



CrisisWatch 2024 – July Trends and August Alerts

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** **China maintained naval activities around disputed waters, while rival maritime exercises strained Japan-China relations.**

Beijing maintained maritime presence around disputed waters. Three Chinese Coast Guard ships 2-4 July entered Japan's 12-mile territorial limit near disputed area off Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, while in pursuit of Japanese fishing boats; Chinese Coast Guard Bureau claimed fishers "illegally" entered waters, warned they would continue to protect their jurisdiction through enforcement activities. In two further incidents, two Chinese Coast Guard vessels repeatedly 10-11 July entered disputed waters near Ootsuri Island, and again, five days later, near Taisho. Tokyo 5 July confirmed presence of Chinese-installed buoy in high seas over Japan's southern continental shelf, Pacific Ocean. As of 29 July, 100 Chinese vessels had been present in Japanese contiguous waters for 25 days and 18 vessels had stayed in Japanese territorial waters for seven days during month.

China-Russia held joint military patrol, Japan-Taiwan conducted joint drill. Commencing their fourth joint annual Asia-Pacific maritime patrol, Russian and Chinese combined flotilla 4-5 July transited Japan's Osumi Strait. Japanese warship 4 July sailed into Chinese waters off eastern Zhejiang province, near Taiwan, ignoring Chinese no-sail zone for live-fire drill; Beijing conveyed serious concerns, leading to Japanese Defence Ministry investigation into warship captain and crew. Taiwan and Japan coast guards 18 July conducted joint drill in Japan's Boso Peninsula, Chiba prefecture, and in waters near Izu Oshima; in protest, Chinese Foreign Ministry urged Japan to "stop disrupting cross-strait peace and stability and China-Japan relations". Japan 12 July released defence white paper saying that "the possibility of 'serious situation' akin to Russia's invasion of Ukraine occurring in East Asia cannot be ruled out", highlighting fears of conflict over Taiwan.

Diplomatic channels remained open. Japan and Chinese Vice Foreign Ministers 22 July convened in Tokyo for first strategic dialogue in four years.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** **Washington and Seoul signed new nuclear deterrence deal prompting condemnation from Pyongyang.**

U.S. and South Korea entered nuclear deterrence pact. U.S. and South Korean defence officials 11 July signed joint nuclear deterrence guidelines on sidelines of NATO summit, Washington, D.C., reaffirming U.S. commitment to defend South Korea using all available capabilities, including nuclear weapons. U.S. President Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol authorised guidelines, while

commending “tremendous progress” since establishment of joint Nuclear Consultative Group. Meanwhile, North Korean Defence Ministry 13 July warned that “hostile states” would “pay an unimaginably harsh price” for increased nuclear cooperation; in response, South Korean Defence Ministry next day said that North Korean regime “will not survive after using nuclear weapons”.

Cross-border tensions continued. South Korea 18 July resumed broadcasting K-pop songs, news and other messages critical of North Korea on loudspeakers at major sections of inter-Korean border, 21 July further expanded operations; responses occurred as more North Korean trash-filled balloons flew around capital city, Seoul.

In other important developments. South Korean newspaper 16 July reported that senior North Korean diplomat Counselor Ri Il-gyu defected in Nov 2023, citing his “disillusionment” and “bleak future” under northern regime. Meanwhile, New York grand jury 16 July indicted former CIA analyst and prominent North Korea expert Sue Mi Terry for failing to register as South Korean foreign agent; case fuelled broader concerns in Washington and Seoul about security of classified information and integrity of individuals handling such sensitive data.

➔ **Taiwan Straits Taipei staged major simulation exercise in case of Chinese invasion as Beijing maintained high military activity around island.**

Taiwan held major simulation operation to prepare in case of Chinese invasion. Taiwan 22-26 July held largest annual Han Kuang war games as troops simulated “real combat” aimed at resisting hypothetical Chinese invasion; exercises included intensified night-time activities, operations with severed command lines and Wan’an civilian evacuation air defence drill, while live-fire drills took place in outlying islands, Kinmen and Matsu.

Beijing maintained intense maritime activity around Taiwan. As of 30 July, Taipei recorded 397 Chinese aircraft either crossing “unofficial” median line or entering Taiwan’s de facto air defence identification zone (ADIZ). Taiwan Ministry of Defence 11 July detected 66 Chinese warplanes near island, representing highest number in 24-hour window this year. Meanwhile, tensions near Kinmen Islands persisted as three Chinese Coast Guard vessels 2 July stopped Taiwan-registered fishing boat outside of Taiwan-controlled waters near Kinmen; Taiwan’s Coast Guard dispatched two vessels to retrieve fishermen, but stopped pursuit to “avoid escalating conflict” after spotting more Chinese vessels; fishing boat and six crew members were escorted to Fujian province, China, for further investigation. Taiwan 11 July reported intrusion of four Chinese Coast Guard vessels into Taiwan-controlled waters around Kinmen islands.

