



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDIA'S PROXIMITY ARCHIVES

March 18, 2026

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South Asia:

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Volume IV, Issue 11



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:

South Asia: The first parliamentary session was held on March 12, 2026 after the recent national elections in Bangladesh. Source: [X/bdbnp78](#)

Southeast Asia: The Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Situation in the Middle East, held via videoconference and chaired by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Theresa P. Lazaro was held on March 13, 2026. Source: [X/@ASEAN](#)

Indian Ocean Region: INS Trikand concluded its port call at Port Louis on March 13, 2026 after participating in the 58th Mauritius National Day celebrations. Source: [PIB](#)

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Watch Points

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South Asia

by

Shreyas Deshmukh

A spokesperson for the Taliban stated that 400 individuals lost their lives in a March 16 [airstrike](#) by Pakistan against a 2,000-bed addiction treatment facility in Kabul. The air and artillery strike by Pakistan in Afghanistan have [intensified](#) the conflict between the two nations. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) [condemned the attack](#), emphasising that international law mandates protection of medical facilities, personnel, and civilians. Pakistan's government [dismissed accusations](#), indicating that the target was a former U.S. military installation presently utilised by Afghan Taliban units an ammunition depot. India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [denounced the attack](#), stating that "the international community must hold the perpetrators of this criminal act accountable." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China has asserted that prompt, [direct dialogue](#) between the Taliban and Pakistan is a prerequisite for de-escalation.

The Taliban government in Afghanistan, lacking the conventional capacity to defend against Pakistani assaults, might resort to guerrilla warfare, which would escalate the insurgency across the Af-Pak region, contradicting Pakistan's stated aim of reducing such activities.

The first parliamentary session was held on March 12 after the recent national elections in Bangladesh, which saw the BNP, headed by Tariq Rehman, secure a win. BNP standing committee member Major (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmad and Laysar Kamal have been [assigned](#) the roles of speaker and deputy speaker. President Md Sahabuddin delivered the inaugural address despite protest by opposition party [Jamaat-e-Islami](#), which was demanding his resignation. Parliament engaged in deliberation concerning the establishment of a constitution reform council for the implementation of proposals outlined in the July National Charter. The newly formed government, meanwhile, is tasked with the [immediate challenge](#) of addressing the nation's energy security, in light of supply chain disruptions caused by the persistent conflict between Iran and the United States. The Bangladesh government has [formally written](#) to the Indian government, requesting an additional supply of disel. Similar requests have also been [made to India by other countries](#) in the region, including Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

In the wake of economic instability and under new administrations, a majority of India's neighbouring countries are requesting Indian assistance to address supply chain disruptions stemming from the conflict in West Asia.

Other Developments

[Bhutan-Japan held summit level meeting on March 13](#)

[Sri Lanka declares Wednesdays off as Asian countries try to conserve fuel](#)

[Sri Lanka repatriates remains of 84 Iranian sailors killed in U.S. attack](#)

[India-Maldives ink framework for FTA negotiations](#)

Southeast Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

On [March 13](#), ASEAN Foreign Ministers convened a Special Meeting to exchange views on the evolving situation in the Middle East and to address its implications for ASEAN. The meeting expressed serious [concern over the escalation of conflict](#) following the attacks initiated by Israel and the United States against Iran, and the subsequent retaliatory attacks by Iran against several countries in the region. This heightens tensions in the Middle East and poses a grave threat to the lives and safety of civilians, as well as to regional and global peace and stability. The meeting called on all countries to [respect international law, including the UN Charter](#). It also focussed on the [economic ramifications of the conflict](#), underscoring “the importance of maintaining stable, open, and reliable global energy supply chains and maritime trade routes, and minimising disruption to the flow of energy and essential goods, including food, to safeguard economic stability in ASEAN.”

ASEAN's statement reflects concern over the escalating conflict in the Middle East, but it deliberately avoids taking sides; instead, it emphasises safeguarding Southeast Asia's economic lifelines and signaling its relevance in global governance by highlighting the need to protect energy security, maritime trade, and regional stability.

On March 16, [Myanmar's parliament](#) convened for the first time since the 2021 coup after the recent elections saw the pro-military party - Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) winning most of the seats. During the session, Khin Yi, the chairman of the military-backed USDP, was elected speaker of the lower house. He is a former general and police chief, widely regarded as a close ally of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's military ruler. In addition, a new five-member panel, the Union Consultative Council, will be established in what some experts have called a “superbody” that would allow Min Aung Hlaing to maintain his grip on both the military and civilian administration. An official announcement from the Union Election Commission said the upper house of parliament will meet on March 18 and a joint session was anticipated on March 20.

