

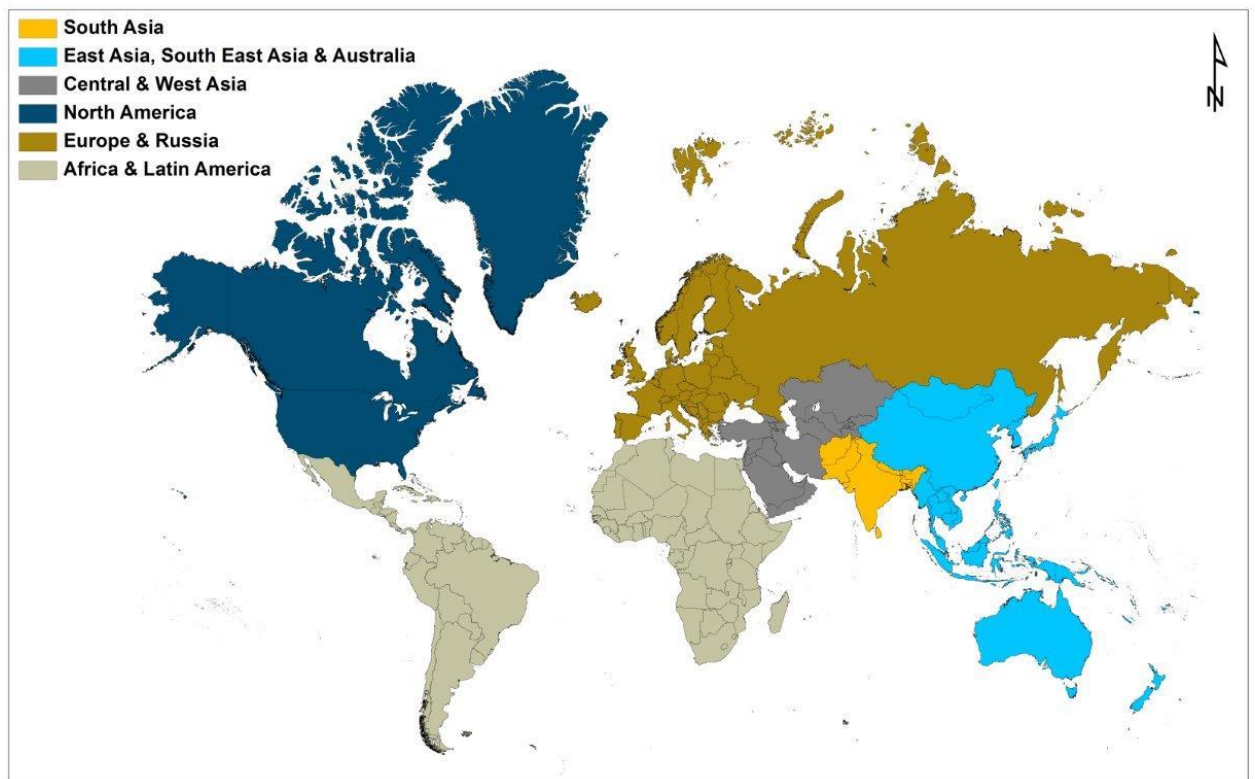


# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## DPG WEEKLY WORLD WATCH



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Delhi Policy Group

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## DPG WEEKLY WORLD WATCH Volume 4, Issue 51

### 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.

### DPG WEEKLY WORLD WATCH

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## South Asia

### India

#### [India wants further talks with China for 'mutually acceptable solution' to LAC standoff](#)

December 17, 2020, The Hindustan Times

India called for further discussions with China to reach a "mutually acceptable solution" on complete disengagement at all friction points on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) against the backdrop of the nearly eight-month border standoff.

#### [Seven branches of China's ruling party have India link](#)

December 18, 2020, The Indian Express

At least seven branches of the Communist Party of China (CPC) have an India connection, and at least one CPC member was hired by the Indian consulate in Shanghai using the services of a Chinese state-owned recruitment agency, according to data shared by a source with an international consortium of journalists .

#### [Defence Ministry approves acquisition of weapon systems worth ₹28,000 cr](#)

December 17, 2020, Mint

The Defence Acquisition Council, headed by the Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, today approved proposals for acquisition of weapons worth ₹28,000 crore required by the Indian Army, the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force.

#### [India on track to acquire Russian S-400 missile defence system](#)

December 16, 2020, The Economic Times

India is on track to acquire the S-400 missile defence system, while it examines the US decision to impose sanctions on NATO ally Turkey's defence industry over the purchase of the Russian system.

#### [Six new 'eyes in the sky' for Indian Air Force to be built by DRDO on Air India planes](#)

December 16, 2020, The Economic Times

In a major boost for the indigenous defence industry, India is going to make six new Airborne Early Warning and Control planes to be developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on aircraft from Air India to further improve Air Force's surveillance capabilities along borders with China and Pakistan.

### [EAM S Jaishankar launches economic diplomacy website](#)

December 17, 2020, AIR

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has launched economic diplomacy website which will showcase India's economic, sectoral, and state-wise strengths. Speaking on the occasion, Mr Jaishankar said the website positions a multidimensional and dynamic Brand India to the global business community through a specific focus on government's ease of doing business initiatives, policy reforms and incentives aimed at attracting foreign investment.

### [Need to press 'refresh' button on United Nations, says External Affairs Minister Jaishankar](#)

December 14, 2020, The Print

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar came down heavily on the United Nations, and even batted to push the "refresh button" on the multilateral body.

