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# Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

**April 17**

### China Bolsters Military Presence Along Myanmar Border

Amidst escalating clashes between Myanmar's ruling junta and rebel factions, China conducted air defense and live-fire exercises near its border with Myanmar. This action follows the capture of a significant Myanmar town near the Thai border by rebel forces, triggering a refugee influx into Thailand. China, concerned about potential trade disruptions and refugee flows, has positioned itself as a mediator in the conflict. Nonetheless, it underscores its commitment to preserving national sovereignty and border stability. While part of an annual routine, these drills underscore China's security apprehensions in the volatile border region with Myanmar.

**April 18**

### Southeast Asian Foreign Ministers Call for Ceasefire in Myanmar

Southeast Asian foreign ministers issued a statement urging an immediate halt to violence in Myanmar's border regions. They expressed grave concern for civilians' safety and stressed the urgency of dialogue. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) emphasized the need for all parties to exercise restraint, adhere to international humanitarian law, and take measures to de-escalate tensions, ensuring the protection and safety of civilians.

**April 19**

### Armenia Agrees to Return Villages to Azerbaijan in Step Towards Peace Deal

Armenia has agreed to return several villages to Azerbaijan, marking a significant step towards a peace agreement after two wars since the Soviet Union's collapse. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry hailed the return of four villages near the shared border, calling it a "historic event." Armenia sees reduced border risks and enhanced security. While only "two and a half villages" are practically returned, the demarcation holds significance. These strategic settlements lie close to Armenia's main highway and a gas pipeline from Russia. The move follows border talks chaired by deputy prime ministers, with Azerbaijan pushing for their return as a precondition for peace amid shifting dynamics in Nagorno-Karabakh.

## April 20

### Heightening Conflict Along Myanmar-Thailand Border Forces Thousands to Flee

A surge in hostilities between Myanmar's military junta and insurgent factions near the Thai border has resulted in the displacement of 3,000 civilians seeking refuge in Thailand. In April, rebel forces, comprised of resistance fighters and ethnic minority factions, seized control of the vital trading town of Myawaddy, dealing a blow to the junta's authority. Despite both sides claiming advances, the situation remains precarious, prompting Thailand to closely monitor developments and prepare for potential humanitarian aid operations. The loss of Myawaddy represents a significant setback for the junta, given its pivotal role in trade and revenue generation. Thailand urges Myanmar to contain spillover effects and uphold border stability.

## April 21

### Taiwan to Discuss U.S. Funding Amid Escalating Tensions with China

Taiwan's military announced plans to engage with the United States regarding the allocation of funding from a \$95 billion legislative package, primarily aimed at supporting Ukraine and Israel, amidst renewed Chinese military activity near the island. Despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations, the United States remains Taiwan's key supporter and arms provider. Facing escalating pressure from China, Taiwan reiterated its sovereignty and expressed gratitude for U.S. congressional support. Amid complaints of delayed weapon deliveries, Taiwan seeks to bolster its combat readiness to ensure national security amid ongoing tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

## April 22

### North Korea Escalates Tensions with Ballistic Missile Salvo

North Korea launched multiple short-range ballistic missiles towards the sea off its east coast, drawing condemnation from South Korea and Japan for endangering regional stability. According to South Korea's military, the missiles traveled approximately 186 miles before plunging into the sea. The launch occurs amidst suspicions of North Korea's preparation for another spy satellite launch and its ongoing development of solid-fuel missiles under Kim Jong Un's leadership. While the U.S. sees no immediate threat from the launch, it underscores North Korea's disregard for UN sanctions aimed at restraining its ballistic missile activities.

## Iran and Pakistan Pledge to Boost Trade to \$10 Billion



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif committed to ramp up bilateral trade to \$10 billion annually, aiming to strengthen ties during Raisi's three-day visit to Pakistan. Amid tight security in the capital, the leaders aim to mend relations following recent military exchanges. Both sides agreed to bolster trade over the next five years and collaborate on combating terrorism. While current trade figures are unavailable, previous estimates suggest bilateral trade exceeded \$2 billion. Raisi's visit includes stops in Lahore and Karachi, with heightened security measures in place. Despite progress, ultimate decisions rest with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

## April 23

### Maldives Pivots Towards China After Muizzu's Party Wins Big



The party of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu secured a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections, winning 71 out of 93 seats. This result is expected to bring the Maldives closer to China and distance it from its traditional partner, India. Muizzu has pledged to end the "India First" policy, straining ties with New Delhi. The election outcome gives Muizzu more leverage to pursue a more balanced foreign policy, potentially forging closer ties with China under its Belt and Road Initiative. However, analysts suggest he is unlikely to completely sever relations with India as he seeks a more diversified approach.



