



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



India's Proximity Archives

March 6, 2024



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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, 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 - Pakistan President Arif Alvi administers the oath to newly sworn-in Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the President House, on March 4, 2024. Source: [Dawn](#)

Southeast Asia - ASEAN leaders pose for the annual Family Photo during the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit 2024 in Melbourne on March 5, 2024. (Source: [Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet](#))

Central Asia - German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock hosted a trilateral meeting with her Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts in Berlin, on February 28-29, 2024. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia](#)

Indian Ocean Region - Shri Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurate new Airstrip and a Jetty at Agalega Island in Mauritius via video conferencing on February 29, 2024. Source: PIB

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South Asia

by

Shreyas Deshmukh

On March 4, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif was sworn in as the [Prime Minister of Pakistan](#). He secured the support of 201 of National Assembly member as against the 92 votes secured by his opponent Omar Ayub. Sharif extended an olive branch to the PTI in his victory speech and promised the empowerment of women, eradication of militants, and reforms in the IT sector, prisons, and the justice system. Meanwhile, PTI leaders and workers continued to stage [protests across the country](#) against the alleged rigging in the general elections.

Pashtun leader from Balochistan Mehmood Khan Achakzai submitted nomination papers to contest the upcoming [presidential election](#) on March 9 against PPP's Asif Ali Zardari. PML-N and its coalition partners back Zardari's nomination. Meanwhile, PPP leader Sarfraz Bugti with the support of PML-N, has been elected unopposed as the new [Balochistan Chief Minister](#).

The ruling coalition between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and the Sheh Bahadur Deuba-headed [Nepali Congress has collapsed](#), and a new coalition government under Prime Minister Pushpa Kumar Dahal swore in a fresh council of ministers on March 4. Dahal named a [three-member cabinet](#), including one minister each from the new coalition partners - the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) and the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP). The third minister is from his own Maoist Centre party.

The annual [India Bhutan Development Cooperation](#) Talks were held in New Delhi March 1. During the Talks, the two sides reviewed the progress of the projects supported by GoI under the 12th Five-Year Plan of Bhutan and discussed priority sectors and projects for Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan.

Other Developments

[Afghanistan invests \\$35m in Iran's Chabahar port, expanding trade routes and regional cooperation](#)

[Four 'Pakistanis' on trial for running arms to Yemen](#)

[USD 2 billion rollover by China shields forex reserves](#)

[Sri Lanka signs security pact with US to prevent illicit maritime trafficking in nuclear and radioactive material](#)

Southeast Asia

by

Anshita Shukla

The [2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit](#), marking 50 years of cooperative relations, commenced in Melbourne on March 4, 2024. Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, stated that "Australia and ASEAN must work together to turn their natural connection into a more [practical cooperation](#) on marine sustainability and security". Penny Wong, Australia's Foreign Minister, announced a funding of [64 million Australian dollars \(USD 41.8m\)](#) for maritime security to ASEAN. The funding is to assist in efforts by Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines to "delimit their maritime boundaries". In addition, Australia has also set up a 2 billion Australian dollars (US\$1.3 billion) [finance facility](#) aimed at boosting trade and investment in Southeast Asia.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. of the Philippines and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia held a [bilateral meeting](#) in Canberra on February 29, 2024. The two leaders signed multiple agreements covering issues of maritime domain, cyber and critical technology, and effective implementation of the respective competition laws and policies of the two countries. President Marcos stated that "Australia remains, and will continue to be, one of our closest friends."

On March 4, the Philippines deployed a Coast Guard vessel [two-week patrol mission](#) in Philippine Rise. The Philippine Coast Guard stated that the aim of the patrol is "to conduct maritime domain awareness, intensify its presence in the northern Luzon Island and monitor local fishermen." They will also check the reported Chinese research vessels in Benham Rise, according to the official statement.

