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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

January 2

Taiwan's Defense Ministry Reports Chinese Military Activity Amid Tensions

Taiwan's Defense Ministry confirmed that Chinese warplanes and warships conducted their first "combat patrol" around Taiwan in the New Year. This follows Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's renewed offer to engage in talks with Beijing. The patrol involved 22 Chinese military aircraft, including J-16 fighter jets, and Chinese warships. Taiwan forces monitored the movements. Taiwan's Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung condemned the action, calling it psychological warfare aimed at intimidating Taiwan. This military show of force follows a history of frequent Chinese military operations near the island. Beijing has yet to comment.

South Korea Demands Urgent Action Following Deadly Jeju Air Crash

South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok urged immediate action if a special inspection of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft in the country uncovers any issues, following the deadly crash of Jeju Air flight 7C2216. The crash, which killed 175 passengers and four crew members, occurred when the plane belly-landed at Muan International Airport and crashed into an embankment, bursting into flames. The flight data recorder is being sent to the U.S. for analysis with the NTSB. Choi emphasized a thorough investigation and thorough checks on aircraft operation and maintenance, while also condemning fake news and malicious online posts.

January 1

Myanmar's 2024 Census Shows Slight Population Decline Amid Ongoing Unrest

Myanmar's 2024 census reported a population of 51.3 million, slightly lower than the 51.5 million recorded in 2014. The census, conducted in October, will serve to compile voter lists for elections planned this year, which have been widely criticized by opposition groups as a sham. The country has been in turmoil since the military coup in 2021, which ousted the civilian government and sparked a violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests. Despite ongoing conflict and economic struggles, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing pledged to organize a "free and fair" election, though concerns remain over its legitimacy.

January 3

India Raises Concerns Over China's Hydropower Dam Plans on Brahmaputra River

India has voiced concerns to China regarding its plan to construct a massive hydropower dam on the Yarlung-Zangbo river in Tibet, which flows into India as the Brahmaputra. Despite Chinese assurances of minimal environmental impact, India and Bangladesh remain wary of potential downstream effects. Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal emphasized the need to safeguard downstream interests and highlighted India's monitoring efforts. Additionally, India protested China's recent establishment of new counties, including a disputed area claimed by India, reaffirming its sovereignty and opposing China's occupation of the region.

January 4

Myanmar Junta Announces Amnesty for 5,864 Prisoners on Independence Day

Myanmar's military government will release 5,864 prisoners, including 180 foreigners, in an amnesty to mark the nation's independence day, state media reported. The country has been in crisis since the military's 2021 coup, which ousted the elected government and suppressed pro-democracy protests, leading to a nationwide armed rebellion. The junta plans to hold elections this year, though opposition groups dismiss it as a sham. Notably absent from the amnesty is former leader Aung San Suu Kyi, serving a 27-year sentence on multiple charges, all of which she denies.

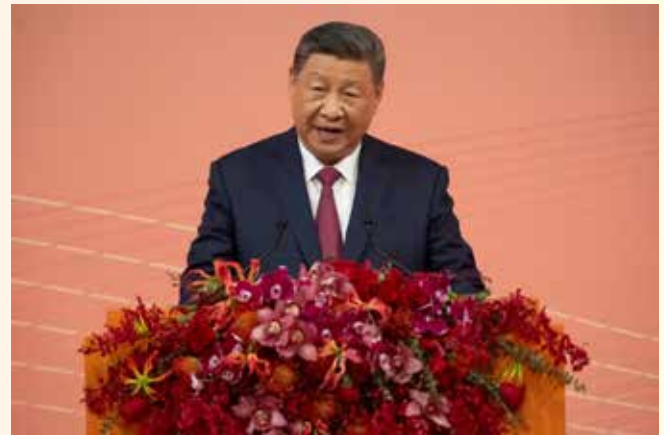
January 5

Malaysia Sends Away Boats with 300 Undocumented Myanmar Migrants

Malaysia's coast guard escorted two boats carrying nearly 300 undocumented Myanmar migrants from its waters near Langkawi, citing exhaustion due to lack of food and water. Authorities provided supplies before the boats were sent away. Director-General Mohd Rosli Abdullah stated that Malaysia is coordinating with Thai authorities for further information. The coast guard did not specify if the migrants were Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority in Myanmar. The interception follows the detention of 196 Myanmar migrants, including children and women, on Langkawi's shores. Malaysia continues to crack down on undocumented migrants, including Rohingya refugees.

January 6

Xi Jinping Declares Corruption the Greatest Threat to China's Communist Party



President Xi Jinping emphasized that corruption remains the most significant threat to China's Communist Party, as he addressed the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection's congress. Xi's remarks follow a series of high-profile corruption probes in 2023, implicating senior officials across various sectors, including finance, energy, and the military. Notably, the fall of top officials like Admiral Miao Hua and former Defence Minister Wei Fenghe highlights the pervasive nature of corruption within China's leadership. Xi warned that corruption is on the rise and vowed to intensify the crackdown, which saw a record 58 senior officials investigated last year.

