



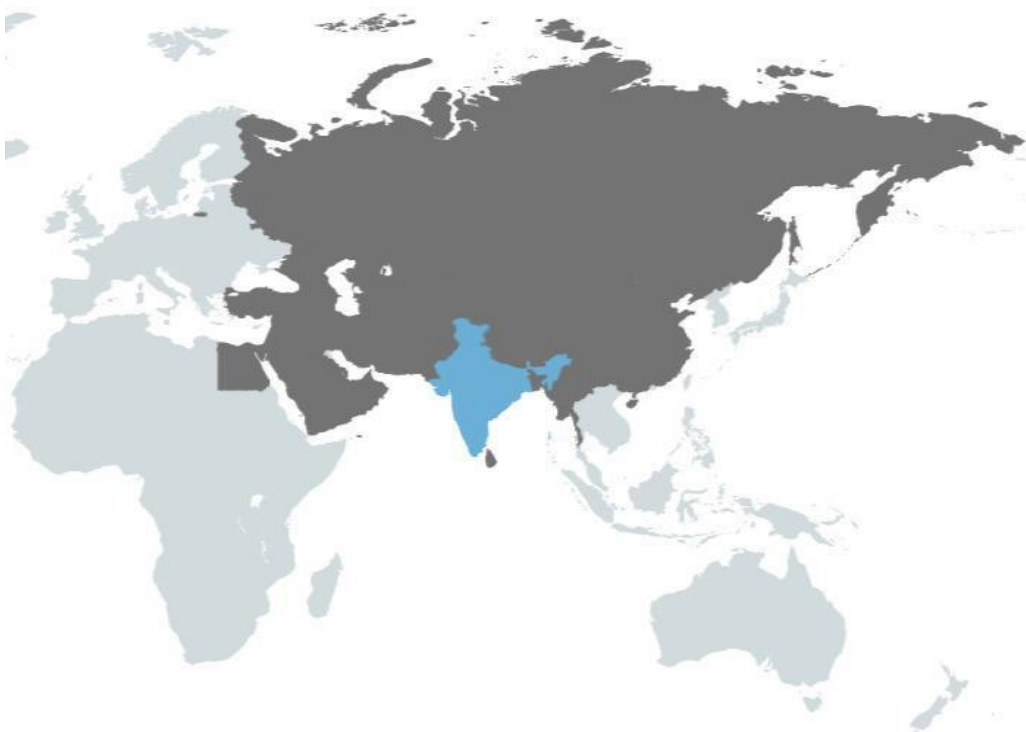
Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2021



Volume II, Issue 9 | September 2021

Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003
www.delhipolicygroup.org



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DPG India Strategic Review

Vol. II, Issue 9

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DPG INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

The DPG India Strategic Review (ISR) is a monthly survey of key developments, trends and policies pertaining to India's immediate and continental neighbourhood. It is compiled by a research team which is led by Sanjay Pulipaka, Senior Fellow, and includes Research Associates Mohit Musaddi, Sanket Joshi, Shreyas Deshmukh and Anushka Nair. The ISR is based on open source official statements, reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to Sanjay Pulipaka at sanjay@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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World map

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DPG India Strategic Review

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I. Overview: Geopolitics and Multilateralism

Sanjay Pulipaka and Mohit Musaddi

India's external engagements in September can be divided broadly into three key baskets. First, on the India-China border, there is an intensified presence of armed forces and equipment by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Second, the situation in Afghanistan continues to be worrisome for India, and prolonged instability is likely as the Taliban has not shown any inclination to be inclusive. Third, Indian foreign policy has demonstrated agility in multilateral fora by chairing the BRICS summit, taking part in the SCO summit, and participating in the first in-person Quad summit. India is the only country that is a member of all the frameworks.

