

Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

Cyclone Fengal Leaves 19 Dead and Causes Severe Flooding in India and Sri Lanka



Cyclone Fengal, which crossed India's southern coast from the Bay of Bengal on Saturday, has killed at least 19 people in India and Sri Lanka. The cyclone caused severe flooding in Tamil Nadu and the Puducherry region, with Puducherry experiencing its heaviest rainfall in 30 years. Chennai was inundated, with flights temporarily suspended on Saturday, but operations resumed by Sunday. The Indian army conducted relief operations in Puducherry. In Sri Lanka, 16 fatalities were reported, and heavy rains affected 138,944 families, according to the Disaster Management Centre in Colombo.

December 1

Thailand Protests Myanmar Navy's Attack on Fishing Vessels

Thailand has protested Myanmar's navy firing on Thai fishing vessels near the border, which resulted in one fisherman's death, two injuries, and the detention of dozens of crew members. Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra questioned Myanmar's claims that the vessels had intruded into its territorial waters when the incident occurred on Saturday. The Thai defense ministry reported that two out of 15 fishing vessels were fired upon while being 4-5.7 nautical miles inside Myanmar's waters. Shinawatra emphasized that Thailand opposes violence under any circumstances and is seeking the prompt release of the detained fishermen. Myanmar's junta has not commented.

December 2

Malaysia Warns Chinese Firms Against "Rebadging" Products to Dodge U.S. Tariffs

Malaysia's Deputy Trade Minister Liew Chin Tong has urged Chinese companies to avoid using the country as a base for "rebadging" products to circumvent U.S. tariffs. Amid growing export restrictions and the U.S.-China trade war, Liew highlighted concerns over Chinese semiconductor firms shifting operations to Malaysia to sidestep tariffs on Chinese-made goods. Malaysia plays a significant role in global semiconductor testing and packaging, accounting for 13% of the market. The U.S. has imposed tariffs on solar exports from Southeast Asia and continues to tighten trade restrictions on Chinese firms to protect domestic industries.

December 3

Singapore and Australia Expand Defence Cooperation

Singapore and Australia have agreed to enhance access to their respective defence facilities, including more frequent Australian visits to Singapore's air force and navy bases. The two countries will upgrade their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership next year, strengthening military collaboration. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles, during his visit to Singapore, emphasized the significance of this step, calling it a major development in their broad relationship. Singapore has long provided access to Australian ships and aircraft, while its pilots have trained in Australia for over 30 years. Both countries aim to increase the frequency of military visits and training opportunities.

December 4

Nepal and China Sign Belt and Road Framework Agreement



Nepal has signed a framework agreement with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), seven years after an initial pact was made without subsequent progress. The deal was finalised during Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's visit to Beijing, marking his first foreign trip since taking office in July.

The agreement paves the way for detailed project planning, including road upgrades and transport corridors, though financing debates persist.

Nepal previously received \$216 million from China for an international airport in Pokhara, operational since last year, but limited international flights due to Indian airspace restrictions hinder its effectiveness.

Taiwan's President Lai Visits Guam Amid Pacific Tour

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te visited Guam on Wednesday during his Pacific tour, aimed at strengthening ties with regional allies amid increasing Chinese pressure. This marks his second U.S. stopover within a week.

Lai, welcomed by Guam Governor Lou Leon Guerrero and Ingrid Larson from the American Institute in Taiwan, highlighted the importance of Taiwan's partnership with the U.S., particularly in the high-tech semiconductor industry.

The trip underscores Taiwan's efforts to maintain formal diplomatic ties with Pacific nations like Tuvalu and Palau, as China continues to expand its influence. Beijing strongly opposes such visits, labelling Lai a separatist.

December 5

North Korea-Russia Defence Treaty Takes Effect

The "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty" between North Korea and Russia, signed in June, officially came into force on Wednesday with the exchange of ratification documents in Moscow, North Korea's KCNA reported.

The treaty, signed during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Pyongyang, includes a mutual defence pact, pledging immediate military assistance if either nation faces armed aggression.

KCNA hailed the treaty as a step towards a "multi-polarised world order" free from domination.

Amid escalating military cooperation, reports indicate over 10,000 North Korean troops and substantial ammunition shipments have supported Russia in Ukraine, though both nations deny these claims.

