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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



February 21

Australia Criticizes China's Inadequate Notification of Naval Exercises



Australia's Defense Minister, Richard Marles, criticized China for providing insufficient notice regarding live-fire naval exercises conducted in international waters near Australia and New Zealand. The lack of adequate communication led to significant disruptions, including the diversion of commercial flights by airlines such

A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

as Qantas and Emirates. While China maintained that it adhered to international protocols, Australian officials emphasized the importance of customary notification timelines to ensure safety and transparency in international waters.

French Aircraft Carrier Conducts Drills in South China Sea

France's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the Charles de Gaulle, along with its strike group, conducted combat drills with Filipino forces in the disputed South China Sea. The exercises aimed to enhance readiness and promote regional security, focusing on anti-submarine warfare and aerial combat training. France's Ambassador to Manila, Marie Fontanel, emphasized the importance of adhering to international law and ensuring freedom of navigation. This deployment reflects France's growing military engagement in Southeast Asia amidst rising tensions over territorial disputes.

February 23

Russia to Build Port and Oil Refinery in Myanmar Under New Agreement

Russia has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Myanmar to construct a new port and oil refinery, strengthening economic and strategic ties between the two nations. The agreement, signed during high-level talks, aims to boost energy cooperation and infrastructure development in Myanmar. Moscow sees this as an opportunity to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, while Myanmar seeks greater investment amid international sanctions. The project is expected to enhance Myanmar's energy security and create new trade routes, further deepening its ties with Russia.

24 Februray

Bangladesh and Pakistan Resume Direct Trade After Five Decades

Bangladesh and Pakistan have officially resumed direct trade after more than 50 years, marking a significant shift in economic relations between the two nations. The move comes as both countries seek to diversify trade partnerships and strengthen regional cooperation. The resumption of direct trade is expected to reduce dependency on third-party trading hubs and lower costs for businesses. Key sectors, including textiles, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products, are likely to benefit. Analysts see this as a potential step toward improved diplomatic ties, despite longstanding political tensions.

25 Februray

China Sets Goal to Eradicate Severe Air Pollution in 2025

China has announced an ambitious plan to eliminate severe air pollution by the end of this year, marking a major step in its environmental agenda. Officials have pledged stricter emission controls, cleaner energy expansion, and industrial regulations to tackle hazardous smog, particularly in urban areas.

The move comes amid growing public concern over air quality and its impact on health. While China has made significant progress in reducing pollution over the past decade, experts warn that challenges remain, especially in heavily industrialized regions.

26 Februray

Kim Jong Un Pushes for Military Modernization Amid Rising Tensions

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called for the rapid modernization of the country's armed forces, emphasizing the need for advanced weapons and combat readiness. Addressing military officials, he cited escalating tensions with the United States and South Korea as justification for boosting defense capabilities. This follows recent missile tests that have raised concerns of a regional arms race. In response, Seoul and Washington are expected to reinforce their own security strategies.

27 Februray

Australia and Vanuatu Strengthen Ties Amid Regional Competition

Australia and Vanuatu engaged in comprehensive discussions to bolster security and economic collaboration, reflecting Australia's commitment to maintaining its status as the South Pacific's largest aid donor amid growing regional competition.

China Accuses Taiwan of Handing Over Chip Industry to the US

China has accused Taiwan of deliberately transferring its semiconductor industry to the United States, claiming it is part of a strategic effort to weaken China's technological rise. The remarks come after Taiwan deepened its chip-making cooperation with Washington, including investments and knowledge-sharing agreements with major US firms.

Beijing warned that such actions could undermine Taiwan's economic security and further strain cross-strait relations. Taipei, however, maintains that its semiconductor partnerships are essential for economic growth and global competitiveness, not political maneuvering.

28 Februray

Myanmar Journalist Reports Torture Amid Crackdown on Press Freedom



An independent news agency in Myanmar reported that journalist Sai Zaw Thaike has been subjected to daily physical and mental abuse in Insein prison. Arrested two years ago while covering Cyclone Mocha, he was sentenced to 20 years on multiple charges. The alleged abuse is reportedly in retaliation for exposing human rights violations by prison staff. This incident highlights the broader repression of the press following the military coup in February 2021, with Myanmar now among the world's top jailers of journalists. Human rights organizations have condemned the abuse and called for accountability and the release of detained journalists.

March 1

Vietnam Accelerates Licensing for Starlink Amid Efforts to Rebalance U.S. Trade Relations

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has directed the Ministry of Science and Technology to swiftly grant a trial license to Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet service. This move aligns with Vietnam's recent regulatory shift allowing full foreign ownership of satellite internet providers, a change designed to attract technological investments. Concurrently, Vietnam is exploring increased imports from the United States, including aircraft, arms, liquefied natural gas, agricultural goods, and pharmaceuticals, to address its substantial trade surplus with the U.S. and mitigate potential tariff implications. Notably, Vietnam Airlines has secured a deal to purchase 50 Boeing 737 Max jets, valued at \$11 billion, exemplifying efforts to balance trade dynamics.

