India’s Proximity Archives
March 15, 2023

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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.

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India’s Proximity Archives

India’s Proximity Archives covers major developments in South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, China, and Central Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open-source media. The research team includes Angana Guha Roy, Ph.D., Shreyas Deshmukh, Sanket Joshi, Anshita Shukla and Jayantika Rao T.V, Research Associates. Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Sanket Joshi at sanket@dpg.org.in.

Cover Image:

South Asia: 19th BIMSTEC Ministers Meeting, March 9, 2023. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand
Southeast Asia: India’s Secretary (East) Saurabh Kumar addressing the East Asia Summit (EAS) Senior Officials’ Meeting in Jakarta on March 8, 2023. (Source: MEA India/ Official Twitter)
West Asia: India’s Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, met UAE’s Minister of Economy, Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, in New Delhi on March 13, 2023. Source: Twitter/@ PiyushGoyal
Central Asia: Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud headed the 18th meeting of the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) from March 10-11, 2023. Source: Twitter

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Pakistan was engulfed in political chaos as the Islamabad High Court ordered the arrest of PTI leader Imran Khan. Following the order, as Islamabad Police and Rangers personnel reached the Zaman Park residence of Imran Khan on March 14, they were engaged in a pitched battle with PTI workers. Protests have erupted in many other major cities, such as Peshawar and Karachi. Imran Khan remained defiant, refused to get arrested, and called on his supporters to resist the establishment.

Meanwhile, former DG ISI Lt Gen Faiz Hamid, who was considered to be a close ally of Imran Khan being investigated for alleged corruption. The COAS Gen Asim Munir once again reiterated that he won’t interfere in political matters.

The series of terrorist attacks by ISKP is continued in Afghanistan, the Taliban governor of Balkh province was killed in a blast on March 9. In another attack on March 11, during an award ceremony for journalists in Mazar-e-Sharif one person was killed.

The 19th Ministerial Meeting of the BIMSTEC was held virtually in Bangkok on March 9. During the meeting, the Ministers approved rules of Procedure for Core BIMSTEC Mechanisms, Sectoral BIMSTEC Mechanisms, BIMSTEC’s External Relations for submission to the 6th BIMSTEC Summit and draft agreement between India and the BIMSTEC Secretariat for establishing BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in India.

After the third Foreign Office Consultation with Thailand, held in Dhaka on March 14, Bangladesh’s Foreign Secretary said that his country is interested in joining the Myanmar-India-Thailand connectivity project.
Other Developments

Pakistan said it had signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran to supply 100 megawatts of electricity to Gwadar.

Russia has proposed exporting liquefied natural gas to Bangladesh as the latter seeks to meet its long-term energy needs.

Bangladesh and Australia discuss Indo-Pacific, IORA, security cooperation

The Maldivian Government announced that it will resume diplomatic ties with Iran after China brokered reconciliation between Riyadh and Teheran.

On March 13, senior leader Ram Chandra Paudel was sworn in as Nepal's third president.
Southeast Asia  
by  
Anshita Shukla  

The 25th ASEAN-India Senior Officials’ Meeting, co-chaired by Saurabh Kumar, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs of India, and Albert Chua, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, was held in Jakarta on March 7. The meeting discussed potential areas of cooperation including maritime activities, transnational crimes, cybersecurity, science and technology, transport and connectivity, digital economy, and fintech, in order to further strengthen ASEAN-India comprehensive strategic partnership.

The East Asia Summit Senior Officials’ Meeting (EAS SOM) was convened on March 8 chaired by Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, SOM Leader of Indonesia. India’s Secretary (East) Saurabh Kumar underscored the pivotal role of East Asia Summit as a leading mechanism for promotion of a free, open, inclusive & rules-based Indo-Pacific. He reaffirmed India’s support to ASEAN centrality and implementation of ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

The Minister for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of India, Dharmendra Pradhan met Gan Kim Yon, Minister of Trade & Industry of Singapore in New Delhi for the Singapore-India Hackathon 2023. “India, through programmes such as Skill India, is capitalising on its demographic dividend. Like India, Singapore also invests heavily in adult learning and upskilling”, Mr Gan stated during the launch of the event which comes under India’s G20 presidency. During his visit, Minister Gan also met India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar to discuss “taking forward the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable process”.

Amidst heightened tensions in the South China Sea, ASEAN announced its plans to conduct an exercise with China on a security hotline this year in an effort to prevent an accidental collision from escalating tensions in disputed South China Sea. Concurrently, Japan has joined the ASEAN emergency hotline set up to promote swift cooperation between ASEAN defence ministers in times of emergency. It is the first non-member country to join the 10 bloc members hotline.

The Philippines and United States launched three-week long annual army-to-army exercises called Salaknib on March 13. Lieutenant-General Romeo Brawner, the Philippine Army Chief, talking about the exercises said, “since this is an army-to-army exercise, we will focus on defence operations such as air defence and also our defence from the shorelines”.

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Other Developments

Malaysia keen on resuming high-speed rail project with Singapore
Malaysia buys South Korea fighter jets as ASEAN arms market grow
Philippines urged to compensate WWII sex slave survivors
West Asia

by

Sanket Joshi

On March 13, India's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, held a meeting with UAE’s Minister of Economy, Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri. The two leaders discussed gains from the India-UAE ‘Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement’ (CEPA) and accelerating ‘UPI’ (Unified Payment Interface) and ‘RuPay’ adoption in UAE. Meanwhile, reports pointed towards India preferring UAE’s Dirham over the Chinese Yuan (CNY) for trade settlements with Russia.

