



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDIA'S PROXIMITY ARCHIVES

March 4, 2026

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South Asia:

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Delhi Policy Group

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ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

India's Proximity Archives

India's Proximity Archives covers major developments in South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, Central Asia and Indian Ocean Region of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open-source media. The research team includes Shreyas Deshmukh, Sanket Joshi, Jayantika Rao T.V, Divya Rai and Arshiya Chaturvedi, Research Associates. Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Sanket Joshi at sanket@dpg.org.in.

Cover Images:

West Asia: Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Jerusalem on February 25-26, 2026. Source: [Official X Handle/Narendra Modi](#)

East Asia: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on February 25, 2026. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China](#)

West Asia: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in US-Israeli military strike in Tehran on February 28, 2026. Source: [Islamic Republic News Agency](#)

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South Asia

by

Shreyas Deshmukh

Nepal will hold its [general election on March 5](#) to choose a new government. This election is the first since the CPN (UML) leader KP Sharma Oli led government was overthrown by youth-led anti-corruption demonstrations in September 2025. Nearly 19 million people are expected to vote for 275 members of parliament, from a pool of over 3,400 candidates. The [leading candidates](#) for the prime ministerial position include Balendra Shah of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP); Gagan Thapa of the Nepali Congress; KP Sharma Oli of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML); and Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Nepali Communist Party (NCP). Reports hint that Balendra Shah is the frontrunner in anti-system sentiment, even though reliable opinion polls are absent. The election campaign focuses on issues such as government mismanagement, corruption, joblessness, and the emigration of young people.

Nepal's progress is critically dependent on the first general election after the Gen-Z protests, which is poised to redefine the nation's path beyond traditional ideological and dynastic politics.

Following the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in coordinated US-Israeli air strikes on Tehran, violent protests erupted across Pakistan on March 1st, resulting in the [deaths of at least 19 people](#) and injuring more than a hundred. Ten people died in Karachi during fighting outside the US consulate, marking the worst violence. In Islamabad, two protesters were killed, and at least seven more lives were lost in POK. In light of the widespread national unrest, the government implemented Section 144 in Punjab, Sindh, and Islamabad, and a curfew in select areas of POK. Meanwhile, border disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan persisted, as both nations alleged the [capture](#) of opposing military installations and the elimination of enemy forces. Thousands were displaced as Pakistan conducted [airstrikes](#) on Bagram Airbase, Kandahar, and Kabul. President Trump lauded Pakistan's airstrikes as "extraordinary," expressed [support for its leadership](#), and indicated a potential intervention in the escalating conflict. The Taliban's interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, [cautioned Pakistan](#) against actions that might necessitate the declaration of a "national uprising" and jihad.

Pakistan's strategic decisions to leverage extremist elements to achieve geopolitical objectives have led to multifaceted internal security crisis, such as conflict with Afghanistan, attacks from the TTP and Baloch insurgents, and sectarian clashes.

Other Developments

[India and Nepal sign MoU to promote bilateral cooperation](#)

[India, Bhutan step up cooperation on trans-boundary rivers, hydropower projects](#)

[Mauritius suspends diplomatic ties with the Maldives](#)

Southeast Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

On [March 3](#), Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung agreed to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation in areas including artificial intelligence (AI), the defence industry, nuclear energy and critical minerals during their summit talks in Manila. The two countries inked a total of [10 memorandums and contracts](#). In the defence sector, they agreed to institute measures such as loosening procurement conditions and expanding the range of South Korean companies eligible for no-bid contracts. The leaders also exchanged views on international affairs, including developments in the surrounding region and the Middle East. Marcos said both countries recognise uncertainties in the region, and they agreed to support the rules-based international order, including in the maritime domain.

The Marcos–Lee summit underscores a strategic alignment in defence, technology, and energy, positioning the Philippines and South Korea as partners in securing supply chains and supporting maritime stability within a rules-based order.

Following the outbreak of the US–Iran conflict, Indonesia announced that all discussions related to the Board of Peace (BOP) have been put on [hold](#). Despite this, President Prabowo Subianto has defended Indonesia's continued participation in the forum. On March 3, Foreign Minister Sugiono told reporters, "All discussions related to the Board of Peace are on hold." He added that Indonesia remains in consultation with its partners, including Gulf states, who have also been affected by recent attacks and are members of the BOP. Sugiono did not provide details on the nature of Indonesia's discussions within the forum. The briefing was notable for its high-level attendance, including former presidents Joko Widodo and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, former vice-presidents Ma'ruf Amin and Jusuf Kalla, as well as ministers and political party leaders. Indonesia's involvement in the BOP has faced domestic criticism, particularly from the Indonesian Ulema Council, the country's highest Islamic authority. In a statement on March 1, the council urged the government to withdraw from the forum, arguing that it had failed to advance "genuine independence" for Palestine. President Prabowo, however, underscored Indonesia's rationale for engagement, offering what participants described as a stark assessment: "The United Nations-led order is struggling to restrain major powers, and Indonesia has opted to engage other diplomatic forums such as the BOP."

