

Regional Overview – Asia 9 October 2018

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The overall levels of organized violence and demonstrations remained relatively static, indicating a slight decrease for the South and Southeast Asian regions last week compared to previous weeks. The first week of October was marked by pre-election violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, increased targeting of civilians by suspected southern Muslim separatists in Thailand, and violent farmers' demonstrations in North India.

Election violence continued to increase in **Afghanistan** as the parliamentary elections set to take place on October 20 draw closer. An Islamic State (IS) suicide bomber detonated himself at an election rally in Kama district of Nangarhar, reportedly killing thirteen civilians. Meanwhile, several parliamentary candidates were targeted more directly with IEDs and grenades throughout the country. Neither the Taliban nor IS claimed these attacks. In the provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar, the bodyguards of candidates clashed with security forces on two separate occasions, although the details surrounding these events are vague. Despite a lack of Taliban claims to attacks last week, they nonetheless voiced their condemnation of the elections and threatened to disrupt the process as they have in the past ([Washington Post, 8 October 2018](#)).

In **Pakistan**, in a string of (presumably) targeted killings, local political leaders of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), Awami National Party (ANP), and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) were reportedly killed in separate incidents in different parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. In a major political move, the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly and the president of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Shehbaz Sharif, was arrested in Lahore city on 5 October in connection to a fraudulent housing scheme ([The Express Tribune, 5 October 2018](#)). Shehbaz Sharif is the brother of Nawaz Sharif, former Prime Minister and PML-N head, who was also jailed this summer for a corrupt housing scandal.

Students were present in more than 10% of the reported demonstrations in Pakistan last week. Most notably, on 4 October, students at the University of Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) staged a demonstration against high tuition fees that led to a clash with police forces. At least five students and some policemen were reportedly injured; 28 students were also arrested.

In **India's** state of Jammu & Kashmir, militants targeted civilians and state forces in several attacks, resulting in the reported deaths of two Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) workers, one shopkeeper, and a policeman. Meanwhile, no fatalities were recorded in a string of cross-border firings along the Line of Control (LoC). The latest round of hostilities between the security forces of India and Pakistan included an incident in which Indian forces fired on a civilian helicopter containing the Prime Minister of the Pakistan-controlled territory of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Raja Farooq Haidar. Haidar was unharmed in the incident, with Indian forces claiming that the helicopter strayed across the

LoC into Indian airspace.

Militant violence was also reported from Chattisgarh's Dantewada district, where Indian security forces clashed with Maoist rebels, allegedly killing three rebels and arresting another. In Odisha, the upcoming students' union elections triggered a series of violent episodes and clashes between political groups in different universities across the state. Authorities cancelled the polls in most universities due to unrest among students ([Odisha TV, 5 October 2018](#)).

Meanwhile, protest marches from farmer organisations from several north Indian states accumulated on the outskirts of the capital, New Delhi, on 2 October leading to clashes with police forces. Farmer organisations had been protesting for loan waivers, higher support prices, and insulation from high fuel costs ([Al Jazeera, 2 October 2018](#)). Following the clashes, farmers and other groups, including students, staged follow-up protests against alleged police high handedness.

In **Bangladesh**, indigenous Adivasi groups and children of freedom fighters took to the streets, demanding restoration of quotas for them in government jobs. In Nepal, the number of demonstrations remained high last week due to ongoing anti-rape protests as well as rioting over the Province Assembly's proposal to make the city of Godawari the new capital of Province 7. In Sri Lanka, a series of protest demonstrations were reported in solidarity with Tamil political prisoners who are on hunger strike at the Anuradhapura and Welikada prisons demanding their release. A number of prisoners have been incarcerated for years under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), without charges being filed against them ([Daily News, 4 October 2018](#)).

There was an increase in organized violence by suspected southern Muslim separatists last week in **Thailand**, specifically in Pattani province. The reported violence last week largely targeted civilians. There were two attacks in Thung Yang Daeng district. In one attack, a woman and her son were reportedly killed while in a teashop. Later in the week, a health service worker, who was a member of the village defence team in tambon Khao Tum, was reportedly killed by suspected separatists as he drove his wife to the market. In Panare district, the director of the Ban Nam Bor school survived an attack. The recent increase in organized violence by suspected separatists challenges the idea that the separatist violence in the South is dying down ([The ASEAN Post, 13 September 2018](#)).

Meanwhile, in the **Philippines**, the number of reported fatalities from drug-related killings increased slightly last week. Within a span of two days, fifteen drug suspects were reportedly killed in the province of Cebu, leading the Commission on Human Rights to announce a probe into the killings ([Rappler, 8 October 2018](#)). On 1 October, the mayor of La Union province, Alexander Buquing, was reportedly killed. His murder reflects the ongoing trend of Philippine mayors being targeted in Duterte's anti-drug campaign ([Voice of America, 7 September 2018](#)).

While the level of organized political violence in **Myanmar** decreased slightly last week, the number of protests remained the same. From 29 to 30 September, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar military clashed at least five times in villages across northern Shan state (for more on the conflict dynamics in northern Shan state, see [this](#)

recent ACLED piece). The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Myanmar military also clashed in Muse township, Shan state last week. In Bago, Monywa, and Homalin, veterans of the Myanmar military held rallies to show support for the military and to protest against the perceived interference of international groups in Myanmar. These rallies reflect a growing trend of demonstrations supporting the government and military's response to international pressure arising from their actions in northern Rakhine state against the Rohingya population.
