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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

Mogami-class multi-role frigates, its biggest defence export since lifting a military ban in 2014. Three ships will be built in Japan by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries starting 2029, with eight constructed in Australia. The frigates, equipped for anti-submarine, surface strike, and air defence missions, significantly enhance Australia's naval firepower amid China's growing presence in the Pacific. Officials hailed the deal as a strategic milestone, strengthening Japan Australia security ties alongside the AUKUS pact. Shares of shipbuilders in both countries surged following the announcement

Aug 06

Pakistan Begins Reporting Registered Afghan Refugees, UNHCR Warns



Pakistan has begun reporting documented Afghan refugees ahead of its September 1 deadline,

Aug 05

Indian Army Denies Ceasefire Violation After Firing Reports

The Indian army dismissed media reports claiming Pakistan violated the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch region. "It is clarified that there has been NO ceasefire violation along the Line of Control," the army said in a statement. The clarification followed local media suggesting Pakistani forces had opened fire. Pakistan's military has not commented. Both countries agreed to renew their ceasefire pact in 2021, significantly reducing cross-border firing, though tensions remain high as Kashmir continues to be a flashpoint in the rivals' decades-long conflict.

Japan Secures \$6.5 Billion Warship Deal with Australia to Counter China

Japan has sealed a landmark A\$10 billion (\$6.5 billion) agreement to supply Australia with 11

the UN refugee agency said. Over 1 million Afghans could be expelled under the campaign, despite many holding legal Proof of Registration or Afghan Citizen Cards. UNHCR condemned the move as a breach of international obligations, urging Islamabad to ensure voluntary and dignified returns. Reports indicate hundreds have already been arrested and deported this month. Pakistan insists only Afghans with valid visas may remain, while Afghanistan calls the expulsions forced. Aid groups fear the mass returns could fuel instability inside Afghanistan and across the region

Aug 07

Cambodia, Thailand Allow ASEAN Observers to Monitor Ceasefire

Cambodia and Thailand agreed to allow ASEAN observers to monitor disputed border areas, aiming to ensure a fragile ceasefire holds after last month's five-day conflict that killed at least 43 people and displaced over 300,000. Defence ministers from both countries met in Kuala Lumpur, finalising terms for peace with support from China, the U.S., and Malaysia. ASEAN military attachés, led by Malaysia, will be stationed in both countries but will not cross the border. The neighbours pledged further talks in the coming weeks, seeking to end decades of recurring clashes over their undemarcated frontier.

Solomon Islands Bars US, China, Taiwan from Pacific Islands Forum

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele announced that 21 donor nations, including the United States, China, and Taiwan, will be excluded from September's Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the region's top political gathering. The move follows Beijing's pressure to block Taiwan and reflects growing geopolitical rivalry. While development banks and civil groups will attend, opposition leaders criticised the decision as a missed chance for Pacific nations to engage with global donors. Taiwan-allied Marshall Islands condemned China's interference. The Pacific,

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Aug 08

Putin Consults Xi, Modi Ahead of Possible Trump Summit

Russian President Vladimir Putin held calls with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and leaders of South Africa, the UAE, and ex-Soviet states to brief them on his contacts with Washington over Ukraine. The Kremlin said a Putin-Trump summit could be held as early as next week, though no details were given. Xi welcomed dialogue, while Modi said he discussed Ukraine developments "in detail" with Putin. Trump has set a deadline for Moscow to agree to peace or face new sanctions. The UAE is being considered as a potential summit venue.

Myanmar Hires US Lobbyists to Rebuild Ties with Washington

Myanmar's military-led government has signed a \$3 million-a-year lobbying deal with Washington-based DCI Group to restore relations with the United States, filings under the Foreign Agents Registration Act show. The agreement, signed July 31, coincided with the junta's nominal transfer of power to a civilian-led interim administration ahead of planned elections. The contract focuses on trade, natural resources, and humanitarian relief. Despite U.S. sanctions, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has sought closer ties with President Donald Trump's administration. DCI, previously investigated by the FBI, has denied wrongdoing. Myanmar remains under international criticism for rights abuses and Rohingya persecution.

Aug 09

North Korea Begins Dismantling Border Loudspeakers

South Korea said it detected North Korea dismantling some propaganda loudspeakers along the border, mirroring Seoul's recent moves to remove

its own. It is the first such step since President Lee Jae Myung took office, signalling efforts to ease tensions. Both nations remain technically at war, with cross-border broadcasts long used as political weapons.

Aug 10

South Korea's Military Shrinks 20% Amid Falling Male Population

South Korea's military has shrunk by 20% in six years, dropping to 450,000 troops as the pool of enlistment-age males declines sharply, a defence ministry report revealed. The shortage, especially of non-commissioned officers, risks operational readiness. Active-duty forces peaked at 690,000 in the early 2000s but have steadily fallen, while North Korea maintains about 1.2 million troops. The decline reflects South Korea's demographic crisis, with the world's lowest fertility rate of 0.75 in 2024. Despite increased defence spending and U.S. alliance support, the military is 50,000 soldiers short of its requirements, raising long-term national security concerns.