Indonesia's decision to pause BOP discussions while still defending its membership reflects a balancing act between domestic pressures and its broader diplomatic strategy to diversify

beyond the UN system. This shows Jakarta's intent to maintain relevance in alternative multilateral forums amid shifting global power dynamics.

Other Developments

[ASEAN considering long-term Myanmar envoy, says Philippine minister](#)

[Philippines' drug war killing plan unfounded, Duterte's defence tells ICC](#)

[Manila rejects claims that US-shared bases are tied to Middle East fighting](#)

[Japan joins U.S. and Philippines for military exercises in waters near Taiwan](#)

['We can no longer swallow' US arguments: Malaysia's MPs unite to condemn strikes on Iran](#)

East Asia

by

Arshiya Chaturvedi

On February 25, [German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, during his state visit to China, met with Chinese President Xi Jinping](#) in Beijing. Highlighting the economic strengths of China and Germany, Xi called for advancing the bilateral relationship, which would serve not only their respective national interests but also Europe and the world at large. To this end, he made three propositions, including upholding mutual respect, trust, and open cooperation; facilitating the two-way flow of talent, knowledge, and technology, including collaboration on AI and other emerging tech; and strengthening cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Xi also urged the two countries to uphold the system and promote multilateralism. Chancellor Merz, speaking positively about this bilateral relationship, expressed the German government's intention to work with China to strengthen this further.

Germany, with its significant economic interdependence on China, faces a strategic dilemma of balancing economic engagement to sustain growth while mitigating security and geopolitical risks of over-dependence, such as potential coercion or supply chain disruptions.

[Japan is reportedly in negotiations with India to undertake collaborative exploration of rare earth deposits](#) located within the country. In February 2026, India's Union Minister of Mines and Coal, G Kishan Reddy, while discussing India's self-reliance in critical minerals, informed that three hard rock rare earth deposits, containing 1.29 million metric tons of rare earth oxides, have been identified in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Media reports indicate that the Japanese government will be providing both the necessary extraction technology and funding support. Hard rock mineral deposits require specialised extraction techniques, which India currently lacks.

China actively uses its rare earth dominance as a strategic tool; this collaboration will be pivotal for both Japan and India in diversifying their mineral supply.

Other Development

[The 9th Japan-UK Cyber Dialogue](#)

[Philippines, South Korea leaders pledge closer cooperation as geopolitical uncertainty mounts](#)

[Japan, South Korea raise concerns about India's steel import restrictions](#)

West Asia

by

Sanket Joshi

On February 28, 2026, the [U.S. and Israel launched a major military offensive](#) against Iran, killing its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and senior military leaders of the Islamic [Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) (IRGC). U.S. presidential envoy Steve Witkoff said that the Iranian officials continued to insist on their "[inalienable right](#)" to enrich nuclear fuel, leading Washington to initiate military action. President Trump asserted that Ali Khamenei was "[one of the most evil persons in history](#)" and his death was justice for the people killed or mutilated by the Iranian regime's "bloodthirsty thugs". Reacting sharply, Iran launched a barrage of missile and drone attacks targeting Israeli cities and [U.S. military bases in Gulf](#) countries.

The U.S. and Israel have killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the nuclear dialogue, highlighting their intent to change the clerical regime in Iran.

On February 28, India's Ministry of External Affairs expressed deep concern about the developments in Iran and the Gulf region. New Delhi called upon all sides to [exercise restraint, avoid escalation](#), and prioritise the safety of civilians. [Prime Minister Modi voiced concern](#) about missile and drone attacks against Gulf countries and Israel in telephone conversation with their leaders.

India's priority in West Asia is to protect its nationals and reinforce the message that dialogue must prevail, as around nine million Indians live and work in the region.

On March 1, China and Russia condemned the US and Israel's military attack on Iran as a blatant [violation of international law](#) and an attempt to push West Asia (Middle East) into chaos. China's position on the Iran conflict is that military actions must cease immediately, dialogue and negotiations should resume, and unilateral actions should be jointly opposed.

It is evident from China's and Russia's lack of direct military intervention in the conflict between the U.S. and Iran that their strategic partnership with Tehran has its limits.

Prime Minister Modi visited Israel from February 25-26, deepening India's special [strategic partnership with Israel for peace](#), innovation, and prosperity. The two countries pledged to deepen their defence cooperation, in both scope and scale.

PM Modi's visit to Israel demonstrates the two countries' commitment to a long-term strategic partnership rather than transactional relations.