China

The events that have unfolded in recent months serve as a reminder that de-escalation of tensions along the India-China border is far from over. According to reports, in late August, close to 100 [PLA soldiers transgressed](#) the Indian border in Uttarakhand and caused damage to infrastructure.¹ Beijing has also built new accommodations in forward locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and has reportedly [deployed two S-400](#) surface-to-air missile units as well as other anti-aircraft systems.² In late August, large-scale exercises called [Snowfield Duty 2021](#) were conducted by the PLA's Tibet military command.³ India has deployed the ultra-light [M777 howitzer towed guns](#) on its side of the border.⁴

Beijing also continues to [blame India](#) by remarking that the "Galwan valley incident [in June 2020] took place because India... encroached upon China's territory and illegally and crossed the line".⁵ India has [rejected](#) such statements and clarified that it was the "amassing of a large number of troops by the Chinese side, their provocative behaviour and unilateral attempts to alter the status quo" that has disturbed peace and tranquillity along the LAC in eastern Ladakh.⁶ During his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the 21st Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, India's External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar reiterated India's stance that bilateral ties with China will only progress once the [border disengagement](#) is complete.⁷

Reflecting on the border transgressions, Indian Army Chief General M. Naravane stated that "such kinds of incidents will continue to occur till such time that a [long-term solution](#) is reached, and that is to have a boundary agreement".⁸ While clear demarcation of the boundary would be a long-term

solution, China's actions do not suggest that there is any such possibility at present.

On defence procurement, General Naravane had earlier noted that “[long-drawn procurement](#) processes and bureaucratic speed-breakers” are preventing rapid technological upgradation of the defence forces.⁹ Subsequently, on September 29, the Indian defence ministry approved the [procurement of military hardware](#) worth INR13,165 crore (USD1.77 billion), of which 87 per cent will be manufactured in India.¹⁰

Neighbourhood

There are concerns about Chinese territorial expansion in Nepal. The Nepal government dispatched a team to Humla district to study China-Nepal boundary disputes. At the end of the visit, the team concluded that there are some issues and [suggested resolution](#) through the formation of a “joint inspection group of experts”.¹¹ Meanwhile, China has continued to make its presence felt in Myanmar. Beijing signed an agreement with the Tatmadaw to conduct field investigation for the [Kyaukphyu Deep Sea Project](#).¹²

India has continued to boost infrastructure and connectivity in the neighbourhood using public-private partnerships. Through a line of credit, India will [finance a rail link](#) within Bangladesh between Bogra and Sirajganj.¹³ This will help modernise Bangladesh's railway infrastructure and improve connectivity within the country. In Sri Lanka, India's Adani Group entered into a USD700 million deal with the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) to build a [deep-sea container terminal](#) in the Colombo Port.¹⁴ This will be the largest foreign investment ever in Sri Lanka's port sector. Indian Foreign Secretary (FS) Harsh Vardhan Shringla will [visit](#) the island nation from October 2-5 to further promote India-backed projects in Sri Lanka.¹⁵

The scheduled meeting of foreign ministers from the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) countries on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly annual debate was [cancelled](#) as “member states were unable to agree upon the participation of Afghanistan”.¹⁶ Islamabad reportedly insisted on Taliban's participation, which was rejected by other member states. With SAARC not making much progress, there is an eastward shift in regionalism. This was evident during the month with [Bangladesh expressing interest](#) in joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).¹⁷ The RCEP will allow Dhaka to enjoy duty free exports beyond its graduation from Least Developing Country (LDC) status in 2026.

United States

Washington has continued its prioritisation of the Indo-Pacific. On September 23, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman [held consultations](#) with counterparts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Participants discussed ways to “collectively advance shared democratic principles and address global challenges”.¹⁸ [Sherman](#) is expected to travel to India and Pakistan for a series of bilateral meetings in October.¹⁹

FS [Shringla visited the United States](#) in the first week of September in preparation for PM Modi's visit later in the month. During the visit, Delhi and Washington “reaffirmed the strength of their defence relationship”.²⁰ Building on previous agreements on the development of air-launched unmanned aerial vehicles ([ALUAVs](#)), a concrete project agreement was signed between India and the US.²¹

US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John [Kerry visited India](#) from September 12-14 to launch the “US-India Climate Action and Finance Mobilisation Dialogue” under the India-US Climate Clean Energy Agenda 2030.²² On September 9, the first ministerial meeting of the newly revitalised US-India Strategic [Clean Energy Partnership](#) was held virtually.²³

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United States for the UNGA General Assembly debate as well as the Quad Summit. The PM met US President Joe Biden and discussed the need to fight against global terrorism collectively, strengthen the India-US defence relationship, enhance bilateral trade and establish secure supply chains. The annual bilateral 2+2 foreign and defence ministerial dialogue will be held in November. PM Modi [also met](#) US Vice President Kamala Harris and the CEOs of five leading American companies.²⁴

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief William [Burns visited India](#) in September and held discussions with Indian National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval.²⁵ Developments in Afghanistan figured prominently in the discussions.

