Regional Overview

In South and Southeast Asia last week, there was a slight increase in the number of battles and reported number of fatalities while the number of demonstrations recorded remained static. Last week was marked by heavy fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Ghazni province, a surge of Maoist violence during the first phase of Assembly elections in India’s Chhattisgarh state, and one of the deadliest encounters between the armed forces of the Philippines and Abu Sayyaf since the 2017 Marawi crisis.

In Afghanistan, intense clashes continued between Taliban militants and Afghan security forces throughout Ghazni province. Fighting was particularly heavy in the districts of Jaghuri, Malistan, and Qarabagh, where over 100 fatalities were reported.

Meanwhile, in Farah province, Taliban militants launched two major attacks on Afghan Local Police (ALP) and National Police. In Khak-e Safid district, approximately 40 ALP personnel and their family members were reportedly killed when a large number of Taliban fighters attacked their homes in the Khost area. Taliban also suffered casualties in the ensuing battle. Days later, in Bala Buluk district, at least a further 40 National Police personnel were reportedly killed during an attack on their compound in the Fararud area – although several sources gave even higher estimates.

In Pakistan, religious right-wing organizations tried to mobilize again against the controversial acquittal by the Supreme Court of a Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, of blasphemy charges. Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of a few major religious parties, planned and led a “million march” in Lahore city on 15 November. However, the protest had a lower turnout than expected with some parties boycotting it.

In addition, journalists protested throughout Sindh province and in the Federal Capital Territory against incidents of media repression. On 8 November, plainclothes policemen raided and harassed journalists at the Karachi Press Club. Shortly after, on 10 November, a well–known journalist, Nasrullah Chaudhry, was arrested from his home on charges of publishing anti–state and hate literature.

In the Kashmir region, Indian and Pakistani forces continued to engage in heavy fire across the Line of Control (LoC), reportedly leaving two Indian soldiers dead.

In India’s state of Jammu & Kashmir, militants launched several targeted attacks on civilians which reportedly left two dead, at least one of whom was accused of being an informant for Indian state forces. In
addition, four militants were allegedly killed during clashes with state forces. With the beginning of panchayat (village council) elections last week, widespread protests focusing on local infrastructure issues – such as poor electricity and water supply – erupted across the state.

The start of the first phase of the Assembly Elections in Chhattisgarh state led to a surge of militant activity in the area. Maoists, who had called for a boycott of the polls, were involved in 13 reported events of political violence in Chhattisgarh state alone, which left at least 12 people dead last week (for more on violence during panchayat elections in India, see this past ACLED piece).

Elsewhere in India, a Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP) leader was shot dead on 13 November in rural Patna, Bihar, raising the number of RLSP leaders killed in the last six months in the state to three (Hindustan Times, 15 November 2018). It is unclear who is responsible for the targeted killings of RLSP leaders, but it is presumed that political enmities are the motive behind the attacks.

The levels of demonstrations increased last week in India. State-wide protest movements were reported from Assam state where organizations such as the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) took to the streets on 16 November to show their opposition against the proposed Citizenship Amendment Bill of 2016. Locals fear that the bill — which aims to grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians who fled religious persecution — could marginalize the Assamese people and encourage migrations from Bangladesh (The Sentinel, 17 November 2018).

In Bangladesh, as candidates began to register with political parties to run in the general elections scheduled for the end of the year, the number of reported political violence and protest events dipped last week. While the process remained largely peaceful, it did lead to rioting by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists in Dhaka city on 14 November. In addition, Rohingya refugees living in refugee camps in Bangladesh staged protests against their proposed repatriation to Myanmar.

Last week in Nepal started with the parents of Nirmala Panta staging an indefinite sit-in protest in Kanchanpur, calling for justice in the minor’s rape and murder case. Over the course of the week, support for the protest grew each day with more people joining the sit-in. Also last week, the Nepal Student Union (NSU) took to the streets in various areas across the country to demonstrate against the arrest of a local NSU president for posting distorted photos of the Prime Minister on Facebook.

In Sri Lanka, the Supreme Court blocked the President from dissolving the Parliament in its ruling on 13 November (New York Times, 13 November 2018). The reconvening of Parliament proceeded as scheduled, with a vote ruling against the appointment of the new Prime Minister as a prerequisite to snap elections. Heated debates
inside Parliament led to rioting among its members, reportedly injuring several legislators and police. Elsewhere, Sri Lankans took to the streets in support of their partisan views of how to end the current government crisis (for more on this, see this past ACLED infographic).

In Myanmar, fighting continued last week between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S) and a joint force of the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta’ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) and Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) in Lashio township, Shan state. Meanwhile, the Myanmar military and Arakan Army (AA) clashed several times in Paletwa township, Chin state. In the past two months, clashes between the Myanmar military and the AA have become more frequent and often occur in villages throughout Paletwa township, which is located at the border of Chin and Rakhine states. The Myanmar military also clashed with the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA), TNLA and SSA-N separately over the course of the week.

On 16 November, in Sulu province in the Philippines, the military and Abu Sayyaf clashed during a hostage rescue operation, leaving five soldiers reportedly killed and twenty-three soldiers wounded. The clash was the deadliest encounter between the military and Abu Sayyaf since the Marawi crisis in 2017 (Agence France-Presse, 17 November 2018). There was also significant violence last week against members of the government. Two village councilors were shot and killed by unidentified assailants while a former village councilor planning to run for his old position was likewise killed by unidentified assailants. In La Union province, the vice-mayor of Balaonan and his aid were reportedly killed and his daughter, the Mayor of Balaonan, wounded. This is the third time politicians in La Union province have been ambushed this year in politically motivated attacks (CNN Philippines, 16 November 2018).

Despite the extension of the state of emergency for Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani provinces in Thailand (Chiang Rai Times, 17 November 2018), last week was marked by separatist violence in two of the three provinces. In Bacho district, Narathiwat province, suspected separatists fired at a marine post. A ranger base was also hit by gunfire from suspected separatists in Pattani province.

In Indonesia, in Jakarta, the anniversary of the Semanggi Tragedy led to a demonstration by students in front of the State Palace calling for the government to bring those responsible to justice. The Semanggi Tragedy commemorates the student-led anti-government protests in 1998 in which many students were shot dead by the military.

There was a significant protest in Cambodia last week as well; around 2,000 garment workers from Quantum Clothing Ltd carried out a week-long demonstration in Phnom Penh calling for better labour conditions. In Vietnam, seven families were forcibly evicted and their homes demolished in Cam Le district to make way for an ongoing...
ecotourism development project. No political violence or protest events were recorded in Laos last week.

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