



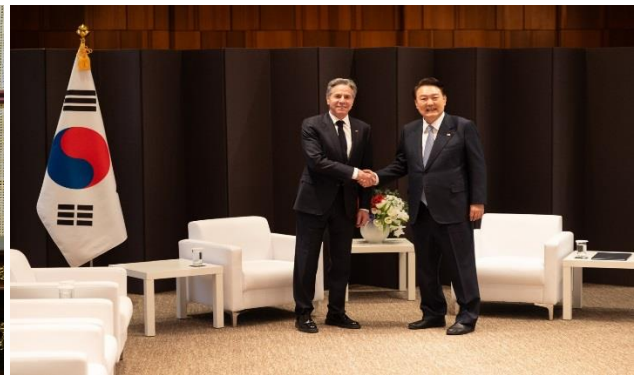
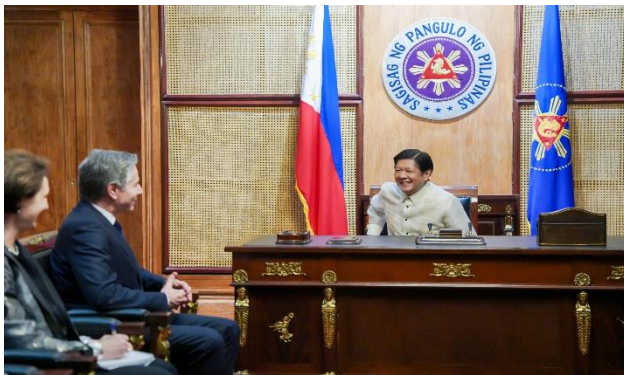
# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## India's Proximity Archives

### March 20, 2024



Volume II, Issue 12 | March 20, 2024

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



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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](mailto:sanket@dpg.org.in).

### Cover Image:

**Southeast Asia:** Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken meeting with President Marcos Jr. of Philippines in Manila on March 19, 2024. Source: [Presidential Communications Office/Official Website](#)

**East Asia:** Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken meeting with Republic of Korea (ROK) President Yoon Suk-yeol in Seoul on March 18, 2024. Source: [X/@SecBlinken](#)

**Central Asia:** Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Murat Nurtleu held talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan in Yerevan, on March 16. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#)

**Indian Ocean:** A coordinated anti-piracy operation was conducted by the Indian Navy in the Southern Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to rescue, a Bulgarian-flagged ship, MV RUEN. Source: [PIB](#)

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## South Asia

by

Shreyas Deshmukh

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay of Bhutan [visited India](#) from March 14-18 and held bilateral talks with PM Narendra Modi. Both sides reviewed the progress in various areas of the bilateral partnership, including infrastructure development, connectivity, energy, hydropower cooperation, people-to-people exchanges and development cooperation. It was PM Tobgay's first overseas visit after assuming office in January 2024. PM Narendra Modi will pay a [state visit](#) to Bhutan from March 21-22.

Meanwhile, on March 13, India's cabinet approved the signing of MoUs between India and Bhutan on cooperation in the field of [energy efficiency](#), energy conservation Measures, [food safety](#), general supply of; [petroleum, oil, lubricants](#) (POL) and related products.

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on March 13 won a [vote of confidence](#) in Parliament. The vote was conducted following the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist forged a new alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist-Leninist, after breaking with the previous partner Nepali Congress.

Pakistan carried out [airstrikes](#) inside Afghanistan on March 18, targeting multiple suspected hideouts of the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group a Pakistani Taliban. The Afghan Taliban said the attacks killed at least eight people and prompted return fire from their forces. Earlier seven security personnel of Pakistan, including two officers, were killed in a [terrorist attack](#) in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan on March 16, of which Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group had claimed responsibility.

The third meeting of the India-Maldives High-Level Core Group was held in Male on 17 March 2024. During the meeting, both sides reviewed the ongoing deputation of Indian technical personnel to enable the continued operation of Indian aviation.

### Other Developments

[Turkish drones arrive in Maldives, maybe used for patrolling the Indian Ocean](#)

[China says military delegation visited Maldives, Sri Lanka and Nepal](#)

[CSTO's plan to strengthen its border with Afghanistan progressing forward](#)

## Southeast Asia

by

Anshita Shukla

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken commenced his two-day state visit to Manila on March 19, 2024. Blinken met with the [Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Enrique Manalo](#), and pledged closer defense and security cooperation between the United States and the Philippines. During his meeting with [Philippine President Marcos Jr.](#), the two stressed the importance of the U.S.-Philippine Alliance and reiterated their commitment to upholding international law in the South China Sea.