## April 24

### North Korean Trade Minister Visits Iran, Hinting at Missile Collaboration

A delegation from North Korea, led by Yun Jong Ho, the cabinet minister for international trade, visited Iran, showcasing the deepening military collaboration between nations grappling with international sanctions. This rare disclosure sheds light on the suspected military alliance between the two countries, thought to involve joint efforts on ballistic missile programs, potentially including the exchange of technical know-how and components. While Iran has supplied ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict, North Korea is also suspected of providing missiles and artillery to Russia, although both nations deny these allegations. Yun Jong Ho, who has previously overseen North Korea's relations with Syria, has been actively involved in the country's expanding engagements with Russia.

### Iran Pledges Closer Ties with Sri Lanka and Asian Partners



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, during his historic visit to Sri Lanka, emphasized his country's commitment to bolstering relationships with Sri Lanka and other Asian nations. The visit marks the first by an Iranian president in 16 years and includes the signing of five Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). Inaugurating a \$514 million hydro power project, Raisi pledged Iran's support for Sri Lanka's development initiatives, offering technical and engineering assistance. Despite challenges, including U.S. sanctions and pandemic-related delays, the project promises significant benefits, adding 120MW to the national grid and providing water for agriculture and communities across three districts. Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe highlighted the importance of solidarity among southern nations in fostering mutual growth and independence.

## April 25

### Indonesian President-Elect Gains Key Political Support for New Administration

Indonesian President-elect Prabowo Subianto received a significant endorsement as the NasDem party, which previously supported his rival Anies Baswedan, pledged its "full support" for his administration.



NasDem's backing, following a meeting between Prabowo and party chief Surya Paloh, signals a potential coalition, though specifics were not disclosed. Prabowo, backed by a wide margin in the election, aims to build a parliamentary coalition for smoother governance in Southeast Asia's largest economy. With NasDem's support, Prabowo's alliance could secure a majority in the new parliament, further solidifying his mandate to lead Indonesia forward.

## April 26

### U.S.-China Talks Address Varied Challenges Amidst Tense Relations



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Beijing saw discussions with Chinese counterparts Wang Yi and Xi Jinping, focusing on managing tense relations between the superpowers. Despite efforts, little headway was made on issues like China's support for Russia in Ukraine, Taiwan tensions, and economic disputes. Blinken expressed concerns over China's role in supplying dual-use goods to Russia, impacting the conflict in Ukraine. Taiwan emerged as a sensitive issue, with China warning against U.S. interference. Economic matters featured prominently, with both sides grappling with trade imbalances. Efforts to foster people-to-people ties included cultural exchanges, reflecting attempts to ease diplomatic strains.

## Sri Lanka to Hand Over Management of Chinese-Built Airport to Indian and Russian Companies

Sri Lanka announced plans to transfer management of the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA), a Chinese-funded project, to Indian and Russian firms in a bid to stem financial losses. Built in 2013 with controversy surrounding its operations, the airport's management will now be overseen by Shaurya Aeronautics (Pvt) Ltd. of India and Airports of Regions Management Company of Russia for a 30-year period. Sri Lanka is also in talks with China EXIM Bank to restructure the airport loan, amid broader efforts to address mounting debt and stabilize the economy following a recent IMF bailout.

**April 27**

## North Korea Slams U.S. Over 'Human Rights Politicization'

North Korea has levied accusations against the United States, alleging the politicization of human rights matters within its borders. Pyongyang condemned what it termed as political provocations and conspiracies orchestrated by Washington, utilizing human rights as a pretext for invasive and hostile actions against North Korea. These assertions followed the release of the U.S. State Department's annual report highlighting notable human rights violations in North Korea. Additionally, Pyongyang criticized the U.S. for urging a cessation of missile launches while seemingly disregarding a recent satellite launch by South Korea. North Korea has reaffirmed its commitment to bolstering space reconnaissance capabilities as part of its security measures.

**April 28**

## Pakistan Prime Minister Discusses New IMF Loan Program



Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif engaged in talks with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva during the World Economic Forum in Riyadh, focusing on securing a larger, long-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreement. The current \$3 billion standby arrangement, vital for economic stability, is set to expire soon. Discussions centered on consolidating gains made over the past year and ensuring continued positive economic growth. The IMF executive board's impending decision on a \$1.1 billion funding tranche underscores the urgency. Pakistan's economy, facing a significant balance of payments crisis, seeks stability through a new IMF program, aiming for sustainable growth amid structural reforms.

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