U.S.-China tensions over Taiwan remained high. Newly appointed director of American Institute in Taiwan Raymond Greene 10 July met with Taiwan President Lai Ching-te at presidential office, Taipei, and reiterated U.S. commitment to boosting Taiwan’s self-defence capabilities. Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Ministry 17 July confirmed pause on nascent nuclear non-proliferation talks with U.S., saying that Washington’s arms sales to Taiwan were “seriously undermining the political atmosphere for continued arms control consultations”.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan** Tensions with Pakistan remained elevated amid cross-border attacks from militants; authorities sought to clamp down on IS-KP activity.

Authorities targeted IS-KP, implemented poppy eradication campaign. Taliban forces 7 July killed Zakir, senior Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) commander in Nangarhar province; 13 July Taliban raided IS-KP hideout in capital Kabul and arrested several suspects for allegedly planning attack during Ashura, day of commemoration held by Shia Muslims. Amid ongoing poppy eradication campaign, authorities 17-23 July arrested at least seven people during narcotic raids in Badakhshan province, leading to tensions with local communities.

Relations with Pakistan remained strained. UN 10 July released document labelling Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) “largest terrorist group” in Afghanistan. Report stated that group received increased support from Taliban authorities to conduct cross-border attacks against Pakistan. It blamed Taliban authorities for being “unable or unwilling” to curb TTP activities whose attacks have increased in recent years. Pakistan Foreign Ministry 17 July said it summoned senior Afghan diplomat in Islamabad after suicide bombing attack in Pakistan’s Bannu city killed eight soldiers two days before; Pakistan accused Afghanistan-based TTP’s Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group for violence, demanded Kabul to take “immediate, robust, and effective action” against attackers. Taliban authorities did not respond immediately. Pakistan 21 July reopened Chaman border crossing with Afghanistan after nine months of closure.

Iran deported over 2,000 Afghan migrants. Amid rising anti-Afghan sentiments, local residents 19 July in Iran’s Khur city torched homes of several Afghans following killing of Iranian man by alleged Afghan teenager; Iran same day sent back 2,212 migrants to Afghanistan.

In other important developments. Central Asian delegations and investors 3 July attended Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Trade Coordination Forum to explore business opportunities around Afghanistan. Taliban Emir 6 July made another round of changes to cabinet and replaced central bank governor, mines and petroleum minister. Authorities early July held series of meetings with Shia leaders to impose restrictions on Shia Ashura celebrations, including by restricting gatherings to places of worship, and prohibiting public displays such as flags.

⬇ **Bangladesh** Violent crackdown on student protests left at least 200 killed and thousands injured; Myanmar’s conflict fuelled further instability in refugee camps.

Anti-government protests turned deadly, with over 200 killed. Public university students 1 July launched protests against High Court ruling which reinstated quotas for entry level govt jobs, including 30% for children and grandchildren of “freedom fighters” from 1971 Liberation War. Protests turned violent after PM Sheikh Hasina 14 July called protesters “razakars”, derogatory term for collaborators with Pakistani military in 1971 war; notably, pro-govt supporters from Chhatra League and police next day used deadly violence against protesters, killing six people. As more

protesters took to streets, violence spread across country and took a turn for the worse on 18 July as police attacked demonstrators, killing dozens of mainly young men and protesters vandalised govt buildings and metro stations in capital Dhaka; authorities subsequently switched off internet nationwide and deployed military, giving shoot-on-sight orders. Supreme Court 21 July scaled back quotas to 7% and student leaders 22 July announced pause. Situation remained stable by end of month, with curfew and internet restrictions relaxed and businesses resuming operations; more than 6,000 have reportedly been arrested nationwide, many from opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami. Police by end of month continued to break up small demonstrations.

Myanmar's developments created instability at border. As Arakan Army (AA) inched closer to capturing Rakhine state's Maungdaw city, regime personnel, civilians, and Rohingya armed groups sought refuge in Bangladesh; Bangladeshi authorities who had previously repatriated junta personnel and their family members back to Myanmar 14 July changed course, refusing two boats carrying 60 Myanmar regime personnel. FM Hasan Mahmud 12 July discussed with regime counterpart Than Swe proposal to start Rohingya repatriation as soon as possible.