Philippine President Marcos Jr. concluded a five-day visit to Germany and the Czech Republic on March 16, 2024. Manila secured [\\$4 billion worth of investment deals](#) in the sectors of renewable energy, manufacturing, innovation and start-ups, IT-BPM, minerals processing, agriculture, space, and aerospace. President Marcos also called for the revival of the Philippine-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations to further enhance trade relations. On the issue of rising tensions in the [South China Sea](#), the leader stated "we cannot, at any point, somehow compromise the territorial integrity of the Philippines".

Singapore Foreign Minister [Vivian Balakrishnan made an official visit to Palestine](#) on March 18, 2024. During his visit, he met with Palestinian counterpart Riyad al-Maliki and General Intelligence Services head Majed Faraj in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. Post the meeting, Dr. Balakrishnan told the reporters the two sides had a "candid exchange of views" on the war in Gaza and expressed concern over the "unbearable humanitarian consequences".

### Other Developments

[UN secretary-general alarmed by reports of Myanmar air strikes](#)

## East Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

US Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken led the US delegation for the third Summit for Democracy hosted by the Republic of Korea on March 17. [Blinken warned](#) that a malicious 'flood of disinformation was threatening the world's democracies' fuelled by the rise of artificial intelligence was increasing 'suspicion, cynicism and instability' around the globe. He also [held bilateral talks](#) with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and other officials to discuss the South Korean-US alliance, democracy and security in the Korean Peninsula.

On March 18, [North Korea fired multiple ballistic missiles](#) coinciding with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Seoul for the third Summit for Democracy. US, South Korea and Japan condemned North Korea's first ballistic missile test in two months, calling it a threat to regional security and a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong met her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi in Canberra on March 20. Wang Yi's visit is the [highest-ranking political visit](#) from a Chinese official to Australia since 2017. Penny Wong and Wang Yi held the [seventh China-Australia Foreign and Strategic Dialogue](#) where they discussed issues ranging from trade and tariffs, human rights, defence and regional security. During their meeting, [Wang Yi highlighted](#) the recent progress in mending ties between the two countries, describing it as having "broken the ice" and pointing to the gradual building of "mutual trust" and "good momentum" in their bilateral relationship. He further emphasised the importance of finding common ground while acknowledging existing differences.

### Other Developments

[Taiwan's Vice-President-Elect Makes Czech Visit After US Trip](#)

[Taiwan warns of 'enormous' Chinese bases in South China Sea](#)

[U.S., Japan, Philippines' leaders to meet for April summit](#)

## West Asia

by

Sanket Joshi

[China, Russia, and Iran](#) held a joint naval exercise 'Security Belt – 2024' from March 11-15 in waters near the Gulf of Oman. This exercise focused on anti-piracy and search and rescue operations. It included training such as firing at sea targets and rescue from hijacked merchant ships. Meanwhile, the G7 warned Iran against sending [ballistic missiles to Russia](#) for its war against Ukraine.

On March 17, [Chinese Envoy Wang Kejian](#) met with Hamas's Political Bureau Head Ismail Haniyeh in Qatar. The two sides exchanged views on the Gaza conflict and Beijing reportedly informed Haniyeh that China was "keen on relations" with Hamas describing it as "a part of the Palestinian national fabric". For his part, Haniyeh emphasised the need for the Israeli military to withdraw from Gaza and the establishment of an [independent Palestinian state](#).

US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke by telephone on March 18. The two leaders discussed hostage negotiations, the [humanitarian crisis in Gaza](#), and the need to increase humanitarian aid to the region. Further, President Biden reiterated concerns regarding Israel's planned ground operation in Rafah, southern Gaza, where more than one million civilians are seeking shelter. Earlier, Washington confirmed that [Marwan Issa - deputy commander of Hamas's military wing](#) had been killed in an Israeli airstrike in central Gaza. Meanwhile, on March 18, Israel raided [Gaza's Al-Shifa hospital](#), reportedly neutralising 20 Hamas operatives including a commander named Faiq Mabhouh.