March 3

Clashes Erupt Between Pakistani and Afghan Forces at Torkham Border Crossing

2025, Pakistani and Afghan security forces engaged in armed clashes at the Torkham border crossing, a critical juncture between the two nations. The skirmish resulted in the death of one Afghan security personnel and injuries to another, while three Pakistani security personnel were wounded. The Torkham crossing had been closed since February 21 due to disputes over border infrastructure, leading to significant disruptions in trade and travel, with thousands of trucks carrying essential goods stranded. The closure and ensuing clashes have exacerbated economic hardships, particularly in Afghanistan, which is facing a severe humanitarian crisis. Both sides have accused each other of initiating the violence, and residents in the vicinity have fled the area seeking safety. Efforts to resolve the impasse through dialogue are ongoing, as the prolonged closure continues to impact

March 4

India's North-South Divide Deepens Over Proposed Constituency Redrawing

India is witnessing escalating tensions between its northern and southern states over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal to redraw parliamentary constituencies based on the 2021 census. Southern leaders, notably Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, argue that this delimitation exercise would unfairly reduce their representation in parliament, effectively penalizing them for successful population control measures. In contrast, northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which have experienced higher population growth, stand to gain increased parliamentary influence. Southern states, contributing approximately 30% of India's GDP, fear diminished political clout and resource allocation. Despite reassurances from Union Home Minister Amit Shah that southern representation will not suffer, skepticism persists among southern leaders, who are advocating for a revised delimitation approach that ensures equitable representation across all states.

March 5

Suicide Bombing at Pakistan Military Base Claims 18 Lives

A coordinated suicide bombing targeted a military base in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of 13 civilians and five soldiers. The attack began with two suicide bombers detonating explosive-laden vehicles to breach the base's perimeter. Subsequently, five to six militants attempted to storm the compound but were repelled and neutralized by security forces. The explosions caused significant structural damage, including the collapse of a nearby mosque's roof during evening prayers, leading to additional casualties. The militant group Jaish Al-Fursan, affiliated with the



Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the assault. This incident underscores the escalating militant activities in the region, posing significant challenges to Pakistan's security infrastructure.

Pakistan Lauds Renewed U.S. Cooperation Following Sharifullah's Arrest

Pakistan has emphasized its renewed counterterrorism collaboration with the United States following the arrest of Mohammad Sharifullah, an alleged mastermind behind the 2021 Kabul airport attack that killed 13 U.S. service members and approximately 170 Afghan civilians. Sharifullah, also known as "Jafar," was apprehended by Pakistani authorities near the Afghanistan border, acting on intelligence provided by the CIA. U.S. President Donald Trump acknowledged Pakistan's assistance during a congressional address, stating that Sharifullah was en route to the United States to face justice. In response, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed gratitude for the recognition and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to partnering with the U.S. in ensuring regional peace and stability.

March 6

Thailand's Deportation of Uyghurs Aimed to Prevent Chinese Retaliation, Says Minister

Thailand deported 40 Uyghur men to China last week to prevent potential retaliation from Beijing, according to Thai Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Russ Jalichandra. This action has drawn criticism from United Nations human rights experts, who fear the deported individuals could face torture and other abuses upon their return to China. Despite resettlement offers from countries

like the United States, Canada, and Australia, Thailand proceeded with the deportation, arguing that such offers would not shield the country from possible Chinese retaliatory measures. The deported Uyghurs were part of a group of 300 who fled China in 2014; while some were previously sent to China or Turkey, others remained in Thai custody for over a decade. China maintains that the deportations were legal and involved Chinese nationals who were illegal migrants.

March 7

Pakistan Orders Illegal Foreigners, Afghan Citizen Card Holders to Leave by March 31

On March 7, 2025, Pakistan's Interior Ministry issued a directive requiring all "illegal foreigners," including Afghan Citizen Card holders, to leave the country by March 31, 2025, or face deportation starting April 1. This move is part of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to address security concerns and regulate undocumented immigration. The country has historically hosted millions of Afghan refugees, with current estimates indicating approximately 1.3 million registered Afghan nationals and over 800,000 holding Afghan Citizen Cards. The Afghan government has criticized these deportations, labeling them as "inhuman acts." The United Nations and human rights organizations have also expressed concerns, urging Pakistan to ensure that any relocation measures respect human rights and provide due consideration to individuals at risk of harm upon return.

Philippines and Canada Set to Sign Visiting Forces Agreement, Deepening Defense Ties

The Philippines and Canada announced the conclusion of negotiations for a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA), paving the way for enhanced military cooperation between the two nations. This agreement establishes a framework for increased collaboration between defense and military establishments, improving interoperability and facilitating more effective joint exercises and capacity-building activities. The SOVFA is expected to contribute to peace, stability, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

WFP Urgently Seeks Funding to Prevent Food Aid Cuts for Rohingya Refugees

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) issued an urgent appeal for funding to sustain its food assistance to over one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Facing a critical funding shortfall, the WFP warns that without immediate support, monthly food vouchers will be halved from \$12.50 to \$6 per person starting April 1, coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan. This reduction threatens to deepen hunger and poverty among refugees who are entirely dependent on humanitarian aid for survival. The funding crisis is exacerbated by global aid reductions, notably from major donors like the United States. The WFP urgently requires \$15 million to maintain full rations in April and \$81 million through the end of 2025 to avert a humanitarian disaster.

March 8

Myanmar Junta Chief Announces Elections for December or January Amid Ongoing Conflict

Myanmar's junta chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has announced plans to hold general elections in December 2025 or January 2026, providing the first specific timeline since the 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government. The country has been in turmoil since the coup, with widespread protests evolving into armed resistance against the military regime. While Min Aung Hlaing asserts that 53 political parties have registered for the upcoming elections, critics argue that the polls are a facade to extend military rule, especially given the banning of numerous opposition parties and the junta's loss of control over significant territories. The planned elections raise concerns about escalating violence, as both the junta and opposition forces vie for territorial dominance in a nation already grappling with economic collapse and the displacement of over 3.5 million people.

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