

# Regional Overview: Southeast Asia 9-15 February 2020

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Elliott Bynum

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## ACLED

Bringing clarity to crisis

In Southeast Asia, key developments last week included: civilian casualties from ongoing shelling in Myanmar; fighting between state forces and both communist and Islamist rebels in the Philippines; and protests over the lack of media freedom in the Philippines.

Civilians in **Myanmar** continue to be harmed in the intensifying conflict in Rakhine state. During the course of a battle between the military and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA), artillery shells fell on a school in Buthidaung township, injuring several students. Shelling in the township also led to the deaths of three villagers. Further, a villager in Kyauktaw township was killed by shelling in the area. Both the military and the ULA/AA have traded blame over who is responsible for the ongoing civilian casualties. With the recent government expansion of the internet shutdown in the region, the conflict appears to be worsening ([UN Human Rights Council, 18 February 2020](#)).

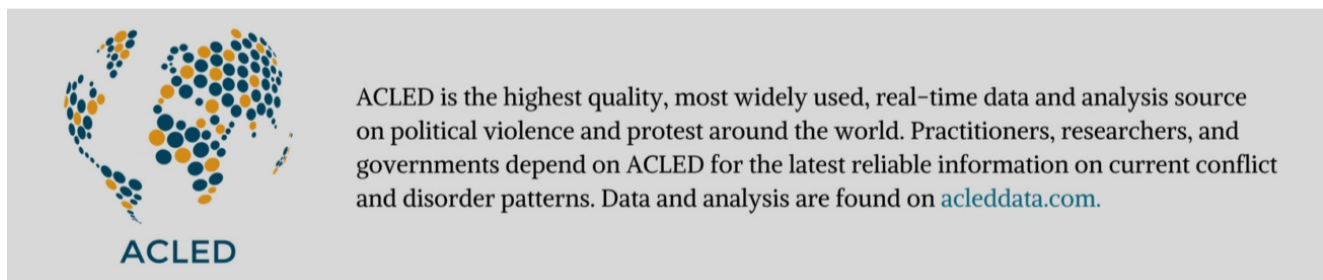
No separatist clashes were reported in **Thailand** last week. In the aftermath of a mass shooting at a mall in Korat, a vigil for the victims also included protesters calling for the resignation of the military's commander-in-chief. While the shooting was motivated by personal grievances, the shooter was a military soldier ([Al-Jazeera, 17 February 2020](#)).

In **Indonesia**, no separatist violence in the West Papuan region was reported. Several Papuan students demonstrated peacefully. They called for government assistance to be able to return to the cities outside of the region where they had been studying until August of last year, when deadly rioting broke out over racial taunts.

In the **Philippines**, clashes were reported between state forces and both communist and Islamist rebels. Battles between the communist New People's Army (NPA) and state forces resulted in six reported deaths, including a police captain in Western Visayas. As well, a clash

was reported between the Islamist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Soccsksargen. It remains to be seen whether President Duterte's recent decision to pull the Philippines out of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States will impact its operations against communist and Islamist rebels ([The Conversation, 17 February 2020](#)).

Finally, the possible shutdown of the media outlet ABS-CBN sparked protests by journalists in the Philippines last week in Quezon City. ABS-CBN has been targeted by President Duterte for its independent reporting. With its franchise license up for renewal in March, Congress has come under pressure not to renew the license. The Solicitor General recently filed a petition at the Supreme Court to void ABS-CBN's franchise license prior to the debate in Congress over its renewal ([Rappler, 10 February 2020](#)). The move is seen as part of Duterte's continued attack on press freedom in the country.



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