### Other Developments

[US Secretary of State, IAEA Chief Discuss Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

[Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a UN Security Council Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-proliferation](#)

[Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's Persian New Year \(Nowruz\) Speech](#)

## Central Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Murat Nurtleu [held talks](#) with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan, in Yerevan, on March 16, 2024. The ministers addressed cooperation in the political, trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian areas, emphasising the importance of strengthening political dialogue at the highest levels. [Mirzoyan stressed](#) that Armenia is interested in developing bilateral relations with everyone – from the American continent to East Asia and said, "Of course, the relations with Kazakhstan play an important role in this vision". Following the meeting, Nurtleu and Mirzoyan signed the [Program of Cooperation between the Foreign Ministries of Kazakhstan and Armenia for 2024-2025](#).

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Murat Nurtleu took part in a [meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#), expressing Kazakhstan's willingness to facilitate the solution of complex issues facing the Organisation in Vienna, on March 14. Noting the intensification of regional cooperation in Central Asia, the Minister emphasized the importance of collective interaction of the countries of the region on the world stage. In this context, he highlighted various initiatives, including establishing the UN Regional Centre for Sustainable Development for Central Asia and Afghanistan in Almaty.

Among the Russian citizenship holders in Kazakhstan, President Vladimir [Putin was not the preferred candidate](#). According to an independent exit poll conducted in Almaty, amongst the 1600 people at the polling station in the consulate, only 8 per cent of the voters declared that they voted for President Putin. On the other hand, Vladislav Davankov, Deputy Chairman of the State Durma garnered around 70 per cent of the votes. Analysts suggest that Putin's reduced popularity among the Russian community in Kazakhstan as many of them relocated to evade being drafted into the army. Kazakhstan's neighbour, Kyrgyzstan on the other hand favoured Russia with more than 81 percent of the votes for the Russian leader.



## Other Developments

[Kazakhstan Announces Dates for Second Astana International Forum](#)

[Azerbaijan, Shanghai Cooperation Organization Explore Prospects For Cooperation](#)

[Belarusian Foreign Minister Calls for UN Reforms, Backs India's Ascension To Security Council](#)

[Azerbaijan Turns To Israeli Mod For Weaponry As Tensions With Armenia Rise](#)

## Indian Ocean Region

by

Divya Rai

On March 16, the [Indian Navy](#), through a sustained high tempo of operation lasting over 40 hours, executed a precise anti-piracy operation to recapture a Bulgarian-flagged ship, MV RUEN, from Somali pirates who had hijacked it on December 14, 2023. INS Kolkata intercepted the ship approximately 260 nautical miles east of Somalia and undertook precise, measured actions while engaging in forceful negotiations, resulting in the surrender of pirates and the release of the original crew.

Concerns about a resurgence of piracy off the coast of Somalia have been raised by the Houthi rebels' recent attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea. Over dozens of piracy attacks have occurred in the last month; just a week ago, a Bangladeshi bulk carrier dubbed [MV Abdullah](#)—originally named MV Golden Hawk—was hijacked off the coast of Somalia. The vessel, sailing under the flag of Bangladesh, was en route to the UAE when it was seized by Somali pirates. Following receipt of the notification, [Long-Range Maritime Patrol \(LRMP\) and a warship of the Indian Navy](#) were at once deployed and attempted to establish communication to verify the crew members' status. Additionally, EU naval [Operation ATLANTA](#) deployed in the Red Sea also gathered visual information about the merchant vessel, which shows around 12 pirates on board in three camps, operating in different areas in the north, center and south of the Somali Coast. As per EU naval operation, initially, the position of the ship was 600NM east of Mogadishu, Somalia and the last known position is 0641N-04719E where the vessel is anchored.

With the withdrawal of the first batch of Indian military personnel at one of the aviation platforms in the Maldives, India and Maldives held its third meeting of the [High-Level Core Group](#), on March 17. The meeting discussed the replacement of military personnel from the remaining two platforms by 10 April and 10 May 2024. As well as they also reviewed the current deployment of Indian civilian technical experts to ensure the continuous operation of the Indian aviation platform.

## Other developments

[India-Italy concluded the 12th edition Military Cooperation Group Meeting in New Delhi](#)

[For the mid-life upgrade of 25 Indian Navy Dornier aircraft, the MoD and HAL ink a contract worth over Rs 2,890 cr.](#)

[EX TIGER TRIUMPH-24: A bilateral Tri-Service exercise between India and the US, began from March 18, onboard INS Jalashwa](#)

[The First Training Squadron \(1TS\) concluded visit to Port Louis, Mauritius](#)



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