Rohingya refugee camps saw more clashes. Refugee camps remained restive with renewed clashes between Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), which left at least six people killed in first ten days of July. Increase is likely related to developments in Rakhine state as ARSA and RSO, who are fighting alongside Myanmar's military, returned to camps.

➔ **India Manipur ethnic conflict persisted, security forces killed at least 22 suspected Maoists in centre, and India-China border tensions continued.**

Violence persisted in Manipur. PM Modi 2 July addressed Manipur conflict at lower house of parliament for first time in almost a year, underlining govt's efforts to ensure return to peace and calling for cooperation with opposition. In Manipur's Jiribam district, suspected Kuki militants 6 July allegedly killed Meitei man, triggering clashes and violence, fuelling displacement to Assam state; 14 July killed security personnel and injured two. In Assam's Cachar district, authorities 16 July killed three Hmar youths whom they accused of being militants; Hmar Students' Association next day claimed those deceased were "village volunteers" defending community from Meitei militants, called for investigation. In Manipur's Imphal East district, Kangleipak Communist Party militants 20 July shot down Meitei man.

Anti-Maoist operations continued. In Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district, security forces 2 July killed five militants during operation. Security forces 8 July killed Maoist in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district; 9 July shot down militant in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district. In Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, security forces 17 July killed 12 militants during operation, which also left two security personnel injured. In Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, IED blast on same day killed two security personnel and injured four others; security forces 19 July shot down Maoist. Authorities 20 July killed suspected Maoist in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district; 25 July shot dead another suspected Maoist in Telangana state.

India-China border relations remained tense. Indian FM Jaishankar 4 July met Chinese counterpart at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit; both agreed to

intensify talks to resolve border issues, noting that prolongation of current situation is not in interests of either side; gap in readouts, however, indicates that normalcy in bilateral ties will likely remain elusive. Reuters 9 July reported India was planning to invest \$1bn in construction of 12 hydropower stations in north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, claimed by China to be South Tibet; Chinese Foreign Ministry 10 July described project “illegal and invalid”, said “South Tibet is China’s territory”. Indian and Chinese FMs 25 July met at ASEAN-related meetings in Laos, stressed importance to resolve border issue at Line of Actual Control.

➔ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Militants ramped up attacks against security personnel in Jammu, driving instability, while central govt expanded its policing and public order powers in Jammu and Kashmir.**

Militant attacks continued to drive insecurity. Militants drove attacks against security personnel in Jammu. Notably, militants 7 July attacked security post in Rajouri district and injured one soldier; 8 July ambushed and killed five security forces personnel on hill tract in Kathua district; and 15 July, ambushed and killed five security forces personnel during security operation in Doda district. Lesser-known militant group, Kashmir Tigers, believed to be front for Jaish-e-Muhammad, took responsibility for attacks on 8 and 15 July. In Kashmir region, different but simultaneous security operations 6-7 July in Kulgam district killed six militants and two soldiers. In Kupwara district, security forces 14 July killed three militants allegedly infiltrating from Pakistan; 23 July killed alleged militant during operation which also killed one soldier, 27 July killed alleged Pakistani intruder, leaving one soldier dead and five injured. Though militant attacks are generally lower in Jammu than in Kashmir, bold nature of attacks and ambushes in Jammu caused serious concern. Security forces ramped up their presence while militants reportedly drew in soldiers with fake intel alerts and carried out pinpointed ambushes. Lack of intelligence from local populations, such as nomadic tribe of Gujjars who are unhappy with govt, has become crucial factor.

Govt expanded powers of Lieutenant Governor over policing and public order. In anticipation of regional election announcement, home affairs ministry 13 July amended and expanded powers of Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to give appointee sole discretion over policing and public order. Opposition Congress party immediately criticised decision saying it would undermine state govt’s executive power. Former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also criticised move and sought “restoration of full, undiluted statehood for J&K [as] prerequisite for [upcoming] elections”.

In other important developments. Chief cleric, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq 19 July called on judges of J&K and Ladakh High Court to intervene against unjust arrests of senior lawyers; move follows High Court’s recognition of pro-govt Kashmir Advocates Association as new lawyers’ body on 29 June.