### [Trump regime blocked trade deal: Jaishankar](#)

December 12, 2020, The Hindu

India was "dead serious" about concluding a trade deal with the United States but the Trump administration decided not to, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.

### [Rajnath speaks to acting US Defence Secretary Christopher Miller](#)

December 15, 2020, The Times of India

Defence minister Rajnath Singh spoke to acting US Defence Secretary Christopher C Miller and discussed issues relating to strategic cooperation between the two countries, officials said.

### [US Congress passes defence policy bill that calls out Chinese aggression against India](#)

December 16, 2020, The Indian Express

The US Congress has officially passed the USD 740 billion defence policy bill, which among other things include calling out Chinese aggression against India along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

### [India-US ties have got stronger, Modi & Biden eager to carry forward momentum – envoy Sandhu](#)

December 16, 2020, The Print

US President-elect Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have vowed to "carry forward" the strategic momentum in their bilateral ties even as they

reiterate their commitment to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific strategy, Taranjit Singh Sandhu, India's Ambassador to the US, said.

## **Pakistan**

### [Foreign loans surge by 45pc in five months of fiscal](#)

December 18, 2020, Dawn

Pakistan's foreign loan inflows have jumped by almost 45 per cent to about \$4.5 billion in first five months (July-November) of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period in the last fiscal. With the loans taken in the five months, the country has received a total of about \$23.6bn in foreign loans during tenure of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government (since July 1, 2018).

### [In sudden move, ECP decides to hold by-elections](#)

December 18, 2020, Dawn

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) decided to immediately hold by-elections in eight constituencies of national and provincial assemblies, which have been pending because of the coronavirus pandemic.

### [Pakistan returns \\$1bn of S. Arabia's soft loan](#)

December 17, 2020, Dawn

Pakistan has returned \$1 billion to Saudi Arabia as a second instalment of a \$3bn soft loan, as Islamabad reaches out to Beijing for a commercial loan to help it offset pressure to repay another \$1bn to Riyadh next month.

### [Foreign Minister Qureshi lands in Dubai for two-day visit](#)

December 17, 2020, Dawn

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi landed in Dubai on December 17, for a two-day visit during which he will hold discussions with the UAE leadership on all areas of mutual interest. The foreign minister's visit comes weeks after the UAE temporarily suspended the issuance of visit visas to a dozen countries, including Pakistan, until further notice.

### [Saudi envoy calls on COAS, mutual matters discussed](#)

December 16, 2020, The News

Ambassador of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Nawaf Saeed Al Malkiy called on Pakistan Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa on December 15. During the meeting matters of mutual interest, regional security situation and bilateral defence relations were discussed.

### [25 injured in Rawalpindi grenade explosion](#)

December 14, 2020, Dawn

In a second blast in the garrison city of Rawalpindi this month, over two dozen people including women and children were injured in the busy Ganj Mandi area on December 13.

### [India's Deputy HC to Pakistan Ahluwalia replaced](#)

December 13, 2020, The News

India's Deputy High Commissioner to Pakistan Gaurav Ahluwalia has been reassigned. His replacement will be Suresh Kumar, who is currently stationed at the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. Mr Ahluwalia has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

### [Pak, China air exercise Shaheen IX underway](#)

December 11, 2020, The News

Pakistan-China Joint Air Exercise 'Shaheen-IX' is underway at a PAF's operational base since December 8th. The contingents of People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) comprising various aerial platforms, combat pilots, air defence controllers and technical ground crews are participating in the exercise. The joint exercise started a week after Chinese State Councilor and defence Minister Wei Fenghe met with President Dr Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan during his visit to the country. The 'Shaheen-IX,' would last until the end of December.

### [MNA Ali Wazir arrested in Peshawar at Sindh police request](#)

December 17, 2020, Dawn

Police arrested MNA Ali Wazir here in connection with a case registered against him and several leaders of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) in Karachi after a recent public meeting. They have been accused of committing several offences, including hatching a criminal conspiracy and passing derogatory remarks against state institutions.

## **Afghanistan**

### [Top US general meets Taliban in Qatar, calls for reduced violence](#)

December 17, 2020, The express Tribune

The top US general met Taliban representatives in Qatar, urging them to reduce the level of violence and move more swiftly towards a political solution in Afghanistan. The meeting in Doha with the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff, General Mark Milley, comes as negotiators representing the Afghan government and the Taliban take a break until Jan 5 when they will continue to work on an agenda.

### [Mullah Baradar Meets Pakistani Foreign Minister in Islamabad](#)

December 16, 2020, Tolo News

A Taliban delegation headed by deputy leader Mullah Baradar has met with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to discuss the Afghan peace process. Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry in a statement said that the Taliban delegation was a planned, official visit and the Afghan government had been made aware of the trip and considered it part of Pakistani efforts to aid the Afghan peace process.

### [Afghan Exporters Claim '\\$450M' Loss Due to Detained Shipments](#)

December 16, 2020, Tolo News

Nangarhar Chamber of Commerce and Investment said that Afghan businesses suffered a nearly \$400 million financial loss over the past eight months because of products detained at Pakistan's Karachi port. Afghan exporters say problems also exist on the Iranian side.

### [Turkey Provides \\$13M Worth Funds for Afghan Forces](#)

December 13, 2020, Khaama Press

The Afghan and Turkey government signed Military-Financial Cooperation Agreement and the International Protocol of Financial Assistance in Ankara, providing a five-year financial aid to Afghan forces. The financial aid that sums up around \$13 million, will furnish Afghan National defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) with military equipment for at least five upcoming years, according to the statement posted by the Afghanistan Embassy in Turkey.