Afghanistan-Pakistan

During the month, the Taliban announced ministerial positions of the new regime, predominantly comprised of ethnic Pashtun leaders and Taliban hardliners. This clearly indicated that the Taliban is not keen on reaching out to the leaders of various ethnic groups. In fact, there were reports that some senior Taliban leaders, such as Mullah [Baradar, were injured](#) in intra-Taliban clashes that took place prior to the announcement of ministries.²⁶

Given the continued fluidity in Afghanistan, Pakistan is making all efforts to ensure that the Taliban's hold is consolidated. On September 11, Pakistan's [ISI chief hosted](#) a meeting in Islamabad with the intelligence heads of Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and China to discuss the evolving security situation in Afghanistan.²⁷ CIA Director William Burns also [interacted](#) with leaders of Pakistan.²⁸ Pakistan PM Imran Khan devoted considerable time during his UNGA speech as well as in speeches on other multilateral platforms calling for immediate recognition of the Taliban. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Islamabad has "a multiplicity of interests, some that are in conflict with" Washington's and therefore, the US will [reassess its relationship](#) with Pakistan.²⁹ Meanwhile, [China announced](#) USD31 million as aid to Afghanistan.³⁰

There have been reports of increased [infiltration of terrorists](#) from Pakistan into the Jammu and Kashmir region of India.³¹ The Indian Army has carried out special operations to contain such infiltrations. A consolidation of the Taliban-Pakistan axis is already beginning to have a negative spillover impact in India.

India-Russia

In early September, Russian intelligence chief Nikolay [Patrushev visited India](#) and held discussions with his counterpart NSA Ajit Doval.³² Patrushev also took part in the India-Russia [Inter-Governmental Consultations](#) on Afghanistan.³³ While the US withdrawal from Afghanistan may have provided space for countries such as Russia and China, there are also concerns in Moscow that the Taliban has not made efforts towards building an [inclusive government](#).³⁴

In the recent past, Delhi and Moscow have worked on expanding areas of co-operation. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed Russia's Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) on September 3 and referred to [increased co-operation](#) between India and Russia in health, energy and connectivity projects.³⁵ The Pharma sector has generated new opportunities as well as challenges. An increase in the supplies of COVID-19 vaccines from Indian manufacturers has [reduced demand](#) for the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine.³⁶ However, there are possibilities that reduced domestic demand could lead to an [increase in exports](#) of the made-in-India Sputnik V vaccines.³⁷

Various meetings of multilateral frameworks during the month such as the 13th BRICS Summit (September 9), 21st meeting of the Council of Heads of State of SCO (September 17) and the joint meeting of the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (September 17) provided platforms for enhanced India-Russia engagement. Indian defence forces also participated in a [military](#)

[exercise](#) organised by SCO in Russia.³⁸ Indian Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin [Rawat travelled to Russia](#) to witness the exercises.³⁹

Delhi and Moscow need to navigate the third-country dynamic in India-Russia relations. There have been reports that the US may apply the provisions of Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act ([CAATSA](#)) for India's purchase of the S-400 surface-to-air-missiles from Russia.⁴⁰ As an [analyst has noted](#), while India "is not willing simply to abandon the longstanding partnership with Russia... [it] also isn't ready to let Russia have a veto over India's relations with the United States".⁴¹

West Asia

The Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud [arrived in India](#) on September 18 for a three-day visit and interacted with his Indian counterpart EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar.⁴² The developments in Afghanistan dominated the conversations between the two. Reports indicated that Saudi Arabia is concerned with the growing influence of Pakistan, Turkey, and Qatar on the Taliban.⁴³ The foreign minister also [called on PM Modi](#) and discussed the potential for greater investments from Saudi Arabia, including in the Indian defence sector.⁴⁴ Saudi Arabia's defence co-operation with India can be mutually beneficial, given Saudi Arabia's willingness to diversify its imports. There are also reports that Riyadh may be in talks with Moscow to [purchase the S-400](#) missile defence system as it is worried about the relocation of the American Patriot air defence systems from the Kingdom.⁴⁵