Other Developments

[Satellite image shows impact of US-Israel strike on Iran Supreme Leader](#)

[Ali Khamenei's son Mojtaba named Iran's new Supreme Leader](#)

[Oil prices rise 1% as Iran crisis disrupts Middle East supply](#)

[Iran Is Shooting at Some of the World's Busiest Airports](#)

Central Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

On [March 3](#), Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Alibek Bakayev said Kazakhstan does not take sides in the escalating Middle East conflict and calls for disputes to be resolved exclusively through diplomatic means. "Kazakhstan advocates resolving any military conflict at the negotiating table, in accordance with international law and the UN Charter," Bakayev said, stressing that Kazakhstan's position of non-interference in the affairs of other states remains unchanged. He emphasised that "We are not taking sides – neither with Iran nor with the countries that were attacked. Our goal is to prevent such conflicts, and if they arise, they must be settled through diplomacy."

Kazakhstan's neutrality in the Middle East conflict reflects both its non-interference policy and a pragmatic effort to avoid straining ties with the United States, as Astana seeks to diversify partnerships beyond Russia and China while presenting itself as a balanced, law-abiding diplomatic actor.

On March 2, Kazakh Foreign Minister Yermek Kosherbayev [held a series of telephone conversations](#) with his counterparts from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The [ministers exchanged views](#) on the rapidly evolving military and political situation in the Middle East, stressing the need for close coordination and swift communication amid the crisis. Kosherbayev expressed gratitude to Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan – both of which share borders with Iran – for assisting in the evacuation of people fleeing Iranian territory. Their discussions took place against the backdrop of escalating hostilities: U.S. and Israeli air strikes have struck targets across Iran, prompting Tehran to launch waves of missiles and drones at Israel, U.S. military facilities, and civilian areas in Gulf states.

The coordinated calls underscore rising regional anxiety over the Iran conflict and demonstrate how the Central Asian "C5" format is evolving beyond economic cooperation into a practical diplomatic mechanism for managing external crises.

Other Developments

[Kazakhstan looks west after pipeline hit, avoiding China dependency](#)

[Three Main Principles of Kazakhstan's Afghan Policy](#)

[Central Asia's plan to bypass Russia and Iran? Railways through Afghanistan and Pakistan](#)

Indian Ocean Region

by

Divya Rai

Operation Epic Fury, [launched by U.S. Central Command](#), targeted Iran's Navy and IRGC Navy assets, with U.S. Navy vessels initiating widespread strikes on Persian Gulf naval bases like Bandar Abbas and Konarak. Destruction of the Iranian Navy and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy is a priority of the ongoing Operation Epic Fury. Key targets within the first 48 hours included anti-ship missile sites, frigates (Bayandor, Alvand, and Jamaran classes), the drone carrier IRIS Shahid Bagheri (a converted containership), the forward basing ship IRIS Makran, midget submarines, and Kilo-class boats, resulting in sunken vessels, fires, and destroyed infrastructure as confirmed by satellite imagery from Vantor and Planet. Satellite photos also show the Iranian forward basing ship IRIS *Makran* was struck while at the pier at Bandar Abbas. CENTCOM reports the complete denial of Iran's 11 warships in the Gulf of Oman, refuting Iranian claims of hitting USS Abraham Lincoln, while U.S. forces like Hellfire-armed Seahawks and littoral combat ships counter asymmetric threats such as small boats, drones, mines, and swarm tactics. Despite the devastation, IRGC commanders vowed to enforce a Strait of Hormuz closure, threatening global oil and gas flows.

U.S. strikes on Iran have inflicted severe military, leadership, and economic blows while amplifying risks of a multi-front war involving Israel, Gulf states, Hezbollah, and proxies across multiple countries. Militarily, the strikes decapitated IRGC leadership, sank naval assets, and neutralised missiles, drones, and nuclear sites, but provoked retaliatory barrages on U.S. bases, Israel, and Saudi refineries, straining regional alliances and U.S. stockpiles.

Iran has effectively [halted most oil and gas exports](#) through the Strait of Hormuz amid escalating tensions from Operation Epic Fury. Iranian IRGC forces issued warnings prohibiting vessel passage, coupled with drone strikes on at least four tankers, causing an 80% drop in maritime traffic, as reported by Lloyd's List Intelligence. At least four tankers were damaged in attacks, including incidents like a projectile exploding near a ship off Sharjah and fires at Saudi's Ras Tanura refinery and UAE ports from drone debris, prompting QatarEnergy to pause LNG production and major shippers such as Maersk, MSC, and Hapag-Lloyd to suspend operations. This de facto closure disrupts roughly 20% of global crude oil and significant LNG flows, with shipping firms suspending operations and over 150 vessels anchoring outside the strait, driving Brent crude prices up 13% to \$82 per barrel.

A widening Middle East conflict, fuelled by U.S. strikes on Iranian naval assets and Tehran's retaliatory de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz, threatens the most severe gas market disruption since Russia's 2022 Ukraine invasion rerouted global LNG flows.

Other Developments

[INS Tarangini arrived at Trincomalee Harbour, Sri Lanka, on a training visit](#)

[Iran destroys U.S. Navy ship carrying ammunition in the Indian Ocean region](#)

[INS Sudarshini arrives at Alexandria after a milestone transit through the Suez Canal](#)



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