The military's dominant presence at parliament's opening confirms its continued grip on power, effectively enabling the junta to decide the next president – widely expected to be coup leader Min Aung Hlaing himself.

Other Developments

[Broad consensus reached at China-Vietnam '3+3' strategic dialogue: Chinese FM](#)

[Marcos' anti-dynasty bill emerges as key battleground in corruption fight](#)

[Thai parliament to elect new PM on March 19, house speaker says](#)

[Thailand to start building border fences after Cambodia clashes](#)

East Asia

by

Arshiya Chaturvedi

NATO is not in East Asia! Japan does not plan to [dispatch naval vessels](#) to escort ships in the Middle East, according to Japan's Prime Minister Takaichi. This was after US President Donald Trump called on allies to send ships to the Middle East. Australia too said it will not be deploying a vessel to the Strait of Hormuz. South Korea emphasised its close coordination with the US on the matter and noted its course of action will be decided after a careful strategic review. President Trump has also urged China to aid in unblocking the strait.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East is testing US alliances, with allies practising restraint under the strategic calculation which prioritises proximate regional threats over wider global security commitments.

China has [suspended the export](#) of refined fuel, including gasoline, diesel and aviation fuel, among other things. China's National Development & Reform Commission (NDRC) issued this restriction to mitigate any potential domestic fuel crisis amid the ongoing conflict in the Middle East involving Iran, Israel, the US and its allies in the region.

This strategic response by China underscores how energy insecurity in one region can trigger defensive economic strategies with global repercussions.

On March 14, North Korea launched multiple [ballistic missiles](#) from its west coast, while the US and South Korea are conducting their 10-day joint military exercise, Freedom Shield. As per reports, a total of 10 missiles were fired with an ascended maximum altitude of 80 kilometres (50 miles) and travelled a distance of 340 kilometres before landing near the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula, outside Japan's EEZ.

North Korea's military counteraction exemplifies the classic case of the Security Dilemma, wherein an enhancement of military coordination and strategic alignment between the US and South Korea exacerbates perceived threats to North Korea's security.

Other Development

[Japan-U.S.-ROK Public-Private Event to Counter North Korea's Cyber Threats in Europe](#)

[Xi Jinping's anticorruption drive sweeps up senior Chinese military chiefs](#)

[RIL signs long-term \\$3 billion pact with South Korea's Samsung C&T for supply of green ammonia](#)

West Asia

by

Sanket Joshi

On March 17, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) announced that Ali Larijani, Secretary of [Iran's Supreme National Security Council](#), and Gholamreza Soleimani, the [Commander of the Basij](#), Internal Security Force, were killed in a precision strike in Tehran. Larijani was acting as the de facto leader of Iran following the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Reacting sharply, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) [launched missile attacks](#) on Tel Aviv using cluster warheads. According to reports, Iran's new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, has [rejected de-escalation proposals](#) conveyed to Tehran by intermediaries, asserting that the U.S. and Israel must first be "brought to their knees".

Israel's targeted killing of Ali Larijani removes another key pillar of Iran's clerical regime, in line with the US-Israeli strategy of regime change in Tehran.

Amidst Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a phone conversation with Iran's President Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian on March 12. PM Modi expressed deep concern about the evolving security situation in West Asia and [reiterated India's call for dialogue](#) and diplomacy to resolve issues in the region. The Iranian government has permitted some India-flagged [oil tankers carrying liquefied petroleum gas](#) (LPG) to cross the Strait of Hormuz in response to India's concerns regarding a critical shortage of cooking gas.

India's priority in its diplomacy with the Gulf nations, Israel, and Iran is to ensure the safety and well-being of Indian nationals in the region and secure uninterrupted transit of energy and goods.

Other Developments

[LPG vessel Shivalik arrives at Gujarat's Mundra Port after crossing Strait of Hormuz](#)

[Trump says NATO's refusal to help on Iran is "very foolish mistake"](#)

[UAE could join any US-led effort to secure Strait of Hormuz, says senior official](#)

Central Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed Kazakhstan's new Constitution and a decree on its implementation following the [March 15](#) national referendum, in which 87.15% of participating voters approved it. The Constitution will come into force on July 1, and March 15 has been designated Constitution Day. [According to Tokayev](#), the Constitution strengthens sovereignty, protects territorial integrity, and guarantees citizens' rights and freedoms. It also establishes conditions for the advancement of education, science, innovation, and culture, while ensuring environmental protection and upholding the rule of law. Five new constitutional laws will be submitted to Parliament, including laws on the President, the Kurultai (Congress in Kazakh), the Khalyk Kenesi (People's Council), the status of the capital, and the administrative-territorial structure. In addition, more than 60 existing laws will be amended. The new constitution also provides President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev with a loophole allowing him to stay in power beyond 2029.