EAM Dr. S. [Jaishankar met his Iran counterpart](#) on the sidelines of the UNGA general debate in New York. They took stock of the existing level of bilateral ties and discussed the latest developments in Afghanistan.⁴⁶

After the Indian Air Chief's visit to the UAE in August, the Indian [Navy Chief travelled to Oman](#) in September. India and Oman signed an "agreement for the exchange of white shipping information and to boost maritime security co-operation".⁴⁷ During the month, the Indian Air force received the Medium Range Surface to Air Missile ([MRSAM](#)) system jointly developed by India and Israel.⁴⁸ The Indian Army also placed an order for [Sky Striker drones](#) that will be manufactured by Israel's Elbit System in collaboration with India's Alpha Design.⁴⁹

India and the UAE have formally launched negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Further, easy movement of professionals between India and the UAE may be facilitated through Abu Dhabi's [Green Visa scheme](#).⁵⁰ The UAE has joined the BRICS New Development

Bank, indicating its intent to diversify economic interactions. On the other hand, [Iran became a member](#) of the SCO.⁵¹ The diversification of interactions by the Gulf countries will further solidify continental multilateral frameworks.

Multilateralism

During the month, India participated in numerous multilateral frameworks. At the [13th BRICS Summit](#), PM Modi stressed the importance of the framework as a platform that gives an “influential voice for the emerging economies of the world” and focuses “attention on the priorities of developing nations as well”.⁵² The Prime Minister [expressed appreciation](#) for the willingness to “accelerate the implementation of the BRICS Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism” and for various other initiatives such as the agreement on co-operation in the field of remote-sensing satellites.⁵³

[At the SCO](#), PM Modi highlighted the challenge of “growing radicalisation and extremism in the broader SCO region”.⁵⁴ He called on the organisation to “develop a code of conduct on ‘zero tolerance’ towards terrorism in the region”.⁵⁵

India, the US, Australia, and Japan convened in Washington for the first in-person [Quad Leaders’ summit](#). Prime Minister Modi’s opening remarks at the summit suggested that India approaches the framework as a “force for global good”.⁵⁶ More importantly, Delhi seeks to leverage the Quad to increase the density of multipolarity in the Indo-Pacific region based on “shared democratic values”.⁵⁷ There were no direct references to China in the Quad joint statement. However, a Pentagon [spokesperson remarked](#) that “China’s aggressive and coercive nature... is a frequent topic of discussion among the Quad nations”.⁵⁸ In addition to pandemic related cooperation, the summit identified a [big menu of activities](#) such as maritime security, shipping operations, and clean energy technologies for implementation.⁵⁹ The underlying theme of these activities is to foster resilient supply chain networks and operationalise a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Assessing India’s role in the evolving multipolar order, PM Modi noted at the UNGA that India’s economic growth and reforms would have a [positive impact](#) on the rest of the world.⁶⁰ PM Modi also reiterated that if the United Nations were to [remain relevant](#), it would need to improve its effectiveness and enhance its reliability.⁶¹

II. India and the Neighbourhood¹

Mohit Musaddi

Nepal

The Nepal Ministry of Home Affairs sent a team led by their Joint Secretary to “study the [border dispute issues](#) with China” in Humla district.⁶² The team [completed the visit](#) to seven border posts on the Nepal-China border, including to the Limi-Lapcha area, which had recently come under scrutiny after the Chinese side constructed nine buildings reportedly in Nepali territory.⁶³ However, the team was unable to visit Pillar No. 11 due to “inclement weather”.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the [Chinese Embassy](#) in Nepal has said that the China-Nepal border is “free of dispute”.⁶⁵

Dr. Narayan Khadka was appointed as the new [Foreign Minister](#) of Nepal. He assumed office on September 22.⁶⁶ Soon after his appointment, Dr. Khadka led the country’s delegation to the [UN General Assembly](#) (UNGA).⁶⁷ In New York, Dr. Khadka also [met](#) India’s External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar.⁶⁸



Foreign Ministers of India and Nepal met in New York on the sidelines of the UNGA annual general debate. Source: Twitter/@DrSJaisankar

