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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

Pashinyan's warning reflects heightened tensions and the urgency for a resolution. The conflict, reignited in 2020, resulted in a significant defeat for Armenia. Efforts to establish a formal peace treaty between the two nations have stalled, hindered by border demarcation and militarization issues.

March 19

Armenia Warns of Potential War with Azerbaijan Over Disputed Villages



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan cautioned that failure to compromise with Azerbaijan and return four villages could lead to war. These villages, under Armenian control since the early 1990s, are strategically significant. Azerbaijan insists on their return as a precondition for a peace deal following the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

March 20

U.S. Affirms Arunachal Pradesh as Indian Territory Amid China Border Tensions

The U.S. State Department reiterated its recognition of Arunachal Pradesh as part of India and voiced strong opposition against unilateral attempts to assert territorial claims in the region, which borders China. Amid ongoing border tensions between India and China, the statement reaffirms the U.S.'s stance on the matter. Arunachal Pradesh, claimed by China as part of southern Tibet, has been a point of contention between the two nations. The statement underscores the U.S.'s support for India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, reflecting the broader geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region amidst heightened U.S.-China rivalry.

U.S. Diplomat Urges Pakistan to Investigate Election Irregularities

Donald Lu, the State Department's top official for South and Central Asia, called on Pakistan to probe reported irregularities in last month's general election. Speaking before a congressional panel, Lu stressed the importance of re-running the vote in affected constituencies if credible evidence of interference is found. The election, marred by arrests, violence, and an internet shutdown, led to delayed results and accusations of rigging. Despite concerns raised by various parties, Lu emphasized the need for a thorough investigation. Allegations of interference by Lu in Imran Khan's removal from power were vehemently denied, with Lu dismissing them as baseless conspiracy theories.

March 21

Chinese Foreign Minister Urges Australia's Independent Foreign Policy

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized Beijing's support for Australia's pursuit of an independent foreign policy during his meeting with former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating. The visit, a rare occurrence since 2017, signifies a thaw in diplomatic relations, following discussions with top Australian officials on trade and regional security. Wang's dialogue with Keating, known for his critiques of Australian intelligence agencies and opposition to the AUKUS defense pact, prompted domestic debate. Keating emphasized the importance of global geostrategic dynamics, while Wang reiterated China's stance on peaceful economic development, fostering optimism for bilateral relations' normalization amid past tensions.

March 22

Deadly Attack Shakes Moscow

In a harrowing incident near Moscow, at least 143 people were killed when camouflage-clad gunmen indiscriminately opened fire on concertgoers at the Crocus City Hall. The attack, the deadliest in Russia since the 2004 Beslan school siege, shocked the nation. As victims scrambled for safety amidst the chaos, the assailants sprayed bullets into the crowd, leaving pools of blood and devastation in their wake. The Islamic State swiftly claimed responsibility for the assault, adding a layer of complexity to an already tense situation. Russian President Vladimir Putin, briefed by security officials, faces mounting pressure to address the nation's security concerns. In response, security measures have been tightened across the region, with heightened vigilance at airports, transport hubs, and public events. Investigations into the identities of the attackers and their motives are ongoing as the nation mourns the tragic loss of life.

U.S. Military Withdraws from Port Development in Philippines' Batanes Islands



The U.S. military has opted out of participating in the development of a port in the Batanes islands, dispelling potential tensions with China. The governor of Batanes, Marilou Cayco, disclosed that initial discussions with U.S. authorities regarding funding support ceased, prompting collaboration with the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA). The port aimed to facilitate cargo unloading from Manila during adverse monsoon conditions. While the U.S. embassy refrained from comment, its engagement withdrawal avoids escalation amidst heightened regional tensions. The Batanes islands' strategic location near Taiwan underscores its geopolitical significance, with the Bashi Channel serving as a crucial maritime route amid regional dynamics.

March 23

Peru Seeks to Rectify Port Deal with China

Peru's port authority aims to address an "administrative error" granting exclusive rights to China's Cosco Shipping over operations at the new Chancay megaport. The National Port Authority (APN) has initiated legal proceedings to annul the decision, emphasizing that the port's construction remains on schedule. The APN clarifies it lacks authority to grant exclusivity and seeks to rectify the error. Despite the setback, Chancay port's development progresses, with completion anticipated by year-end. The \$3.5 billion megaport, poised to enhance South American Pacific connectivity, symbolizes China's expanding presence in Latin America, raising concerns among Western powers.

March 25

Myanmar Military Plans Election Amidst Ongoing Conflict

Myanmar's top general, Min Aung Hlaing, stated that the military plans to hold elections if peace and stability prevail in the country, although it may not be feasible nationwide amidst ongoing conflict. The junta, in power since a coup three years ago, aims to restore democratic governance. However, it faces significant challenges, with pro-democracy protests evolving into armed resistance. The military confronts ethnic minority armies while facing accusations of atrocities, which it denies. The junta's repeated extensions of emergency rule and crackdown on opposition groups draw criticism. Despite turmoil, efforts persist to hold elections amid internal and international skepticism.

March 26

Militants Attack Pakistan Naval Airbase; One Soldier Killed

Militants launched an assault on a Pakistan naval airbase in Turbat, southwestern Pakistan, killing at least one paramilitary soldier, officials confirmed.

Security forces swiftly retaliated, eliminating all five attackers. This marks the second attack by Baloch militants on a military installation within a week. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the assault, continuing its history of targeting Pakistani and Chinese interests. The significance of the naval base to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor underscores the broader implications of such attacks on regional stability. Despite challenges, both countries remain committed to advancing economic development in the area.