The referendum is more than a routine constitutional amendment; it sets a new legal foundation. Broader in scope than a single-policy vote, it carries deeper geopolitical weight by consolidating Tokayev's authority and reinforcing regime stability.

On [March 17](#), Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov held a phone call with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi to discuss the latest developments in the region and bilateral relations. During the call, [Araghchi](#) stated that US and Israeli attacks on Iran violate international law. Araghchi outlined Iran's position regarding "the military aggression" by the US and Israel, stressing that under international law, "no country should allow its territory or facilities to be used for acts of aggression against others." He also warned against the US and Israeli "disinformation campaigns aimed at damaging Iran's relations with other countries," adding that Iran's defensive measures "target only those responsible for attacks and the facilities used to carry them out."

The phone call between the two foreign ministers was less about reconciliation after Iran's strikes on Azerbaijan and more about Tehran's attempt to reshape the narrative and discourage Baku from aligning with Israel and the US. By stressing US and Israeli "military aggression," Araghchi cast Iran as a victim of external hostility, diverting attention from its own attack on Azerbaijan.

Other Developments

[Tokayev Says Kazakhstan Will Continue Supporting 'Board of Peace' Initiative](#)

[Indians in Iran move into Armenia, Azerbaijan amid West Asia war as MEA facilitates land-border transit](#)

Indian Ocean Region

by

Divya Rai

INS Trikanth [concluded its port call](#) at Port Louis on March 13 after participating in the 58th Mauritius National Day celebrations. The port call included a series of professional interactions, cultural engagements, sports activities and community outreach initiatives aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation. Training sessions were also conducted onboard for personnel of the Mauritius National Coast Guard on harbour and sea watchkeeping practices, including firefighting and damage control. After departing Port Louis, INS Trikanth undertook a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance jointly with the Mauritius Coast Guard.

This port call advances joint Indian Ocean stability, protecting Mauritius' EEZ while exemplifying India's strategic pivot through operational interoperability.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) [reported](#) about 3,200 vessels and 20,000 seafarers trapped west of the strait due to escalating attacks on merchant ships. The 36th Extraordinary Session of the IMO Council, chaired by Spain's Victor Jiménez, was convened on March 18-19, 2026, to address security, transit disruptions, and potential naval escorts. According to the IMO Secretariat, international shipping was immediately impacted at the start of the crisis, with four confirmed attacks on merchant vessels reported on March 1, 2026. So far the four confirmed incidents have killed at least two seafarers and one port worker, amid broader violence involving missiles, drones, and explosive boats in the Arabian Sea, the Sea of Oman, and the Persian Gulf. Iran-linked forces, including the Revolutionary Guards, conducted over 21 attacks, drastically reducing tanker traffic to near zero and stranding hundreds of ships. Specific incidents include strikes on the Thai-flagged *Mayuree Naree* (fire and engine damage, three crew missing) and Marshall Islands-flagged *Star Gwyneth* (hull damage). IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez condemned the attacks, urging de-escalation, seafarer protections, and adherence to SOLAS, the ISPS Code, and Best Management Practices (BMP).

The Strait of Hormuz crisis, triggered by US-Israel strikes on Iran, has prompted IRGC attacks that halted shipping, stranding thousands of ships and seafarers while spiking energy prices from 20% of global oil flows. Strategic reserves offer short-term relief, but IMO's emergency meeting cannot offset rerouting delays, leading to 5-20% cost surges, and fertiliser shortages hitting economies like India.

Indian-flagged LPG tankers Shivalik (IMO 9356892) and Nanda Devi (IMO 9232503), owned by Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), [successfully transited](#) the Strait of Hormuz with Iranian approval and Indian Navy escort after loading Qatari gas at Ras Laffan. This passage occurred amid regional tensions, likely tied to the ongoing Iran-Israel-US conflict disrupting the strait. The [passage follows](#) intensive diplomatic efforts between New Delhi and Tehran. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has held four rounds of talks with his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, since the crisis began. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also held high-level discussions with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to secure the safe transit of Indian vessels.

Iran maintains unimpeded access to the Strait of Hormuz amid the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict. This selective control allows Tehran to sustain oil exports while paralysing commercial traffic from adversaries, leveraging the strait as asymmetric leverage.

Other Developments

[The United Arab Emirates may join a U.S.-led effort to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz](#)

[Iran allowing more ships through Strait of Hormuz](#)

[7th Aerospace & Defence MRO South Asia Summit 2026 was conducted in India](#)



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