### [Scores killed after Taliban attacks on military checkpoints in Kandahar](#)

December 13, 2020, France 24

Dozens of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce overnight fighting between Afghan forces and militants who attacked multiple checkpoints in the insurgent bastion of Kandahar on December 12. Taliban militants attacked checkpoints in five districts surrounding the city of Kandahar, which Afghan forces countered with heavy air and ground assaults.

### [World Bank Approves \\$85M Grant to Afghanistan](#)

December 12, 2020, Tolo News

The World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved two grants totalling nearly \$85 million from the International Development Association (IDA), as



part of a \$393 million financial package to help Afghanistan alleviate COVID-19 impacts and improve access to clean water, sanitation, and public services. The \$85 million IDA grants are part of two financial packages that include additional support from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), a multi-donor fund managed by the World Bank on behalf of 34 donors.

## **Bangladesh**

### [India, Bangladesh to reopen 55-year-old Haldibari-Chilahati rail line](#)

December 16, 2020, Business Today

India is set to re-open a railway line along with its neighbouring country Bangladesh after a gap of 55 years, which will connect West Bengal in India to Chilahati across the border.

### [Last Padma Bridge span to be installed](#)

December 8, 2020, Dhaka Tribune

The authorities of the Padma Multi-Purpose Bridge Project have decided to install the last and 41st span of the 6.15km long bridge, if the weather remains favourable and no technical problem occurs.

## **Nepal**

### [India-Nepal Ties Tall As Himalayas, Deep As Ocean With 'No Strings Attached', Says CDS Rawat](#)

December 17, 2020, Business World

Calling the India- Nepal ties as "tall as the Himalayas and as deep as the Indian Ocean," Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat said India's goodwill towards its neighbour comes with "no strings attached", however, without naming China, CDS Rawat warned Kathmandu to be cautious when signing agreements with "other countries" in the region.

### [India, Nepal inching closer to finalise cross border electricity sales regulatory modality](#)

December 12,2020, The Economic Times

India and Nepal are inching closer to finalize the regulatory modality for allowing Nepali power producers access to Indian power market which will provide an outlet for Nepal's surplus power in the coming months, the Indian embassy said.

## **Bhutan**

### [Israel inks deal establishing diplomatic relations with Bhutan](#)

December 12, 2020, The Times of Israel

Israeli envoy to India hosts signing ceremony with Bhutanese ambassador; small Himalayan kingdom maintains full ties with just over 50 countries.

## **Sri Lanka**

### [As US withdraws aid, Chinese mission to push Sri Lanka further into debt succeeds](#)

December 17, 2020, WION

In 2017, Sri Lanka leased the Hambantota Port to China for 99 years after failing to keep up its payments. Despite this loss, the island nation has not lost appetite for Chinese debt as last year 43 per cent of its loans on major projects came from China. And by giving green signal to more infrastructure projects, the Rajapaksas are pushing Sri Lanka further into Beijing's trap.

### [In Close Touch With Sri Lanka For Early Release Of 36 Fishermen: India](#)

December 17, 2020, NDTV

With the Sri Lankan Navy apprehending a number of Indian fishermen recently, India said it is in close touch with the Lankan government to ensure consular access and facilitate the early release of the fishermen and their boats.

## **Maldives**

### [India, Maldives hold discussions on cordial, multi-dimensional partnership](#)

December 17, 2020, ANI

A defence cooperation webinar and expo between India and Maldives were held where in both sides spoke on close, cordial and multidimensional relationship between the two countries.

## East & South East Asia

### China

#### [The Tibet Military Region makes great efforts to solve the winter support problem of frontline troops](#)

December 16, 2020, Guangming

In response to the security problems faced by border guards after the snow-covered mountains, the Tibet Military Region has made innovative measures to use solar heating systems, new energy container barracks, multi-energy complementary demonstration systems and other new technologies to solve the problem of heating and hot water supply in plateau training points.

#### [Top legislator calls for China-Japan relations to suit new era](#)

December 16, 2020, Global Times

China's top legislator Li Zhanshu held video talks with Tadamori Oshima, speaker of the House of Representatives of the Japanese parliament, calling for a China-Japan relationship consistent with the needs of the new era.

#### [West's hyping of CPC 'infiltration' ridiculous and untenable: FM](#)

December 15, 2020, Global Times

The Chinese Foreign Ministry slammed the West's hyping of members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) being potential spies as just another ridiculous and untenable "China threat" theory.

#### [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: China and Russia injected positive energy into maintaining the international arms control system](#)

December 18, 2020 Guangming

Chinese State Councilor and Minister of National defence Wei Fenghe and Russian defence Minister Shoigu formally signed the "Regarding the Extension of October 13, 2009" on December 15th. The Agreement between the Government of the Republic and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Mutual Notification of the Launch of Ballistic Missiles and Space Launch Vehicles "Protocol on the Validity Period", which extends the validity of the "Agreement" for 10 years.

#### [The Navy spokesperson responded to the U.S. saying that China has refused to participate in the China-U.S. maritime military security consultations](#)

December 18, 2020, Guangming

According to reports, the US-Indo-Pacific Headquarters issued a statement on the 16th, stating that the Chinese People's Liberation Army refused to

participate in the meeting on the US-China Maritime Military Security Consultation Mechanism scheduled to be held in video format with the US-Indo-Pacific Headquarters from December 14 to 16, 2020. This Navy spokesman Liu Wensheng responded.