December 6

Imran Khan Calls for Rally Threatens Civil Disobedience

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, jailed since late last year, has urged his supporters to rally in Peshawar on 13 December, threatening a civil disobedience movement if his demands are unmet. Khan seeks a judicial probe into the deaths of 12 supporters during a 25 November protest and the release of all arrested party workers.

The government denies protest-related deaths and accuses Khan's followers of attacking military installations on 9 May last year. Indicted for allegedly directing the attacks, Khan pleads not guilty, claiming politically motivated charges to sideline him after his fallout with military generals.

Vietnam Faces Tariff Threat from Trump Administration

Vietnam may become the next target of U.S. tariffs under the Trump administration, with its trade surplus with the United States significantly increasing, analysts warn.

The country, a hub for major U.S. multinationals like Apple, Google, Nike, and Intel, ranks fourth in its commercial surplus with the U.S., following China, the European Union, and Mexico.

Industry executives fear Vietnam's rising trade imbalance could attract scrutiny as Washington continues its protectionist trade policies. The potential tariffs could challenge Vietnam's growing role in global supply chains and its economic reliance on exports to the United States.

December 7

South Korean President Yoon Faces Pressure to Resign Amid Martial Law Controversy

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol narrowly survived an impeachment vote, despite backlash over his short-lived martial law declaration earlier this week. Opposition parties condemned his actions, but his People Power Party (PPP) boycotted the impeachment vote, leaving the motion invalid.

PPP leader Han Dong-hoon announced Yoon's eventual resignation, citing his "serious violation of the law." Yoon apologised in a televised address but left his fate to the party. Tens of thousands protested, demanding his impeachment, with polls showing 73.6% public support for removal. Yoon's declaration has plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

BJP Accuses U.S. "Deep State" of Destabilising India

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has alleged that U.S. "deep state" actors, the State Department, investigative journalists, and opposition leader Rahul Gandhi are collaborating to destabilise India. The BJP accused Gandhi's Congress party of leveraging articles by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) targeting Modi-linked Adani Group, alleging close ties to the government.

The Adani Group, which denies all accusations, faces U.S. indictments over alleged bribery. The BJP claims the OCCRP, funded by U.S. entities and philanthropist George Soros, also linked India to Pegasus spyware allegations. These assertions come despite robust India-U.S. relations.

December 8

China Increases Naval Activity Near Taiwan Amid Rising Tensions

Taiwan's defence ministry reported a near doubling of Chinese warships around the island, with 14 vessels detected compared to eight the previous day. This escalation follows Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te's Pacific tour, including stops in Hawaii and Guam, which angered Beijing.

China has conducted two rounds of war games near Taiwan this year, and security sources anticipate more, weather permitting. Meanwhile, China's Ministry of State Security criticised Taiwan's independence efforts and U.S. support, warning against challenging its sovereignty. Taiwan's government rejects Beijing's claims and asserts its independence. The situation remains tense.

December 9

Bomb Threats Target 40 Delhi Schools, Prompting Evacuations

At least 40 schools in Delhi received bomb threats via email on Monday, demanding \$30,000, ANI reported. Authorities conducted searches while parents were called to take children home. Two schools received threats on Sunday night, claiming bombs were planted, and similar emails reached others on Monday morning. This year, India has faced hundreds of hoax bomb threats, with airports and airlines receiving 999 such alerts by mid-November. These incidents have resulted in 12 arrests, government data shows. In May, over 50 Delhi schools experienced similar scares. Police investigations are ongoing, and no immediate response was available from Delhi authorities.

Australia Signs Economic and Security Pact with Nauru to Counter China's Influence

Australia finalised a treaty with Nauru, committing A\$100 million in budget support over five years and A\$40 million for security enhancements. The agreement, which blocks Chinese security ties, grants Australia veto power over Chinese involvement in Nauru's security, banking, and telecommunications. This follows a similar deal with Tuvalu amid growing concerns over Beijing's Pacific ambitions, including the Solomon Islands-China security pact in 2022.

Prime Minister Albanese highlighted Australia's role as Nauru's primary security partner, pledging further investment in policing and infrastructure. President Adeang praised the partnership for bolstering Nauru's stability, economic resilience, and regional peace.

Contributors

Debi Karmakar

Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)

debi@cgs-bd.com

Bahauddin Ahmed

Digital Coordinator at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)

bahauddin@cgs-bd.com