Philippines Mobilizes Forces Against Chinese Coast Guard "Monster" Vessel

The Philippines has deployed military and coast guard assets to monitor China's largest coast guard vessel, 5901, in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), condemning the ship's presence as "intimidation, coercion, and aggression." The 165-meter-long vessel was spotted 65 to 70 nautical miles off Zambales province. National Security Council spokesperson Jonathan Malaya warned of an appropriate response to any provocative action. Tensions between the Philippines and China have escalated, with Beijing's expansive South China Sea claims rejected by a 2016 international ruling. The Philippines vowed to bolster its maritime presence to safeguard its fishermen.

January 7

Deadly Earthquake Strikes Tibet Leaving Over 126 Dead

A powerful 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck near Tibet's holy city of Shigatse, killing at least 126 people and reducing hundreds of homes to rubble, according to Chinese authorities. The tremors, felt across Nepal, Bhutan, and India, originated 80 km north of Mount Everest. The U.S. Geological Service reported a magnitude of 7.1. As rescue efforts continue in the freezing temperatures, with forecasts dropping to minus 16°C, the region grapples with the devastating aftermath. Tingri county, the epicentre, is a key access point to the Everest region.

January 8

U.S. Warns of North Korea's Military Gains from Fighting in Ukraine

The United States cautioned that North Korea is gaining critical combat experience and military advancements by deploying troops alongside Russia in its conflict with Ukraine. Deputy U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Dorothy Camille Shea, revealed that over 12,000 North Korean troops are fighting in Russia's Kursk region. Shea warned the U.N. Security Council that North Korea's enhanced military capabilities could heighten regional tensions and bolster its global arms trade. These developments come as North Korea tested a new intermediate-range hypersonic ballistic missile, escalating concerns about its growing military prowess.

January 9

Taliban Hails India as Key Partner in High-Level Talks

In their highest-level talks since taking power, the Taliban described India as a "significant regional and economic partner" following a meeting between India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai. Discussions centered on strengthening ties and boosting trade through Iran's Chabahar Port, bypassing Pakistani ports. Despite not officially recognizing the Taliban, India maintains a presence in Kabul for trade and aid. The talks come amid regional interest from China and Russia in Afghan investments, potentially unsettling Pakistan, which has a contentious relationship with both Afghanistan and India.

January 10

U.S. Urges Stability Amid South Korean Political Turmoil

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan expressed concerns about North Korea exploiting South Korea's political unrest, emphasizing the need for Washington to assist in stabilizing the region.



Despite the turmoil, Sullivan affirmed the strength of the U.S.-South Korean alliance. He highlighted the deteriorating situation regarding North Korea's nuclear ambitions, cautioning against the negative trend. Addressing South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's controversial martial law declaration, Sullivan criticized it as shocking and wrong but voiced confidence in South Korea's resilience as a robust democracy committed to its alliance with the U.S.

U.N. Rules Australia's Offshore Detention Violates Human Rights

A U.N. committee concluded that Australia breached a human rights treaty by detaining asylum seekers, including minors, on Nauru despite granting them refugee status. Australia's offshore processing policy, in place since 2013, has faced criticism from rights groups. The U.N. Human Rights Committee found Australia violated provisions against arbitrary detention and the right to challenge detention. It urged compensation for victims and measures to prevent recurrence. Australia, asserting limited control over Nauru's facilities, engaged with the U.N. on the matter. The controversial policy remains popular domestically, with the government defending its fairness and respect for detainees.

January 11

Deadly Air Strike in Myanmar's Rakhine State Kills Dozens

An air strike by Myanmar's military junta in Rakhine state killed over 40 people, including civilians, this week, according to the United Nations and local reports. The attack, targeting Kyauk Ni Maw village, destroyed hundreds of homes. The Arakan Army and the National Unity Government confirmed the casualties. Myanmar has been mired in conflict since the military coup in 2021, sparking a civil war. The UN called for adherence to international humanitarian law, while activists from the Blood Money Campaign urged global sanctions to halt the junta's access to aviation fuel, aiming to end such air strikes.

January 12

U.S.-Japan Ties Endure Amid Nippon Steel Controversy

The foreign ministers of Japan and the United States reaffirmed their nations' strong ties, despite recent tensions over U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to block Nippon Steel's \$14.9 billion bid for U.S. Steel. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba called the move "perplexing," but after a meeting in Tokyo, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japan's Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya emphasized the enduring strength of their bilateral relationship. While concerns about potential impacts on Japanese investment persist, analysts believe shared security interests, particularly regarding China, will mitigate any long-term strain.

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