[China and the Caribbean countries with diplomatic relations are watching and helping each other to carry out anti-epidemic cooperation](#)

December 18, 2020, Guangming

On the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup> December, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin hosted a regular press conference. A reporter asked: A few days ago, the second special meeting at the deputy foreign minister level between China and the Caribbean countries with diplomatic relations with the Caribbean was successfully held. Can you tell us about the outcome of the meeting? What measures will China and Caribbean countries take to deal with the epidemic in the next stage?

[The claim that "China influences the US election" is purely groundless](#)

December 18, 2020, Guangming

At the regular press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup>, some reporters asked the spokesperson about the US's allegations that China is a security threat and affecting the US election.

[Sino-Cambodian ties deeper-rooted after joint COVID-19 fight, bilateral FTA signing](#)

December 18, 2020, People's Daily

China-Cambodia ties have been deeper-rooted in 2020 after the two countries have worked together closely to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and have signed the bilateral free trade agreement, say Cambodian officials and academics.

[China speeds up establishment of new, modern industrial system](#)

December 18, 2020, People's Daily

During the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), China has given strong impetus to supply-side structural reforms and accelerated the establishment of a new modern industrial system that features a great capacity for innovation, excellence in product quality and service, and synergistic coordination, and is friendly to the environment.

### [Xi signs order to release revised military metrology regulations](#)

December 17, 2020, People's Daily

Xi Jinping, chairman of the Central Military Commission, has signed an order to release a set of newly-revised military metrology regulations.

### [China's mission to EU confirms detention of Bloomberg's Chinese employee suspected of 'jeopardizing national security'](#)

December 13, 2020, Global Times

The mission of China to the EU confirmed the detention of a Chinese national for national security reasons in response to a question regarding the actions of a Bloomberg employee.

### [U.S. Blacklists China's Top Chip Maker, Escalating Tech Fight](#)

December 18, 2020, The Wall Street Journal

The Trump administration is adding China's largest manufacturer of computing chips to an export blacklist, restricting the company's access to high-end technology over its alleged links to the Chinese military. Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp., or SMIC, will be added alongside more than 60 other Chinese institutions to the entity list, the Commerce Department said. The designation restricts companies from exporting U.S.-origin technology to the listed firms without a license, with a provision that effectively prohibits SMIC from acquiring technology to build chips with 10-nanometer circuits and smaller, the industry's top class of chips.

### [Chinese infiltration: Taiwan can help](#)

December 18, 2020, Taipei Times

For seven decades Taiwan has weathered the full gambit of Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-backed espionage. Of the many tactics employed by the CCP, the most potent and damaging is its long-term strategy to infiltrate and gain influence over Taiwanese political and social institutions. Other nations are belatedly waking up to the threat of Chinese infiltration, which appears to have been executed on an industrial scale, as revealed in multiple reports last week.

### [Chinese Companies Win Billions in European Taxpayer-Funded Contracts](#)

December 17, 2020, The Wall Street Journal

Chinese state-backed companies significantly increased their presence in Europe's rich public-procurement market over the past year, according to a Wall Street Journal analysis that for the first time quantifies how Beijing has expanded its global push to rival Western industrial giants in one of the world's most sophisticated economies. The European Union's public-procurement

market is among the world's largest, valued by EU officials at roughly 2 trillion euros, equivalent to \$2.44 trillion, annually.

### [China Charges Hong Kong Activists Caught Fleeing to Taiwan](#)

December 16, 2020, The New York Times

Ten Hong Kong activists who were captured at sea while trying to flee to Taiwan in August were charged in mainland China with illegal boundary-crossing offenses that could put some of them behind bars for years. The case has become a focal point for Hong Kong's pro-democracy opposition, which, after months of intense protests last year, has been checked by a wide-ranging crackdown and the imposition of a tough national security law on the semiautonomous Chinese territory.

### [Taiwan on Track to Apply to Join Trans-Pacific Trade Pact](#)

Reuters, December 14, 2020

Taiwan will submit an application to join the revamped version of the Trans-Pacific Partnership once it has finished informal consultations with its existing 11 members, talks which are ongoing, the island's foreign ministry said. While a member of the World Trade Organization, many countries are wary of signing trade deals with Taiwan fearing objections from China, which claims the democratic island as its own territory, and Taiwan has sought greater access to multilateral deals.

## **Japan**

### [Japan, China to seek early setup of defence hotline](#)

December 16, 2020, Japan Today

Japanese defence Minister Nobuo Kishi has agreed with Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe to seek the early establishment of a hotline between their officials amid tensions over the sovereignty of islands in the East China Sea.

### [Japan says it is seeking closer ties with U.S. after Biden's win affirmed](#)

December 16, 2020, Japan Today

Japan is seeking to strengthen ties with the United States and work closely toward realizing its vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said, after Joe Biden's win in the Nov 3 presidential election was affirmed.

### [Japan's FY2021 budget to be around ¥106.61 trillion](#)

December 18, 2020, Japan Today

Japan's initial budget for fiscal 2021 will total about 106.61 trillion yen (\$1.03 trillion), a record high for the ninth straight year, as it plans to add 5 trillion yen to reserve funds for future response to the coronavirus pandemic, government sources said.

### [Pfizer files request for COVID-19 vaccine approval in Japan](#)

December 18, 2020, Japan Today

U. S. pharmaceutical giant Pfizer Inc requested Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare approve its novel coronavirus vaccine, making it the first drug maker to file such a request in the country.