➔ **Pakistan Security forces continued to undertake anti-militant operations, straining ties with Kabul amid delicate internal political situation.**

Domestic political situation remained volatile. Pakistan and International Monetary Fund 12 July reached staff-level agreement for \$7bn bailout, easing concerns about risk of sovereign default. Meanwhile, Supreme Court 12 July issued ruling in favour

of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) by granting it 22 seats reserved for women and minorities in federal legislature, paving way for PTI to return to parliament as largest party with 114 seats.

Security operations against militant groups continued. Sindh counter-terrorism department 13 July arrested suspected commander of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)'s Karachi chapter; TTP took responsibility for 8 July killing of senior counter-terrorism official. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province near Afghanistan witnessed several deadly attacks, including one officer and four soldiers killed 9 July during security operations in North and South Waziristan and Lakki Marwat districts. Ten militants 15 July targeted Bannu city cantonment, killing eight soldiers in suicide car bombing; military killed all ten militants and attributed attack to TTP's Afghanistan-based Gul Bahadur group. Two soldiers and five civilians, including two women health workers, next day killed in militant attack in Dera Ismail district. Meanwhile, local anti-TTP "peace march" 20 July turned violent in Bannu city, KPK, leaving one dead and dozens injured; three Baloch protesters killed 28 July in clashes with security forces in various Balochistan cities.

Tensions with Kabul over TPP activity persisted. After Bannu attack, military 16 July blamed Afghanistan for allowing TTP to operate within its borders, said Pakistan would take all necessary measures against such threats emanating from Afghanistan. Foreign Ministry 17 July said "strong demarche" had been delivered to Afghan deputy head of mission. Blaming Gul Bahadur group for attack, ministry called on Kabul "to fully investigate and take immediate, robust and effective action" against those responsible. After protesters bearing Afghan flags 20 July attacked Pakistani consulate in Frankfurt city, Germany, defence minister said Islamabad would have to rethink its "hospitality" to Afghan people; comment came after Islamabad allowed "legal" refugees to stay in country following visit from UN Refugee Agency chief Filippo Grandi 7-9 July.

➔ **Sri Lanka Date of presidential election announced but fears of possible electoral delay continued; meanwhile, government reached agreement in principle with international bond holders to restructure \$12.5bn in debt.**

Presidential election date announced amid continued postponement suspicions. Election Commission 26 July announced presidential election would be held on 21 Sept. President Ranil Wickremesinghe same day formally registered his independent candidacy. Sri Lanka Podujana Pera-muna (SLPP), controlled by former ruling Rajapaksa family, 29 July announced they would not back Wickremesinghe, who nonetheless retains support of some half of SLPP's parliamentary. Former Army commander Sarath Fonseka and Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe, who resigned as justice minister 29 July, also announced their candidacies. Worries of possible poll postponement remained widespread, even after Supreme Court dismissed separate petitions which 8 and 15 July requested election delay; President's challengers Sajith Premadasa of Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) party and Anura Kumara Dissanayake of National People's Power (NPP) party 3 and 11 July accused Wickremesinghe of attempting to delay elections, but asserted attempts at postponement will be defeated. PM Dinesh Gunawardena's 26 July said govt rejected as illegal 24 July Supreme Court decision temporarily barring Deshabandu Tennakoon from serving as Inspector General of Police, fuelling fears of potential constitutional crisis; Bar

Association next day “strongly condemn[ed]” govt’s decision as effort to “subvert the course of justice”.

Govt achieved long-sought bond restructuring, but public discontent remained. Govt negotiators 4 July announced they reached framework with commercial creditors to restructure \$12.6bn of International Sovereign Bond, proposing 28% cut on face value and 11% reduction on past interest; International Monetary Fund 11 July confirmed they were still evaluating agreement. Public discontent with economic hardship resulted in public sector strikes for higher pay with 1mn public sector employees 8-9 July holding two-day national strike. New electricity tariffs 16 July came into effect, reducing rates overall by 22.5% and offering relief to consumers using less than 90 units of electricity.

South East Asia

➔ **Myanmar** **Armed ethnic groups renewed fighting, making critical headway against regime as army chief declared himself new acting president.**

In west, Arakan Army (AA) made territorial gains. AA 5 July confirmed capture of Thandwe airport two days earlier, said clashes left 400 regime casualties, but did not reveal its own losses. AA 9 July captured Light Infantry Battalion 55 base, last military base in Ngapali town, Rakhine state. Despite gains, AA’s aim to capture Maungdaw town remained challenging, while its battlefield victories fostered tension with other rival ethnic groups, including Rohingya and Chin armed groups.