Aug 11

Armenia, Azerbaijan Release US-Brokered Peace Deal Text

Armenia and Azerbaijan published the text of a U.S.-brokered peace agreement pledging to respect each other's territorial integrity and renounce the use of force, aiming to end nearly four decades of conflict. The draft, initialled in Washington with U.S. President Donald Trump, still awaits formal signing. A key hurdle remains Azerbaijan's demand for Armenia to amend its constitution, which Baku says implies territorial claims. The accord, welcomed by the EU, Turkey, and Russia, bans foreign troop deployments and could reshape the energy-rich South Caucasus region long fractured by war and closed borders.

India Slams Pakistan over Reported Nuclear Remarks

India accused Pakistan of "sabre rattling" after media reports quoted Pakistani army chief Asim Munir as making nuclear threats during a U.S. visit. Indian officials called the alleged comments "irresponsible," warning they underscored Pakistan's recklessness. Islamabad denied the remarks, stressing it remains a "responsible nuclear weapon state" with strict civilian oversight.

The controversy comes amid renewed tensions following deadly clashes in May and heightened U.S.-Pakistan engagement under President Donald Trump. India's foreign ministry said the international community should note the risks of such rhetoric, particularly when voiced abroad in a friendly third country.

US Declares Pakistani Baloch Separatists a Terrorist Group

The United States has designated Pakistan's Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) as a foreign terrorist organization, the State Department announced. The BLA, the most powerful of several separatist groups in Balochistan, operates near the Afghan and Iranian borders in a mineral-rich region central to China's Gwadar port projects. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio cited the group's March hijacking of a Jaffar Express train, which killed 31 people and left hundreds hostage. The designation imposes sanctions and bans material support, underscoring Washington's concern over escalating violence in the region.

Australia to Recognise Palestinian State at UN in September

Australia will recognise a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly in September, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced. The move, coordinated with France, Britain and Canada, seeks to build momentum for a two-state solution and a Gaza ceasefire. Albanese said recognition depends on commitments from the Palestinian Authority, excluding Hamas. Israel's ambassador criticised the decision, warning it undermines hostage negotiations. Albanese said expanding Israeli settlements and Gaza's devastation compelled the move. Canberra also signed five agreements with the Palestinian Authority, aiming to contribute to reconstruction and reinforce governance reforms. The U.S. expressed caution over the decision.

Aug 12

Rahul Gandhi, Opposition Leaders Detained in Election Panel Protest

Indian police detained dozens of opposition leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, during a protest in New Delhi against alleged electoral malpractices. Around 300 lawmakers marched from parliament to the Election Commission, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP of manipulating voter lists through deletions and duplicate entries. Gandhi



called the protest a fight “to save the constitution.” The Election Commission denied wrongdoing, insisting revisions were routine. The BJP dismissed the opposition’s claims as an attempt to spread “anarchy” after recent electoral defeats, while critics warned the accusations could further strain confidence in India’s democratic process.

Malaysia, Partners Launch Peace Mission for Rohingya Refugees

Malaysia and several Southeast Asian partners will send a joint delegation to Myanmar to push for peace and humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said. The move comes as Bangladesh struggles to shelter over one million Rohingya in Cox’s Bazar. The mission, coordinated by Malaysia’s foreign minister with counterparts from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, aims to address escalating conflict in Myanmar. Anwar, speaking alongside Bangladesh’s interim leader Muhammad Yunus, stressed the urgent need for humanitarian relief. During Yunus’s visit, Malaysia and Bangladesh also signed five agreements, including defence and energy cooperation.

Aug 13

Taliban Accused of Diverting Aid US Watchdog Reports

Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers are diverting international aid through force and coercion, blocking minority groups from access and allegedly colluding with U.N. officials for kickbacks, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported. Based on nearly 90 interviews with officials and aid workers, the watchdog said donors’ intentions are undermined as aid is redirected to Taliban priorities. Taliban authorities denied the allegations, insisting aid distribution is transparent. International donors

have provided \$10.7 billion since the Taliban takeover in 2021.

UNReport Accuses Myanmar Security Forces of Systematic Torture

A new United Nations report has found evidence of systematic torture by Myanmar’s security forces, identifying high-level commanders among the perpetrators. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) documented beatings, electric shocks, gang rape, strangulation, and mutilation, often resulting in death. Children were among the victims, some detained as proxies for missing parents. Based on over 1,300 sources, including eyewitnesses and forensic evidence, the report highlights ongoing abuses since the 2021 coup. Myanmar’s military government denied the allegations, blaming “terrorists.” Investigators say the findings could strengthen future prosecutions for crimes under international law.

Aug 14

Pakistan Announces New Army Rocket Force Amid India Tensions

Pakistan will establish a new Army Rocket Force to oversee missile combat capabilities, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced. The move follows the country’s deadly conflict with India in May, the worst in decades, which saw both sides deploy missiles, drones, and fighter jets. Sharif said the new force would be equipped with modern technology and enhance Pakistan’s conventional war capabilities. A senior official confirmed it will have a separate military command dedicated to missile deployment. India dismissed the announcement as political rhetoric, as both nuclear-armed rivals continue to upgrade military arsenals amid escalating Kashmir tensions.