### [Japan to issue bonds in excess of 100 trillion yen for the first time](#)

December 16, 2020, The Asahi Shimbun

The government decided to issue new bonds worth 112.554 trillion yen (\$1.1 trillion) for fiscal 2020 through next March, the first time the nation's debt issuance will top 100 trillion yen in a single fiscal year.

### [Neighbors in Hokkaido object to plans to store nuclear waste](#)

December 16, 2020, The Asahi Shimbun

Opposition has sprung up in communities near two municipalities in Hokkaido that intend to host final disposal sites for highly radioactive nuclear waste.

## **Korea**

### [N.Korean FM Disappears from Public View](#)

December 18, 2020, The Chosun Ilbo

North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Son-gwon, a hawkish former point man on the U.S. and South Korea, has disappeared from public view since August.

### [S. Korea's exports dip at fastest pace in 2019 on weak chip demand](#)

December 18, 2020, The Korea Herald

South Korea's exports dropped at the fastest clip in 2019 due to sluggish overseas demand for semiconductors, government data showed.

### [Korea, Indonesia sign deal to boost trade, investment](#)

December 18, 2020, The Korea Times

South Korea and Indonesia signed an economic partnership agreement aimed at boosting investment and trade between the two countries, in areas ranging from automobiles to apparel, officials said.

### [Moon's rush for breakthrough with Japan raises questions](#)

December 17, 2020, The Korea Times

President Moon Jae-in's rush to resolve serious issues with Japan before the Tokyo Olympic Games is not going as well as Cheong Wa Dae had hoped.

### [Korea hosts MIKTA's first online meeting amid pandemic](#)

December 17, 2020, The Korea Times

South Korea hosted the sixth annual meeting of speakers of the parliaments of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia (MIKTA) , held online for the first time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### [Denmark, Korea sign MOU on green, circular economy](#)

December 16, 2020, The Korea Times

The Embassy of Denmark in Korea and the Korea Environment Corp., a government-affiliated organization, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), Dec. 14, to bolster cooperation on creating a circular economy and better pursuing sustainable development.

## **Southeast Asia**

### [Philippines, Japan affirm close cooperation over South China Sea](#)

December 15, 2020, ABS CBN

President Rodrigo Duterte and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga agreed Monday to closely cooperate over issues related to the South China Sea, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said, as Beijing continues its military buildup in the waters despite the concerns of neighboring countries.

### [Hints Hun Sen starting to look away from China](#)

December 17, 2020, Asia Times

When Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen announced this week that his country will order its first batch of Covid-19 vaccines from the United Nations-backed COVAX facility, it was notable that Cambodia's first inoculations were not coming from China.



### [China Building Massive Myanmar Border Wall: Reports](#)

December 17, 2020, The Diplomat

Reports have emerged that the Chinese government is constructing a 2,000-kilometer reinforced fence along its coiling border with Myanmar, following a spike in COVID-19 cases in the latter country.

### [Indian Navy to conduct coordinated patrol with Indonesian Navy on December 17-18](#)

December 17, 2020, India Today

The 35th edition of India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT) between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy will be conducted between December 17 and 18.

### [13 missing Chinese, Vietnamese sailors found in Vietnam's central coast](#)

December 18, 2020, Xinhua Net

Vietnamese rescuers have rescued 11 crew members and found two bodies of the 15 sailors who earlier went missing after their Panama-flagged ship sank off central Vietnam's Binh Thuan province.

### [Two Chinese crew members dead as Panama vessel sinks off central Vietnam](#)

December 18, 2020, VN Express

Two Chinese crew members dead as Panama vessel sinks off central Vietnam  
A Panamanian ship with 15 crew members tilts off Phu Quy Island in south central Vietnam, December 17, 2020. Photo courtesy of Binh Thuan Search and Rescue Command.

## Central & West Asia

### Central Asia

#### [First Trilateral Working Group Meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of Chabahar Port](#)

December 14, MEA

The first Trilateral Working Group Meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on the joint use of Chabahar Port was held virtually on December 14. The Meeting was jointly chaired by Secretary (Shipping), Shi Sanjeev Ranjan, Government of India, Deputy Minister of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mr. D. Dehkanov and Deputy Transport Minister of Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Shahram Adamnejad. During the meeting, the participants discussed joint use of Chabahar Port for trade and transit purposes and enhanced regional connectivity.

#### [Joint Statement on India-Uzbekistan Virtual Summit: Close Friendship, Strong Partnership](#)

December 11, 2020, MEA

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and President of Uzbekistan Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev co-chaired a Virtual Summit between India and Uzbekistan on December 11. Both the leaders held an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations, the COVID-19 pandemic and regional and global issues of mutual interest.

#### [Kazakhstan Plans to Bring Aral Sea's Landscape Back to Life](#)

December 14, 2020

As environmental issues have long become some of the world's most pressing challenges, countries across the globe are looking for new solutions and Kazakhstan is no exception.

#### [China places Central Asia in its gunsights](#)

December 15, The Times of Central Asia

By means of its Belt and Road Initiative, China aims to expand its economic, political, and military influence, and presence, in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and beyond to Iran and the Middle East, which could put China in a key position in this vast region.

### [Iran Rapidly Expanding Rail Links with Central Asia and Caucasus](#)

December 15, 2020, The Jamestown Foundation

The United States and other Western countries have worked long and hard to marginalize Iran as punishment for its transgressions on the international stage. Nevertheless, Iran's neighbours as well as states further out, including Russia, China and the Central Asian republics, understand that their plans to establish strategically important north-south and east-west regional transportation routes will depend on the development of Iranian railways and the integration of its domestic rail system with bordering countries.