¹ In the neighbourhood, this chapter will cover developments in Nepal, Myanmar, the Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

On September 16, Delhi and Kathmandu held the meeting of the 4th Joint Project Monitoring Committee (JPMC) on Strengthening of Road Infrastructure in the Terai Area of Nepal via video-conferencing. The [meeting](#) reviewed the overall implementation of the Terai roads project in Nepal, which is funded by the Government of India. India has committed INR500 crore (USD67.8 million).⁶⁹ During the month, India and Nepal also signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) for India to reconstruct 14 cultural heritage projects and 103 health sector projects across Nepal; these had been damaged during the 2015 earthquake.⁷⁰ The funds for reconstruction will be utilised from the allocated total grant of USD250 million. On September 30, the JPMC "carried out a comprehensive review of the progress of Government of India assisted [post-earthquake reconstruction](#) projects".⁷¹ A day earlier [six schools](#) were inaugurated in Nepal that were built using Indian grant assistance of USD50 million.⁷²

The 15th India-Nepal military exercise '[Surya Kiran](#)' is being held in Pithoragarh from September 20 to October 3 "with a focus on counter-terror drills and disaster relief operations".⁷³

Officials from the United States' Millennium Challenge Corporation ([MCC](#)) [visited Nepal](#) during the month to discuss the status of the USD500 million American aid agreement, which was signed in 2017.⁷⁴ Under the agreement, the US government will provide [grant assistance](#) to strengthen Nepal's hydroelectricity transmission line and to improve road networks.⁷⁵ However, the MCC grant has been [mired in controversy](#) and there have been concerns on whether it "has any military connection, and whether the US would control the rights over the intellectual property".⁷⁶ Nevertheless, there have been reports that the current Nepal government is keen to start the project. To that end, Nepal and India signed an MoU on September 8 for the construction of a [400kV transmission line](#) from Butwal (Nepal) to Gorakhpur (India).⁷⁷ The transmission line is a pre-requisite for the MCC grant, which will be utilised to connect Butwal to Damauli and Hetauda within Nepal through a 315-kilometre transmission line. Once both projects are complete, Nepal will be able to generate and export up to 2,000 MW of electricity to India.⁷⁸

Despite a change in the government, domestic political challenges continue to persist in Nepal. PM Deuba has been unable to expand his cabinet owing to constraints imposed by the coalition and there are currently [16 ministries](#) that lie vacant.⁷⁹ The government went under a '[shutdown](#)' for a week in September as a replacement bill for the budget ordinance brought in by the erstwhile Oli administration in May 2021 could not be passed within the 60-day constitutional deadline.⁸⁰

Myanmar

Myanmar's shadow government – the National Unity Government (NUG) – has called for a “[people's defensive war](#)” against the military regime.⁸¹ The NUG has also said that it could [no longer rely](#) on the international community “to support the country's democratic movement or to protect the people of Myanmar from the brutality of the military junta”.⁸² There has been inaction on the part of ASEAN as, despite a delayed appointment of the special envoy to Myanmar, there has not been much progress on the five-point consensus agreed by ASEAN in May. Since the NUG's call for a war against the military, reports of unrest have emerged from different parts of the country. Towns abutting the Indian border in Myanmar's Chin state saw a major flare up of violence. There have been reports that [over 5,000 people](#) have arrived from Myanmar in just two districts of Mizoram since the escalation of violence.⁸³ The Tatmadaw reportedly [cut off internet](#) access in various parts of Chin.⁸⁴ Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has said that she has “[no comment](#)” on NUG's call for a “people's defensive war”.⁸⁵

There has been a [steady increase](#) in the number of defections from the Tatmadaw over the past few months.⁸⁶ Reportedly, close to [2,000 soldiers](#) and police have joined the opposition's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) since February 1.⁸⁷ To facilitate such movements, the NUG along with the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) launched the [People's Embrace Project](#) on September 17.⁸⁸



Members from the Sangha Union participate in protests against the Myanmar military, September 22, 2021. Source: Twitter/@Myanmar_Now_Eng