After the talks facilitated by China between March 6-10, 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic relations. In light of this, Chinese state media underscored Beijing’s “goodwill to promote regional and global security through its ‘Global Security Initiative’ (GSI) and political dialogue”. Welcoming the understanding reached between Iran and Saudi Arabia, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stressed that “de-escalation” between Tehran and Riyadh was not “adverse” to American interests, rather, it is a “positive development for the Middle East promoting a goal that the US has been promoting in the region”.

On March 9, during his Middle East visit, US Defence Secretary Austin met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The two leaders reiterated their resolve to “prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons”, “maintain regional security”, and “expand the circle of peace”. Secretary Austin expressed concerns over the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank and called upon Israel to work with the Palestinian Authority Security Forces to reduce violence and restore calm.

Other Developments

Israeli foreign minister likely to visit India in March
Commercial Bank ‘first in Qatar’ to launch UPI remittance service to India
Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Remarks on Saudi Arabia-Iran Talks in Beijing
The Saudi-Iran détente and its regional implications
Saudi Arabia launches new airline, Riyadh Air to connect 100 locations by 2030
Syria’s President Assad arrives in Moscow ahead of meeting with President Putin
US calls Iran’s claim of a prisoner swap deal a ‘cruel lie’
China
by
Angana Guha Roy

Xi Jinping has been handed an unprecedented third term as President, making him China’s most dominant leader in generations. In a speech to mark the start of his precedent-breaking third term, he vowed to oppose foreign interference on Taiwan, a veiled reference to increasing American support for Taipei. Li Qiang has been appointed as the country’s new premier. However, several ministries have seen their current leaders remain in place.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in its Annual Report 2021-22 released on March 13 stressed that continued unilateral attempts by China to change the Line of Actual Control (LAC) status quo have impacted India-China bilateral relationship. According to the MEA report India’s engagement with China is complex. The two sides have however, agreed to manage their differences and not allow disturbed the peace and tranquillity along the LAC.

After agreeing to restructure its loans China said that it would play a positive role in helping bankrupt Sri Lanka get through its debt crisis. At a press briefing foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said “China is ready to work with relevant countries and international financial institutions to play a positive role in helping Sri Lanka cope with its current difficulties, ease its debt burden and achieve sustainable development.”

At the annual Spring Dialogue in Dhaka Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen introduced China’s positions and propositions on various issues, including China’s economic growth target in 2023, the growth of China’s defense budget, GDI, GSI, Belt and Road cooperation between China and Bangladesh, bilateral trade and investment, displaced people from Myanmar to Bangladesh, Ukraine crisis, China-Russia relations, China-India relations, and the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Ram Chandra Poudel on assuming office as president of Nepal. In his message, Xi said he attaches great importance to the development of China-Nepal relations, and is willing to work with Poudel to carry forward the traditional friendship between the two countries, consolidate mutual political trust, advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, expand cultural and people-to-people exchanges, so as to constantly promote the strategic partnership of cooperation featuring everlasting friendship for development and prosperity.
Other development

Bipartisan resolution introduced in U.S. Senate recognising Arunachal Pradesh as integral part of India
Central Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

The eighteenth meeting of the Chief Justices/Chairpersons of the Supreme Courts of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Member States was held in New Delhi from March 10-11, 2023. Under the aegis of the Chief Justice of India D. Y. Chandrachud, the two day meeting saw the physical participation of all SCO member states, two observer states (Iran and Belarus), the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), and the SCO Secretariat. Justice Munib Akhtar of the Pakistan Supreme Court addressed the conference virtually.

Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud stressed that SCO member states should strive for judicial cooperation to make their judicial systems more approachable to people. Furthermore, D Y Chandrachud argued that the conference “allows all member and observer states to reflect on the challenges common to their jurisdictions”. During the second day of the conference, which was under the theme of ‘smart courts’, Nail Akhmetzakirov, the head of the Court Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, offered insight into his country’s new software which was developed post-Covid-19 to make the electronic system in judicial services more accessible. Moreover, Xiaochen Qiann, the Chief Judge of the case-filing division of the Supreme People’s Court of the People’s Republic of China, said that there was great importance for the “growth of the judiciary that modern public judicial services were built featuring inclusiveness, equity, convenience, efficiency, intelligence and accuracy” which is a global challenge that needs to be addressed both nationally and collectively as members of the SCO.

On March 13, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Emomali received the Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, Imangali Tasmagambetov. During the conversation, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan highlighted the “importance of the increasing cooperation in the political dimension, expanding the international activities of the CSTO, and increasing the effectiveness of military, military-technical and military-economic cooperation”. He further stressed the importance of strengthening the comprehensive work to counter challenges and threats to security, in particular, terrorism, extremism, radicalism, drug smuggling, cybercrime, and transnational organised crime.
Other Developments

**SCO Members to Consider Jointly Developing Emerging Fuel Projects**

**Doval, SCO NSAs to discuss the rise in Afghanistan drug trade and Terrorism**

**Iran-Uzbekistan Foreign Ministers Discuss Situation in Afghanistan**

**India-Uzbekistan Concluded their Joint Military Exercise ‘DUSTLIK’**

**Tajikistan Creates Restrictive Dress Code for Women**

**Uzbekistan to Hold Referendum on New Constitution that Would Allow the President to Run Again.**