Three Brotherhood Alliance (comprised of TNLA, MNDAA and AA) made rapid advances. Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and its allies 25 July claimed seizure of Lashio town in northern Shan State, including Northeastern Military Command headquarters and airport; fighting, however, continued across multiple locations in Lashio as MNDAA attempted to clear out significant numbers of regime troops dispersed throughout town. Tens of thousands of residents had fled Lashio ahead of offensive. Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) also had series of victories, 10 July capturing Nawngkhio and Kyaukme towns along with Gokteik Viaduct bridge in Shan state, 25 July announced capture of Mogok town in Mandalay Region, major ruby mining centre; social welfare groups reported heavy civilian casualties with almost 60 bodies cremated in Kyaukme. TNLA’s move into low-lying valleys and urban areas in Shan state has created conflict with Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) as TNLA continued to take territory beyond upland areas where Ta’ang populations mostly live. Consequently, SSPP 5 July responded with two deadly attacks against TNLA, killing several high-ranking officers.

In other important developments. Myanmar state-run MRTV 22 July reported acting president, Myint Swe is unable to perform his duties for medical reasons, with military chief Min Aung Hlaing appointing himself to role. Announcement came week before state of emergency was renewed on 31 July.

➡ **Philippines Peace process remained on track in Bangsamoro region while authorities pursued anti-communist measures.**

Implementation of MILF peace process continued in Bangsamoro region. Illegal gun dealer 12 July killed police informant during buy-bust operation in Sultan Kudarat town, Maguindanao del Norte. Thus far, peace process stayed on track in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) as authorities 17 July facilitated dispute settlement between two groups of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), ie, Muslimin Yasil of NDBC-MNLF and Barah Barahim of Samideen-MNLF. Dialogue marked significant peacebuilding breakthrough in Basilan province. Senior officials of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)'s United Bangsamoro Justice Party 20 July told local reporters that they aimed to continue Mindanao peace process and resolve conflict between Moro and non-Moro peoples on island.

Security operations against communist rebels continued in Luzon and Visayas islands. Counter-insurgency operations against communist rebels continued. Notably, soldiers 8 July apprehended two senior communist leaders in Baguio city, Luzon, under terrorism and arson charges. Military 25 July killed platoon communist leader in clash in General MacArthur municipality, Eastern Samar. Former communist rebels continued to surrender as army 14 July reported that 300 former members of Communist Party of Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) registered in govt amnesty program from 5-12 July.

In other important developments. President Marcos 30 July welcomed U.S. Sec of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to capital Manila; U.S. officials announced \$500mn in foreign military aid toward "confronting Chinese aggression" (see also South China Sea).

⬆ **South China Sea Philippines and China signed temporary pact to mitigate growing tensions amid strengthening security ties between Manila and allies.**

Temporary agreement reached with Beijing to stem maritime tensions. Manila and Beijing 21 July reached deal to "deescalate situation in South China Sea". Philippine Foreign Ministry said agreement would not compromise geopolitical positions of either side, but neither party released official text. Deal comes at time of increasing confrontation between sides about territorial delineation, particularly around Second Thomas Shoal. Notably, Manila 9 July deployed BRP Jose Rizal Sabina Shoal after sightings of Chinese vessels near region to mark show of force for sovereignty rights but may fall short because Manila lacks ability to maintain naval presence across contested waters. Shortly after, Russian and Chinese navies 16 July carried out live-fire exercises in South China Sea to strengthen bilateral capacity of responding to "maritime security threats". Beijing and Manila subsequently disagreed publicly about details of 21 July agreement, with Philippine Foreign Ministry 22 July denying it includes prior notification and "on-site verification" as China's Foreign Ministry asserted earlier same day. Philippine forces 27 July resupplied BRP Sierra Madre.

Philippines deepened defence cooperation with U.S. and Japan. U.S. Department of Defence 11 July stated Washington is set to approve General Security of Military

Information Agreement with Manila to facilitate timely exchange of classified information. U.S. military chair of Joint Chiefs of Staff 16 July inspected selected U.S. military bases, prerequisite for approving new intelligence sharing framework. U.S. and Philippines 21 July completed Marine Aviation Support Activity where U.S. Marines dropped guided bombs on targets near Western Luzon. U.S. 30 July announced \$500mn in foreign military aid to Manila during high-level visit. Meanwhile, Japan and Philippines 8 July held “2+2” foreign and defence meeting in Manila to discuss regional security matters, signed Reciprocal Access Agreement that would allow respective militaries to visit each other’s soil, as part of efforts to counter China’s growing aggression in region.

