

Regional Overview: Southeast Asia 19-25 January 2020

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Bringing clarity to crisis

In Southeast Asia, key developments last week included: civilian deaths from shelling in Myanmar; separatist violence in Thailand amid renewed peace talks; a conviction in a racial discrimination case that sparked ongoing violence in Indonesia; and large-scale labor protests in Myanmar and Indonesia.

Shelling in **Myanmar** led to the deaths of two Rohingya women in Rakhine state last week. The military and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) blamed each other for the deaths. Continuous shelling during the conflict in Rakhine state has led to many civilian deaths over the past year. Meanwhile, clashes between the military and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) continued last week in northern Shan state. Clashes between the two groups reached a high in the last two months of last year in the wake of the PSLF/TNLA's involvement in an attack on the military's Defense Service Technological Academy in the Mandalay region ([Irrawaddy, 15 August 2019](#)).

Separatist violence was reported in **Thailand** with clashes between suspected separatists and state forces in Yala and Pattani provinces. The clashes come as Thai government officials met with the main separatist group, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (BRN), in **Malaysia** in an effort to restart peace talks around the ongoing violence in the deep south. Another meeting is being planned for March ([Bangkok Post, 22 January 2020](#)).

In **Indonesia**, a clash between the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) and Indonesian state forces was reported in Papua. Disorder in Papua and West Papua increased in 2019 after racial taunts set off deadly rioting in the region. Last week, those involved in the racist abuse towards Papuan students in East Java were convicted in the first such racial discrimination case in the country ([UCA News, 23 January 2020](#)).

In the **Philippines**, clashes were reported between state forces and armed Islamist groups as well as communist rebels. Further, a paramilitary group, Alamara, destroyed the walls around the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) in Davao City, which has been housing displaced Lumad villagers. The UCCP is a group that has been “red-tagged”, or accused of connection with communist groups, in the past ([Rappler, 26 January 2020](#)).

There were significant labor protests in Indonesia and Myanmar last week. In Indonesia, thousands demonstrated against the omnibus bill which is viewed as pro-business and unfavorable towards labor ([Reuters, 20 January 2020](#)). In Myanmar, in the industrial townships of Hlaingthayar and Shwepyithar, large demonstrations were held by factory workers calling for an increase to the minimum wage.

Finally, in **Cambodia**, a former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) member was assaulted in Phnom Penh. In **Vietnam**, it was reported that a detained environmental activist had been subject to an assault while in detention.



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