The Philippines [accused that Chinese Coast Guard vessels](#) collided with two Philippine vessels and water cannoned a boat near Second Thomas Shoal on March 5, 2024. The incident left four crew members of the Philippines vessel injured. The Chinese Coast Guard stated that it "took control measures" against Philippine ships' "illegal intrusion" in the Spratly Islands. This comes after Philippine Foreign Minister Enrique Manalo urged China to "[stop harassing us](#)" on March 4, 2024

Other Developments

[Israeli military response gone 'too far'; Singapore to donate more aid to Gaza, foreign minister Vivian Balakrishnan says](#)

East Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

On March 5, China announced it will [boost its defence spending](#) for 2024 to 1.67 trillion Yuan (about \$232 billion), an increase of 7.2 percent over last year. The figure amounts to about 40% of China's government spending. The [official budget figure announced](#) at the opening of the legislature's annual meeting, which amounts to 1.3% of China's GDP, is considered only a fraction of spending by the People's Liberation Army.

On March 1, Zhang Xiaogang, a spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defence, [refuted the validity of the "Taiwan Strait's median line"](#). Xiaogang made the comments in response to a media query regarding allegations by the US press that China's military planes have constantly crossed Taiwan Strait's median line. Xiaogang said "there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of China's territory" therefore, Taiwan Strait's median line is invalid. Previously also, China has dismissed the existence of the Taiwan Strait's median line on September 18, 2023.

On March 5, Taiwan's Minister of Defense, Chiu Kuo-cheng, declared that the country's armed forces will [heighten the frequency of missile drills](#) for the current year. This decision comes as a reaction to China's escalating military pressure on Taiwan to concede to its sovereignty claims. Responding to reporters' queries on the sidelines of parliament, Chiu remarked that the increase in missile drill frequency is necessary due to a perceived shift in the level of threat posed by the opponent.

On March 1, the President of South Korea, Yoon Suk Yeol, stated that [improved relations with Japan](#) are helping to counter the threat posed by North Korea's weapons development. He also called on the international community to assist in achieving unification with North Korea. During a ceremony commemorating an independence holiday, Yoon mentioned that next year would mark the 60th anniversary of normalized diplomatic ties with Japan, and expressed hope for an improvement in the bilateral relationship.

According to a media report, the US has kicked off talks with Britain and Australia on [inviting Japan to collaborate](#) on defence technology under the AUKUS security partnership. Japan's involvement in the partnership would be limited to specific projects, excluding nuclear-powered submarines under the first pillar of the trilateral agreement, with the aim of boosting multilateral

cooperation towards deterring China. US President Biden's administration is reportedly aiming to reach an agreement early next month, and an announcement could come during Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's state visit to Washington on April 10, 2024.

Other Developments

[Japan PM Kishida to address U.S. Congress on April 11](#)

[South Korea and U.S. start stepped-up military drills](#)

[Japan Says China's Rapidly Rising Military Power 'Serious Concern'](#)

West Asia

by

Sanket Joshi

On March 1, India expressed “deep shock” at the loss of lives during the delivery of [humanitarian aid in northern Gaza](#). According to the Israeli military, the majority of Palestinians killed were run over by humanitarian aid supply vehicles during a [stampede in northern Gaza](#). Meanwhile, on March 5, shortly after an Indian national was killed and two others were injured in a missile strike near the Israel-Lebanon border, India issued a [travel advisory](#) urging Indians living/working in Israel’s border areas in the north and south to relocate. Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant warned that [Hezbollah’s aggression](#) at the Israel-Lebanon border could lead to military escalation.

In a rebuke of Israel, US Vice President Kamala Harris called for an “[immediate ceasefire in Gaza](#) for at least the next six weeks”. In the first week of March 2024, the US Central Command and the Royal Jordanian Air Force airdropped [meals into northern Gaza as humanitarian aid](#).

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, attended the 159th Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on March 3. A GCC statement stressed the importance of [achieving a ceasefire in Gaza](#) and establishing humanitarian relief corridors for the delivery of aid. During a meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Saudi Foreign Minister reiterated the call for the [establishment of a Palestinian state](#) within 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Despite allegations that [UNRWA](#) (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) staff members were involved in Hamas' terror attack on Israel, the European Commission has confirmed that it will continue to fund UNRWA. The United Nations welcomed the European Commission's decision to proceed with 82 million Euros in funding for UNRWA, emphasising that the funds would be used to [maintain life-saving and essential services](#) in the region.