### [Central Asia could be a testing ground for regional stability](#)

December 17, 2020, Arab News

Four years ago, as hostilities were still taking place in Syria between the regime and various opposition groups, the Astana talks were launched and a broad cease-fire was reached, mainly through an agreement between Russia and Turkey. The Astana talks were, for many, a first realization of the importance of the Greater Middle East, from North Africa to Central Asia.

### [Chabahar Port: India Gaining Foothold In Central Asia As Iran's Chabahar Port Attracts New Foreign Partners](#)

December 13, 2020, Eurasian Times

Chabahar port is back in the news as India, Uzbekistan, and Iran are set to conduct the first trilateral working group meeting on the joint use of the Iranian port – Chabahar.

### [UNDP starts new phase of project to promote cross-border trade on Tajik-Afghan border](#)

December 17, 2020, The Times of Central Asia

Official signing ceremony of the new phase of LITACA project aimed at improving livelihoods in Tajikistan-Afghanistan cross border areas was held on December 16 in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will implement the third phase of the project, funded by the Government of Japan, between 2021 and 2024 with a total budget of \$9.89 million, UNDP in Tajikistan said.

[Climate diplomacy and security project launched for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan](#)

December 18, 2020, The Times of Central Asia

On December 17, a presentation of a project on climate diplomacy and security in Central Asia was held in Bishkek. The project is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in cooperation with relevant government agencies in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with the support of the UK Government.

[China places Central Asia in its gunsights](#)

December 15, 2020, The Times of Central Asia

By means of its Belt and Road Initiative, China aims to expand its economic, political, and military influence, and presence, in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and beyond to Iran and the Middle East, which could put China in a key position in this vast region.

## **West Asia**

[The United States Sanctions Turkey under CAATSA 231](#)

December 14, 2020, U.S. Department of State

The United States has imposed sanctions on the Republic of Turkey's Presidency of defence Industries (SSB) pursuant to Section 231 of the 'Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)' for knowingly engaging in a significant transaction with Rosoboronexport, Russia's main arms export entity, by procuring the S-400 surface-to-air missile system.

[India Discusses Chabahar Port's Joint Usage with Iran, Uzbekistan](#)

December 15, 2020, The Tribune

The first trilateral working group meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on the joint use of Chabahar Port was held virtually . Uzbekistan's interest in using Chabahar Port marks a flexing point in India's efforts to carve out a communication route to Afghanistan and Central India that outflanks Pakistan.

[Muraleedharan Calls on Oman Foreign Minister, Discusses Bilateral Ties, Covid-19](#)

December 17, 2020, The Economic Times

Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan called on Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi during his two-day visit to the Gulf country, and

discussed bilateral relations between the two nations including cooperation against the Covid-19 pandemic.

[India Welcomes Normalisation of Ties by Israel and Morocco, Calls for Talks with Palestinians](#)

December 17, 2020, Hindustan Times

India welcomed the normalisation of ties between Israel and Morocco and reiterated its call for talks between the Israeli and Palestinian sides to find an acceptable two-state solution.

[Will Provide Whatever 'Friend' India Needs to Defend Itself: Israel Ambassador Ron Malka](#)

December 17, 2020, Hindustan Times

Israel won't be found wanting in meeting India's requirements to defend itself against all challenges and hostilities though such cooperation is not directed against any other country, Israeli ambassador Ron Malka has said.

[India, Qatar Agree on Institutionalising Measures to Promote, Protect Workers' Rights](#)

December 10, 2020, Hindustan Times

India and Qatar have agreed on institutionalising measures to promote and protect the rights of workers, including settlement of labour issues and facilitate the movement of people between the two countries, in a safe and secure manner.

[252 Indian Jews, Including Infants and Elderly, from the Bnei Menashe Community Immigrate to Israel](#)

December 15, 2020, News 18

A total of 252 Jews, including infants and elderly, from India's north-eastern Bnei Menashe community landed at the Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv as immigrants and to start a new life in Israel.

[U.S. Throws Weight behind Construction of Eastmed Gas Pipeline](#)

December 18, 2020, The Economic Times

The United States is backing the construction of a subsea pipeline that would supply Europe with natural gas from the eastern Mediterranean, U.S. Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette said.

### [UAE-Bahraini-Israeli Officials Discuss Investment Opportunities in Energy](#)

December 17, 2020, Asharq-AL-Awsat

Emirati, Bahraini and Israeli officials in the energy sector discussed investment opportunities, as well as the mechanism to strengthen and develop them during a meeting hosted by the UAE.

### [Israel's US Envoy Ron Dermer Urges Biden Not to Repeat 'Mistakes of The Past' on Iran](#)

December 17, 2020, The Times of Israel

Israel's Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer called on the incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden to not repeat what he called "the mistakes of the past" when it comes to dealing with Iran, while stressing the pro-Israel bona fides of the new American leader.

### [IAEA Chief: U.S. Re-entering Iran Deal Will Require Some New Agreements](#)

December 17, 2020, The Times of Israel

UN atomic watchdog head says additional understandings must lay out how Iran's violations of multilateral accord can be reversed, as parties are no longer at 'square one'.

### [Despite Payment Delays in Iran, India's Basmati Exports up 33 Percent](#)

December 15, 2020, Moneycontrol

India's basmati rice exports continue to grow, especially to Iran, despite shippers facing payment problems from the largest buyer of the fragrant grain. "Basmati exports are doing very well. They are 30 percent higher this year compared with last year," former president of Delhi-based All India Rice Exporters Association (AIREA) Vijay Setia said.