Tensions between Vietnam and China persisted. Vietnam 17 July submitted claim to UN to extend its continental shelf in South China Sea, prompting strong opposition from China.

➡ **Thailand Election Commission approved new Senate and violence continued in deep south.**

Election Commission endorsed new senators. Election Commission 10 July confirmed election of 200 new senators for five-year term, replacing 250 senators appointed by National Council for Peace and Order in 2019; despite electoral process designed to prevent politicisation of Senate, over 60% of new senators are affiliated to Bhumjaithai Party, member of govt coalition with close ties to army and monarchy, while 12 senators are aligned with Pheu Thai party and 18 with Move Forward Party (MFP). Constitutional Court 24 July said it will rule on case concerning impeachment of PM Srettha Thavisin on 14 Aug.

Violence continued in deep south, Malaysia appointed new facilitator to support peace dialogue. Malaysia 1 July appointed Datuk Seri Mohamad Rabin Basir as new Malaysian Govt Facilitator for southern Thailand peace dialogue process; new round of official talks between Thai govt and main separatist group Barisan Revolusi Nasional due in mid-Aug. Meanwhile, violence in deep south persisted. In Pattani’s Mae Lan district, gunmen 3-4 July shot down village head. In Narathiwat’s Sri Sakhon district, rangers 4 July clashed with militants, leaving some injured. Militants disguised as rangers 9 July carried out raids in districts of Krong Pinang, Yaha and Muang, in Yala province, stealing weapons. In Pattani’s Nong Chik district, assailants 12 July shot down defence volunteer. Roadside IED attacks 22 July wounded six police officers in Nong Chik district, Pattani province, and 23 July four police officers in Thepa district, Songkhla province. Security forces and militants 27 July clashed in Khok Pho district, Pattani, resulting in two soldiers wounded and one killed by grenade. Two suspected militants 28 July killed man in Pattani’s Panareh district.

In important international developments. Bank officials 11 July appeared before House committee on national security after UN Human Rights report 26 June alleged Thai lenders were responsible for half of Myanmar’s arms and materiel procurement in 2023; committee chairman and Move Forward MP Rangsiman Rome 19 July said he had no evidence banks broke law; Foreign Ministry 24 July announced creation of task force to investigate and prevent such transactions.

Pacific

➡ **New Caledonia** Deadly riots triggered by France's proposed voting reforms appeared to subside.

Isolated incidents persisted despite overall lull in violence. Authorities early July started to lift roadblocks linking south of New Caledonia to capital Nouméa, including in pro-independence stronghold of Saint-Louis in Mont-Dore commune, prompting violent incidents. Notably, security forces 10 July killed man in alleged exchange of fire with rioters in Mont-Dore, bringing death toll since unrest started in May to ten people. Attackers 16 July targeted Saint-Louis Catholic church in Mont-Dore; 18-19 July vandalised another landmark Catholic mission in Vao village on Isle of Pines; 21-22 July vandalised Kanak memorial in La Foa area. Curfew remained in place by late July, though authorities relaxed it starting 22 July; authorities maintained roadblocks between Mont-Dore and Nouméa throughout month, with maritime shuttles allowing some movement between the two.

Local figures called for calm, regional body endorsed crisis resolution mission. In France's snap legislative elections held late June-early July, pro-independence Kanak candidate elected 7 July as MP, first time pro-independence candidate chosen since 1986; Emmanuel Tjibaou said his election amounted to "distress call", urged for "re-creation of the conditions for dialogue". Pro-independence leader Christian Tein, incarcerated since late June in metropolitan France, 17 July called for appeasement, while warning of lack of political response due to vacuum following legislative elections. Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) 23 July said high-level delegation will visit New Caledonia in August, seeking "long-lasting resolution" to political crisis; Paris had yet to accept request by end of month. President Macron 25 July said provincial elections scheduled by end of 2024 would be postponed.

⬇️ **Papua New Guinea** Gang launched series of attacks in country's north, killing 26 people.

Young men from gang called "I don't care" 16-18 July attacked villages of Tamara, Tambari and Agrumara in Angoram district, East Sepik province, killing at least 26 people, including 16 children, according to authorities; UN human rights chief Volker Turk 24 July said that death toll could exceed 50 and attacks were motivated by "dispute over land and lake ownership and user rights". Brutality of attack, including reported beheading, sexual violence and village burning, prompted some 200 people to leave province. Authorities 26 July arrested five people linked to attacks; more perpetrators are believed to be in hiding still. East Sepik governor Allan Bird reported that there were only 20 police officers for 100,000-strong population of Angoram district.