testimony of two Tatmadaw deserters confessing to army-directed atrocities against Rohingya, both fled Myanmar in Aug and are believed to be in The Hague in the Netherlands and to have been interviewed by International Criminal Court; military questioned credibility of confessions and called for soldiers to be returned to Myanmar to face justice. Ahead of Nov general election and amid rise in COVID-19 cases, campaign period kicked off 8 Sept; several opposition parties called for postponement of polls in light of deteriorating COVID-19 situation but Union Election Commission (UEC) 14 Sept rejected calls; unknown individual threw two grenades at residence of UEC official in capital Naypyitaw 19 Sept; neither exploded.

➡ **Philippines Clashes persisted in south between militant groups and security forces following deadly blast in Aug; clan fighting also continued in south.** In Maguindanao province in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), security forces' operations following deadly blasts in Jolo in late Aug resulted in small clashes between soldiers and elements of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu; special forces 9 Sept led operation in suspected hideout of ASG sub-leader Zamboanga Sibugay in Roseller Lim municipality, which killed five suspected ASG militants and left two soldiers wounded; one militant 28 Sept also killed in Patikul. Roadside bomb 18 Sept killed one marine, wounding four others in Datu Hoffer town. In Basilan province, armed group 16 Sept kidnapped Filipino businessman. Clan conflicts continued in BARMM and in adjacent provinces of Sultan Kudarat and nearby province of Sarangani in the town of Maitum; in Maitum, two Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)-affiliated groups 11-13 Sept fought intermittently, killing two and wounding several. In Lanao del Sur, MILF represented by Abdullah Macapaar of Northwestern Mindanao Front agreed to convince members of Dawlah Islamiya insurgent group to lay down arms. Clashes between communist New People's Army and armed forces continued in Luzon in north, Visayas in centre and Mindanao in south, although at relatively lower level compared to Aug; clashes killed at least 14 combatants and civilians and injured one throughout month.

➡ **South China Sea Tense exchanges continued between China and U.S.** During annual meeting of South East Asia regional organisation ASEAN, Chinese Vice FM Luo Zhaohui 4 Sept met with ten envoys and accused U.S. of threatening peace and stability in South China Sea (SCS); Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe 7-11 Sept travelled to meet with leaders of Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Philippines. In address to ASEAN forum, U.S. Sec State Pompeo 10 Sept said U.S. “will be here in friendship to help” and urged countries to cut ties with state-owned Chinese companies. During ASEAN foreign ministers’ meeting with Pompeo, Vietnamese FM Pham Binh Minh 10 Sept said U.S. “role and contribution to maintaining peace, stability and security in the region are encouraged”; Vietnamese MFA 17 Sept reaffirmed Vietnamese sovereignty over Hoang Sa (Paracel) Islands and Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands; China 28 Sept conducted military drills near Paracel Islands. Chief of Indonesian maritime security agency 15 Sept stated that Indonesia would increase maritime security operations near northern Natuna islands after reports of Chinese coastguard vessel 12-14 Sept entering area. Philippines FM Teodoro Locsin 16 Sept said that Philippines would push for conclusion of Code of Conduct in SCS amid ongoing ASEAN talks on subject. In pre-recorded address delivered to UN 22 Sept, Philippines President Duterte affirmed 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision that rejected legality of China’s maritime and territorial claims based on historic rights, marking shift from his earlier stance downplaying the ruling. France, Germany and UK 18 Sept submitted note verbale to UN stating that China’s exercise of “historic rights” in SCS contravened UN Convention on Law of Sea. U.S. defence dept 1 Sept reported that China has world’s largest navy; Chinese defence ministry 13 Sept called report “wanton distortion” and described U.S. as “destroyer of world peace”. U.S. state dept 27 Sept issued statement concluding U.S. will “stand with our Southeast Asian allies and partners in resisting China’s coercive efforts to establish dominion over the South China Sea”.

➡ **Thailand Protests continued to grow in size as demonstrators staged largest pro-democracy rally since 2014 military coup; Muslim leaders proposed small measures to address local demands in deep south.** Amid near-daily small-scale demonstrations mainly in capital Bangkok, police 1 Sept arrested activist and president of Student Union of Thailand, Jutatip Sirikhan, who was granted bail same day. Police 3 Sept arrested protest leaders Anon Nampa and Panupong Jadnok after Bangkok Criminal Court ruled they had breached their Aug bail terms by continuing to take part in protests, both released 7 Sept after police withdrew request to detain them; Constitutional Court 16 Sept accepted complaint accusing Anon, Panupong and Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul of attempting to overthrow govt. Also in Bangkok, on field adjacent to Grand Palace, activist group United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration 19 Sept organised largest pro-democracy rally since 2014 coup with more than 30,000 demanding dissolution of parliament, new constitution, end to harassment of activists and reform of monarchy. Demonstrators next morning installed plaque commemorating transition from absolute monarchy to democracy and attempted to deliver letter to king’s Privy Council demanding action on ten-point manifesto to reform monarchy. After police prevented protesters from reaching Privy Council offices, they handed letter to senior police officer. Protest organiser Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak 20 Sept called for general strike on 14 Oct, anniversary of 1973 student uprising. Palace 15 Sept announced that king had approved appointment, effective 30 Sept, of army

chief General Apirat Kongsompong and head of corrections department Police Colonel Narat Sawettanan as deputies to Lord Chamberlain of Royal Household. Parliament 24 Sept postponed vote on constitutional amendments, instead voted to form another committee to consider charter change. In deep south, security forces 6 Sept killed two suspected insurgents in Thepa district, Songkhla province. Head of Thai delegation in peace negotiations with insurgents 13 Sept met with Muslim leaders in Nong Chik, Pattani, who proposed making Friday – Islam’s holy day – a public holiday, posting village signs in Thai, English and Malay and declaring latter as an official language in southern provinces.