### [Microsoft Says Cyber Assault on U.S. Hit 40 of Its Customers, Including in Israel](#)

December 18, 2020, The Times of Israel

Microsoft said that dozens of its customers, including firms in Israel and the United Arab Emirates, were targeted as part of the massive cyber-assault on US government institutions that was uncovered this week.

### [UAE Joins East Mediterranean Gas Forum](#)

December 16, 2020, Reuters

Egypt said that the United Arab Emirates has joined the Cairo-based Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum as an observer. Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Jordan established the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) as an intergovernmental organisation in a virtual ceremony hosted by Cairo in September.

## United States

### United States

[Biden's pick for top U.S. trade official will continue tough line on China, says ex-Trump official](#)

December 18, 2020, CNBC

US President-elect Joe Biden's pick for his incoming administration's top trade official will likely carry on a tough line against China, according to former Trump trade negotiator Clete Willems.

[Trump says he will veto \\$740 billion defence bill, breaking with Republican-led Senate](#)

December 17, 2020, CNBC

President Donald Trump said he will reject the sweeping defence bill that authorizes a topline of \$740 billion in spending and outlines Pentagon policy.

[US sanctions NATO ally Turkey over purchase of Russian missile defence system](#)

December 15, 2020, defence News

The Trump administration imposed sanctions on its NATO ally Turkey over its purchase of a Russian air defence system, in a striking move against a long-time partner that sets the stage for further confrontation between the two nations as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office.

[US under cyberattack believed to be tied to Russia: Private sector, infrastructure, all levels of government at risk](#)

December 17, 2020, USA Today

A cyberattack believed to be tied to Russia continues to pose a "grave risk" to government networks and the private sector, according to an ominous warning issued by the Department of Homeland Security.

[Pentagon's 2021 maritime strategy has Beijing's South China Sea activities in its sights](#)

December 18, 2020, South China Morning Post

The US military warned it would be "more assertive" against Beijing, saying China was the only rival presenting a long-term challenge to the United States.

### [U.S. to blacklist dozens of Chinese firms including SMIC, sources say](#)

December 18, 2020, Reuters

The United States is set to add dozens of Chinese companies, including the country's top chipmaker SMIC, to a trade blacklist, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

### [How 2020 Shaped U.S.-China Relations](#)

December 15, 2020, Council on Foreign Relations

This year, tensions between Washington and Beijing flared over many issues. As the Biden administration prepares to take over, what lies ahead for one of the world's most important bilateral relationships?



## Europe & Russia

### Europe

[UK's Indo-Pacific tilt about managing challenges, taking advantage of opportunities in region: Dominic Raab](#)

December 16, 2020, Hindustan Times

The UK's planned "Indo-Pacific tilt" is as much about managing the challenges and pressures arising from China's assertive actions as it is about taking advantage of opportunities across the region, British foreign secretary Dominic Raab said.

[India, UK To Ensure "Equitable Distribution" Of Vaccine: Dominic Raab](#)

December 16, 2020, NDTV

His assertion of strengthening ties with India in a host of fields, including in the health sector, came after his talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

[India, EU Agree to Strengthen Cooperation in Cyberspace At 6th Edition Of Cyber Dialogue](#)

December 17, 2020, Republic World

India & the European Union discussed the importance of multilateral and regional cooperation on stability in cyberspace at UN platforms or in regional settings.

[EU countries may go their own way on coronavirus vaccinations](#)

December 17, 2020, Politico

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised EU countries will start their coronavirus vaccination programs together later this month. But it's not clear such a well-orchestrated effort will be possible.

[EU agrees 'in principle' to an investment agreement with China](#)

December 18, 2020, South China Morning Post

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron are understood to be in agreement for the deal to go ahead, says source.

[EU Parliament condemns China over Uyghur 'exploitation'](#)

December 17, 2020, CNN

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution which strongly condemns China over allegations of forced labor by minority groups.

## Russia

### [Putin: Russia Reduces Its Dependence on Oil](#)

December 17, 2020, Oil Price.com

Russia's oil and gas exports account for 60 percent of total exports, and revenues from the oil and gas represent about 30 percent of GDP. While the number is a lot lower than the portion of oil revenues in GDP of most of the world other large oil exporters, it still makes up quite a large portion of budget revenues. Be that as it may, Russia is preparing for a future with a lot less oil consumption, according to Deputy Finance Minister Vladimir Kulychev.

### [Putin explains Russia's position on Nagorno-Karabakh cease-fire, says region integral part of Azerbaijan](#)

December 17, 2020, Daily Sabah

Russian President Vladimir Putin explained Russia's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh cease-fire and said that the region is an integral part of Azerbaijan according to international law.

### [Moscow must come to terms with India's security imperatives](#)

December 13, 2020, Hindustan Times

This year began with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov criticising the idea of the Indo-Pacific at the Raisina Dialogue, calling it a "divisive approach" to disrupt existing regional structures and contain China's influence in the region. Arguing that India was "smart enough to understand the trap," he said the United States (US) Indo-Pacific ploy was an attempt to "reconfigure the existing structures" and to move away from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-centric consensus.

### ['Independent ties with countries': India pushes back against Russian minister's comments](#)

December 12, 2020, Hindustan Times

India pushed back against the Russian foreign minister's stand that the West's Indo-Pacific policies were aimed at enmeshing India in "anti-China games", saying the country has an independent foreign policy based on its national interests.