New Zealand Raises Concerns with China Over Cyber Hack

The New Zealand government disclosed that it had expressed concerns to the Chinese government regarding its involvement in a state-sponsored cyber hack on New Zealand's parliament in 2021. This revelation follows the uncovering of the cyber intrusion by New Zealand's intelligence services. Amid accusations by Britain and the U.S. of widespread cyber espionage by China, both New Zealand and Australia have condemned such activities. Foreign Minister Winston Peters urged China to refrain from such interference in the future. The government also highlighted links between a Chinese state-sponsored actor, APT40, and cyber activities targeting New Zealand's parliamentary services.

March 27

India Plans \$3.7 Billion Border Fence Project with Myanmar

India aims to invest nearly \$3.7 billion to fence its 1,610-km border with Myanmar over the next decade to curb smuggling and illegal activities, revealed a source familiar with the matter. The decision, previously announced this year, aligns with New Delhi's efforts to bolster national security and maintain the demographic structure of its northeastern region. A government committee recently approved the project's cost, pending cabinet approval. Amid concerns over communal tensions and cross-border conflicts, India also plans to construct parallel roads and feeder roads connecting military bases to the border. The project's challenging terrain and technological requirements are expected to drive up costs.

Interpol Warns of Global Expansion in Human Trafficking and Cyber Scams Amid Pandemic

Interpol's secretary-general, Jurgén Stock, revealed that organized crime rings, catalyzed by the pandemic, have expanded from Southeast Asia into a global network generating up to \$3 trillion annually. Stock highlighted the proliferation of cyber scam centres, fueled by online anonymity and COVID-induced factors, as a major concern. These centres, often staffed by trafficked individuals, contribute to the diversification of criminal revenue streams alongside drug trafficking. Despite drug trafficking still being a significant income source, criminal groups are increasingly engaging in trafficking humans, arms, and intellectual property.

US Impose Sanctions on North Korea's Weapons Programs

The United States imposed sanctions on six individuals and two entities from Russia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, accusing them of funneling funds to North Korea's weapons programs. South Korea, a US ally, also enforced sanctions on four of the same individuals and the two entities. The action, coordinated between the two countries, targets individuals directly involved in illegal financial activities aiding North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. The sanctioned entities, including Alis LLC in Russia and Pioneer Bencont Star Real Estate in the UAE, are linked to North Korea's armed forces through Chinyong Information Technology Cooperation Co.

March 28

Sri Lanka's Key Inflation Rate Plummet to 0.9% in March

Sri Lanka's crucial inflation rate dropped to 0.9% year-on-year in March from 5.9% in February, according to the statistics department. The Colombo Consumer Price Index (LKCCPI=ECI), a leading indicator for national prices, tracks inflation in Colombo, the country's largest city. The significant decrease was primarily attributed to a 22% reduction in household power tariffs earlier in the month. While food prices increased by 3.8% in March, non-food item prices rose by 0.5%. Despite the unexpected reduction, economists project a slight upward trend in April, fostering economic growth prospects for the country, which has been slowly stabilizing after facing a severe financial crisis in 2022.

March 29

Chinese Investigators Join Probe into Attack on Nationals in Pakistan

Chinese investigators arrived in Pakistan to assist in the investigation of the killing of five Chinese nationals in a suicide attack, Pakistan's interior ministry confirmed, aiming to thwart assaults jeopardizing Islamabad's economic modernization efforts. This marked the third major attack within a week on Chinese interests in Pakistan, where Beijing has invested over \$65 billion in infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road initiative. Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi briefed the Chinese team at Beijing's embassy. The recent attack, a suicide bombing targeting Chinese engineers at a hydropower project in Dasu, claimed six lives. While no group immediately claimed responsibility, past attacks in Dasu and other regions have been linked to separatist groups like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA).

Russia Calls for New Approach to North Korea Amid Sanctions Veto



Russia's call for a fresh approach to North Korea accused the United States and its allies of heightening military tensions in Asia and aiming to "strangle" the reclusive state. Moscow's veto on the annual renewal of a UN panel monitoring sanctions against North Korea undermines efforts to enforce sanctions imposed since Pyongyang's first nuclear test in 2006. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova emphasized the need for updated approaches, citing ineffective international restrictions and severe humanitarian consequences. The U.S. State Department criticized Russia's move, warning of emboldened behavior from North Korea and reduced prospects for peace on the Korean Peninsula.

March 30

Indian Navy Frees Crew of Iranian Fishing Vessel from Somali Pirates

The Indian Navy successfully liberated the 23-member crew of an Iranian fishing vessel, Al-Kambar 786, which was seized by armed pirates off Somalia. The incident occurred southwest of Yemen's Socotra Island on March 28, with nine pirates reportedly boarding the vessel. Naval forces, including INS Sumedha and INS Trishul, intervened, employing coercive tactical measures for over 12 hours until the pirates surrendered. The pirates will face prosecution in India under domestic laws against piracy. The crew, consisting of 23 Pakistani nationals, underwent medical checks and were cleared to resume fishing activities. These incidents mark a resurgence of piracy in the region, posing challenges for global shipping.

March 31

Philippine President Orders Maritime Security Strengthening

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has instructed his government to bolster coordination on maritime security to address "a range of serious challenges" to territorial integrity and peace, amidst escalating disputes with China. The order comes after a series of bilateral maritime confrontations and mutual accusations over the South China Sea. President Marcos pledged to implement countermeasures against China's "illegal, coercive, aggressive, and dangerous attacks" following a recent flare-up. The reorganized National Maritime Council aims to formulate unified strategies for maritime security and domain awareness, expanding its support agencies to 13, including the military and academic institutions.

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