Regional Overview: Southeast Asia 15 December 2019 – 4 January 2020

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In Southeast Asia, key developments over the past three weeks include: continued fighting between the military and several ethnic armed groups in Myanmar; clashes during the Christmas ceasefire between state forces and communist rebels in the Philippines; and separatist violence in Thailand and Indonesia.

At the end of December, there was intense fighting in **Myanmar** between the military and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) in Rakhine state. The ULA/AA announced the death of the chairman of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Buthidaung township office whom they had abducted earlier in the month. The ULA/AA claimed the chairman was killed due to the military's shelling in the region, a claim which the military disputed (Irrawaddy, 27 December 2019). An NLD member of parliament is still being detained by the ULA/AA. As the internet shutdown in four townships in Rakhine state reached its sixth month, a protest was held in Yangon calling for internet service to be restored (Myanmar Times, 25 December 2019).

Additionally, fighting between the military and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) in Shan state also increased at the end of the month. The PSLF/TNLA, along with the ULA/AA, is a member of the Brotherhood Alliance which recently announced a continuation of their unilateral ceasefire until the end of February (Irrawaddy, 3 January 2020).

Meanwhile, the new year began with a clash between the military and the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) in northern Shan state. As well, the military and the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA), a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatory, clashed in Kayin state in early January.

The KNU/KNLA had recently met with the military as road construction in the region controlled by KNU/KNLA brigades 3 and 5 has led to tension and intermittent clashes. The KNU/KNLA sees the continuing road construction by the military in the area as being in violation of the NCA (Karen News, 10 December 2019).

In the **Philippines**, despite the Christmas ceasefire between state forces and the New People's Army (NPA), clashes between the two groups were reported. The military has warned that the end of the ceasefire will lead to renewed operations against the communist rebels (Rappler, 7 January 2020). During the ceasefire period, the government organized rallies across the country against the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). The rallies came as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) marked the 51st anniversary of its founding (Philippine News Agency, 26 December 2019).

Separatist violence in **Thailand** and Indonesia likewise continued in recent weeks. The military killed three civilians in Narathiwat whom they mistook for separatists. In contrast with how such an event has been handled in the past, the military has been active in addressing this mistake, pledging to take action against the soldiers involved (Benar News, 30 December 2019).

In **Indonesia**, state forces and the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) clashed at least four times over the past three weeks in Papua. The ongoing conflict in the region led to the resignation of the Nduga deputy regent whose aide had been killed (The Jakarta Post, 28 December 2019). Also, in recent weeks, the arrest of Jemaah Ansharut Daulahmembers (JAD) members in Papua has raised concern that Islamic State-affiliated groups will use the area to hide out and train (Benar News, 23 December 2019).

Finally, protests were reported in **Cambodia** over land and labor issues. In **Vietnam**, a demonstration was held in Hanoi to demand compensation for land taken for a landfill. In Indonesia and **Malaysia**, rallies were held in solidarity with the Uighurs in China.

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