Other Developments

[Record drop in Suez Canal transits due to Houthis’ attacks: Data](#)

[Statement issued by the Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\) in its 159th session](#)

[Saudi FM warns Israel against offensive in Rafah during OIC meeting](#)

Central Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

[Germany welcomed the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia](#) for two days of peace talks, five months after Azerbaijan 'recaptured' the Karabakh region, prompting the mass exodus of ethnic Armenians. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met separately with her Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts on February 28 before hosting the trilateral meeting on February 29. The Ministers discussed perspectives on the provisions of the [draft bilateral Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations](#) between Armenia and Azerbaijan. [Baerbock's offer](#) of mending relations come after Chancellor Olaf Scholz arranged a brief trilateral meeting at the Munich Security Conference two weeks ago, which included Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

The 3rd Antalya Diplomacy Forum was hosted by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, under the theme 'Advancing Diplomacy in Times of Turmoil' under the auspices of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan between March 1-3, 2024. At the panel session, themed Institutionalisation in the Turkic World: The Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) in the 21st Century, [Murat Nurtleu](#), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan underscored the country's pivotal role in the Turkic world, highlighting its status as an initiator and founding member of the OTS, and its proactive engagement in fostering integration with the organisation. Nurtleu said that the OTS "is not a block structure and does not have a hidden agenda" thus are able to cooperate which other leading to a unified Turkic world as a new geopolitical reality.

On March 1, officials from Turkmenistan and Turkey [signed two preliminary agreements](#) for the Central Asian country to supply gas to Turkey and onward to Europe, deals that would aid Ankara's bid to become a regional energy hub. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, the chairman of Turkmenistan's People's Council, on the sidelines of the international Antalya Diplomacy Forum, where officials from the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding and a letter of intent on natural gas cooperation.

Other Developments

[Kazakhstan, US Strengthen Partnership in Geological Exploration with AI Integration](#)

[Comparing Chinese and Indian Energy Security Strategies in Central Asia](#)

[Belarus Hopes To Join Shanghai Cooperation Organization During The Summit In July](#)

Indian Ocean Region

by

Divya Rai

During a video conference on February 29, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr. Pravind Jugnauth, jointly inaugurated the new airstrip and St. James Jetty, along with six community development projects, at the [Agalega Island in Mauritius](#). The projects are intended to fulfil the demand for better connectivity between mainland Mauritius and Agalega and foster socio-economic development. The event marks the fifth meeting between both leaders in the past six months and follows the recent launch of UPI and RuPay services by the two leaders on February 12, 2024.

In the recent week, the Indian Navy displayed its naval prowess and expanded its maritime outreach in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by participating in various multilateral and bilateral maritime exercises. The Indian and Royal Malaysian Navy conducted the third edition of [Exercise Samudra Laksmna](#) from 29 February to 02 March 2024, at/off Vishakhapatnam. INS Trikanth participated in the multilateral exercise [Cutlass Express-24](#) conducted in the Western IOR, along with the US and African countries. These exercises demonstrate the Indian Navy's commitment to enhance operational capabilities, foster interoperability, and promote maritime security in the region.

[HGC Global Communications](#), an international telecom operator and ICT solution provider based in Hong Kong, reported damage to four out of over 15+ submarine communications cables in the Red Sea. These cables are owned by major telecom networks including Seacom, TGN, Asia-Africa-Europe-1, and Europe India Gateway. The estimated impact of this damage was significant, affecting approximately 25% of the traffic flowing through these cables in the Red Sea. The cause of damage is still unknown but it underscores the vulnerability of undersea cables as well as to safeguard global communications infrastructure.

The Indian Navy will commission the Naval Detachment Minicoy as [INS Jatayu](#) on March 06, 2024, in the presence of Admiral R. Hari Kumar, the Chief of the Naval Staff of India. Following INS Dweepakshak in Kavaratti, INS Jatayu will become the second naval base in Lakshadweep. The Naval Detachment Minicoy was established in the early 1980s. The primary objective of the new base is to enhance operational capabilities and support the Indian Navy's

efforts in antipiracy and anti-narcotics operations in the Western Arabian Sea, as well as to strengthen the Indian Navy's role as the first responder.

Other Developments:

[Procurement of BrahMos supersonic missiles for the Indian Navy was signed with M/s BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited \(BAPL\).](#)

[Chinese vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3 last located near Hulhumale two days ago.](#)



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