Militants Kill Six Policemen in Pakistan Independence Day Attacks

Militants launched 13 coordinated gun and grenade assaults across Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province overnight, killing six policemen, officials said. The attacks targeted police stations, checkpoints, and patrols in seven districts bordering Afghanistan. Police officer Mohammad Ali Babakhel confirmed the strikes occurred as Pakistan marked its 78th Independence Day. The province has faced escalating

militant violence in recent years, with security forces frequently targeted in cross-border and insurgent attacks.

US, Pakistan Eye Cooperation on Minerals and Energy

The United States is exploring new cooperation with Pakistan on critical minerals and hydrocarbons, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement marking Pakistan's Independence Day. The announcement follows a recent trade deal aimed at lowering tariffs and boosting investment. Pakistan plans to open mining ventures, particularly in Balochistan's resource-rich region, including the Reko Diq project. Rubio praised Pakistan's role in counterterrorism and trade, noting closer ties after years of strained relations. The two countries held counterterrorism talks this week in Islamabad, with Washington reaffirming its commitment to deepen economic and security partnerships with Pakistan.

Germany Reviews Fate of Afghans as Pakistan Expels Refugees

Germany is reassessing whether Afghans stranded in Pakistan with approval to resettle in Germany will be allowed entry, Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt. The move comes as Pakistan accelerates deportations of Afghans, including those awaiting German visas, ahead of its September 1 deadline. More than 2,000 Afghans in Germany's admission programme face expulsion despite being at risk under Taliban rule. Since 2021, Germany has admitted about 36,500 Afghans, but the conservative-led government plans to shut down the scheme, citing integration limits. Berlin is in talks with Islamabad to prevent deportations, with decisions on the programme expected soon.

India Rejects Court's Authority on Indus Waters Treaty

India said that the International Court of Arbitration has no authority over the Indus Waters Treaty, asserting it never recognised the court's legitimacy. The response followed a ruling backing Pakistan, which held that India must follow treaty provisions in designing hydroelectric projects on western rivers flowing into Pakistan, a long-running source of bilateral tensions.

Aug 15

South Korea to Restore Military Pact with North Korea, Ease Border Tensions

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung announced that Seoul will end some military activities along the border with North Korea, aiming to revive inter-Korean trust. Speaking on the 80th anniversary of Korea's liberation, Lee pledged to restore the 2018 September 19 Comprehensive Military Agreement, which suspended drills, live-fire exercises, and propaganda broadcasts near the Demilitarized Zone. The pact was scrapped last year amid rising tensions. While Lee urged Pyongyang to reciprocate, analysts warned the North may dismiss the overture. Lee also signalled pragmatic diplomacy with Japan ahead of his summit with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on 23 August.

China Calls for Lasting Peace on Cambodia-Thailand Border

China has urged Cambodia and Thailand to work towards restoring lasting peace along their shared border following the worst clashes in over a decade. At a trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation forum in Yunnan, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reaffirmed Beijing's support for a sustainable ceasefire and deeper regional cooperation. Discussions also covered agriculture, environmental governance, and emerging sectors such as electric vehicles and energy storage. Wang further called for enhanced law enforcement collaboration to tackle cross-border crime and protect overseas citizens, while stressing the need for stronger judicial and security cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Aug 16

Trump Urges Zelenskiy to Strike Deal as Putin Demands Donetsk

U.S. President Donald Trump told Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskiy to "make a deal" with Russia, warning "Russia is a very big power, and they're not." After meeting Vladimir Putin in Alaska, Trump relayed Moscow's demand that Kyiv cede all of Donetsk in exchange for freezing most front lines. Zelenskiy rejected the proposal, insisting on a ceasefire and security guarantees. European leaders backed Kyiv, vowing tighter sanctions on Russia. Trump said he favoured a direct peace agreement over a ceasefire. Zelenskiy

will meet Trump in Washington on August 18, potentially alongside European allies, to press Ukraine's case.

Aug 17

Flash Floods Devastate Northwestern Pakistan, Killing Hundreds

At least 337 people have died in northern Pakistan after torrential monsoon rains triggered flash floods and landslides. Buner district, three-and-a-half hours from Islamabad, was the worst-hit, with 207 deaths after a rare cloudburst dumped over 150 mm of rain in just one hour. Villages like Bayshonai Kalay were buried under rocks, trees, and mud, with survivors describing scenes of devastation and trauma. Officials warned that global warming has shifted monsoon patterns westward, intensifying disasters. More heavy rain is forecast until early September as rescue teams struggle to clear debris and recover missing bodies.

Aug 18

Myanmar to Hold First Phase of General Election on December 28

Myanmar will hold the first phase of its long-delayed general election on 28 December. The polls, the first since the 2021 military coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government, will be conducted in multiple phases through December and January for security reasons. A total of 55 political parties have registered, though most opposition groups have been barred or are boycotting the vote. Critics, including Western governments, have dismissed the election as a sham designed to cement military rule under Min Aung Hlaing amid ongoing nationwide resistance.

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