### [Russia signs more deals with India to make 300 million Sputnik V vaccines](#)

December 18, 2020, Reuters

India will produce about 300 million doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccines next year, a Russian official was quoted as saying, nearly three times

the previously known number as deals have been signed with more manufacturers.

[Putin pledges to solve Crimea's water supply problem](#)

December 17, 2020, TASS

Enough money will be allocated in order to resolve the water supply problem in Crimea, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

[Putin says Russian hypersonic weapons' existence impacts global situation](#)

December 17, 2020, TASS

The existence of Russia's hypersonic missile systems influences the situation in the world and changes it, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

[Experts name S-500 air defence system as possible 'antidote' to hypersonic weapons](#)

December 18, 2020, TASS

Russian military experts named the S-500 surface-to-air missile/anti-ballistic missile system and a modernized interceptor missile as a possible 'antidote' against an enemy's hypersonic weapons mentioned by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his annual press conference.

## Africa & Latin America

### Latin America

#### [Pacific Alliance holds summit in Chile](#)

December 11, 2002, Prensa Latina

The presidents of Chile, Sebastian Piñera, and Colombia, Ivan Duque, led the start of the 25th Summit of the Pacific Alliance, which is being held in Santiago de Chile on a semi-presential basis.

#### [Venezuela moves towards setting up a new Parliament](#)

December 12, 2020, Prensa Latina

Venezuela is moving today towards setting up a new National Assembly (unicameral Parliament), in a scenario marked by the categorical triumph of the Great Patriotic Pole in the recent legislative elections.

#### [Cuba rejects US interference from ALBA-TCP Summit](#)

December 14, 2020, Prensa Latina

The president of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel, rejected US Government's interference in the region, while addressing the 28th Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-People's Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP, in Spanish).

#### [Japan to broaden cooperation in Bolivia's community projects](#)

December 15, 2020, Prensa Latina

Japan will extend its cooperation in community projects (for about US\$ 448.503) in terms of water, health and education for four Bolivian departments, Japan's embassy in Bolivia reported.

#### [UK and Brazil to boost economic relationship](#)

December 12, 2020, Merco Press

The UK and Brazil made agreements on financial services, taxation, sustainable growth and Green Finance, helping to boost jobs and investments for UK companies. The fourth Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD) between the UK and Brazil on 10 December 2020 saw the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, and the Brazilian Economy Minister Paulo Guedes, meeting to build further economic ties between the two countries. They were joined by central bank Governors and heads of financial sector regulators.

### [Argentina takes over the Mercosur chair for six months on 16 December](#)

December 12, 2020, Merco Press

Uruguay will be handed over to Argentina on next 16 December the pro tempore chair of the South American trade bloc Mercosur. The ceremony as happened six months before with Paraguay was virtual given the coronavirus pandemic, according to a release from the Uruguayan Executive Office.

### [Argentinian Foreign Minister calls to strengthen MERCOSUR](#)

December 15, 2020, Prensa Latina

Argentinian Foreign Minister Felipe Sola spoke on December 15 in favour of strengthening the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR, for its Spanish initials) with the full incorporation of other states, such as Bolivia.

### [South Africa and Cuba strengthen trade relations](#)

December 17, 2020, Prensa Latina

Mtho Xulu, president of the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and his Cuban counterpart Antonio Luis Carricarte virtually signed an important cooperation agreement between the two entities.

### [Distrust of Bolsonaro is holding up the EU/Mercosur trade deal, says EU ambassador in Brasilia](#)

December 15, 2020, Merco Press

Distrust in Europe of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's government is holding up ratification of a trade deal between the European Union and Mercosur, the EU ambassador to Brasilia said.

### [US latest attack submarine visits Brazil for the incorporation of three Scorpone class submersible](#)

December 15, 2020, Merco Press

The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Vermont (SSN 792) is operating in the US 4th Fleet area of operations and conducted a brief stop for logistics in Rio de Janeiro December 10-15.

## **Africa**

### [Malawi named country of the year](#)

December 17, 2020, Africa News

Malawi has been named country of the year by The Economist Newspaper following the supreme court decision to annul its presidential election.

### [France Approves Return of African Treasures Looted During Colonial Period](#)

December 18, 2020, All Africa

French MPs have approved the return of looted historical artefacts to Benin and Senegal, completing the legislative process needed to give back the objects.

### [Mozambique's Islamist insurgency: UN warns of rising violence in Cabo Delgado](#)

December 18, 2020, BBC News

The number of civilians forced from their homes by conflict in northern Mozambique has quadrupled this year - to 420,000 - according to the United Nations. It links the crisis in Cabo Delgado province not just to attacks by Islamist militants, but to a perceived failure to distribute vast mineral and off-shore gas revenues to the local population.

### [Ethiopia probing cross-border attack on Sudanese troops](#)

December 18, 2020, BBC

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has said his government is "closely following" a cross-border attack on Sudanese troops by Ethiopian forces and militia.

### [Somalia cuts diplomatic ties with Kenya, deploys troops at border](#)

December 17, Africa News

Kenya-Somalia diplomatic relations have severed in recent weeks with the latter blaming Kenya of meddling in its internal political affairs.

### [EU halts aid to Ethiopia over Tigray conflict](#)

December 16, 2020, Africa News

The European Union has postponed almost 90 million euros in budget support payments to Ethiopia over the bloc's concerns of the Tigray crisis, according to an EU document seen by various media organisations.

### [Sudan's PM laments army's role in the country's economy](#)

December 15, 2020, Africa News

Sudanese Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok renewed his criticism of the army and security services, deeming "unacceptable" their predominant weight for years in the country's economy.



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