In dire need of cash, the Tatmadaw auctioned over 12,000 tonnes of [illegal timber](#) in September.⁸⁹ It has reportedly lost over USD1 billion in revenue since the coup from the military-operated power company “amid a widespread [public boycott](#) of the paying of electricity bills”.⁹⁰ Another steady source of revenue for the Tatmadaw that has been affected is that from state-run [educational institutions](#). Since the opening of schools in June, there has been a widespread boycott of state-run schools; instead, there has been a spike in enrolments at ethnic community schools.⁹¹ The value of [Myanmar's currency](#) has fallen from 1,330 kyats per US dollar on February 1 to an all-time low of 2,200 kyats to the US dollar.⁹² In the recent past, Tatmadaw has already held [auctions](#) for timber in May and June.⁹³

During the month, China signed an agreement with the Myanmar military junta to conduct preliminary field investigation work for the [Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone](#) (SEZ) Deep Sea Project. On September 16, a senior official from the Chinese Foreign Ministry had [met](#) the Myanmar Ambassador to China to exchange views on “China-Myanmar relations, anti-pandemic co-operation, and international and regional issues of common concern”.⁹⁴ Last month, Beijing's special envoy for Asian affairs had [travelled to Myanmar](#) to meet General Min Aung Hlaing and other senior junta leaders.⁹⁵

Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the UN Mr. [Kyaw Moe Tun](#) sat out of high-level UN meetings but has retained his post, at least until November 2021.⁹⁶ Mr. Tun, an appointee of the ousted Suu Kyi-government, has [refused to vacate](#) his post after the military coup despite an assassination attempt against him.⁹⁷ Reports suggest that the decision is a “[compromise](#)” between the US and China over who should be allowed to take Myanmar's seat at the UN.⁹⁸ A nine-member UN credentials committee, which includes the US and China, will meet in November this year to make the decision. While the committee “appears united against recognising the [military] regime”, it is reportedly sceptical over the degree of support it will extend to the ousted government.⁹⁹

Maldives

In his [address to the UNGA](#) on September 21, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih reminded the world about the reality of climate change and said that “there is no guarantee of survival for any one nation in a world where the Maldives ceases to exist”.¹⁰⁰ The President also urged the world to give up excessive use of fossil fuels and to adopt cleaner and smarter technologies for energy.¹⁰¹

President Solih made the speech in the presence of Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid, who is also the current President of the UNGA. Newly appointed Indian Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi had [met Shahid](#) on September 9 in New York to discuss issues related to "COVID-19 vaccines, gender, youth, human rights and environment".¹⁰²

On September 30, India and the Maldives signed an MoU on "Augmenting Marine Safety, Security and Environment Protection in the region through cooperation in the long-range identification and tracking of ships ([LRIT System](#))".¹⁰³ India maintains a National Data Centre (NDC), through which it monitors its ships on international trade across the world. As per the MoU, Male will be able to use the NDC on "no cost basis".¹⁰⁴

India is assisting the Maldives through a line of credit to build a cancer hospital to help boost medical tourism in the country. In that regard, a team from the Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) visited the Maldives from September 2 to 5 to [carry out a study](#).¹⁰⁵ The Maldivian government, on September 2, also signed a USD40 million line of credit agreement with India's EXIM bank "for the development of [sports infrastructure](#) across the country".¹⁰⁶ Further, the EXIM bank has also concluded agreements in the Maldives to "extend buyers credit of approximately USD 227 million for the construction of 4000 [Social Housing Units](#) in Hulhumale".¹⁰⁷

Bhutan

India will be part of the [reconstruction](#) of the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong monastery in Bhutan, which was damaged in a fire incident in 2012.¹⁰⁸ The project will be completed by July 2022 and funded through India's project tied assistance of INR1 billion (USD13.5 million) for Bhutan's 11th and 12th Five-Year Plans (FYPs). In total, India has [committed INR45 billion](#) (USD610 million) for Bhutan's ongoing 12th FYP.¹⁰⁹ On September 19, a [motorable bridge](#) at Berdungma, Trashigang, built using Indian assistance, was inaugurated.¹¹⁰ On September 23, the Government of India [released INR3.72 billion](#) (USD50 million) for various development projects in Bhutan.¹¹¹ The space organisations of India and Bhutan signed an implementing arrangement on September 24 on the [joint development](#) of a small satellite for Bhutan.¹¹²



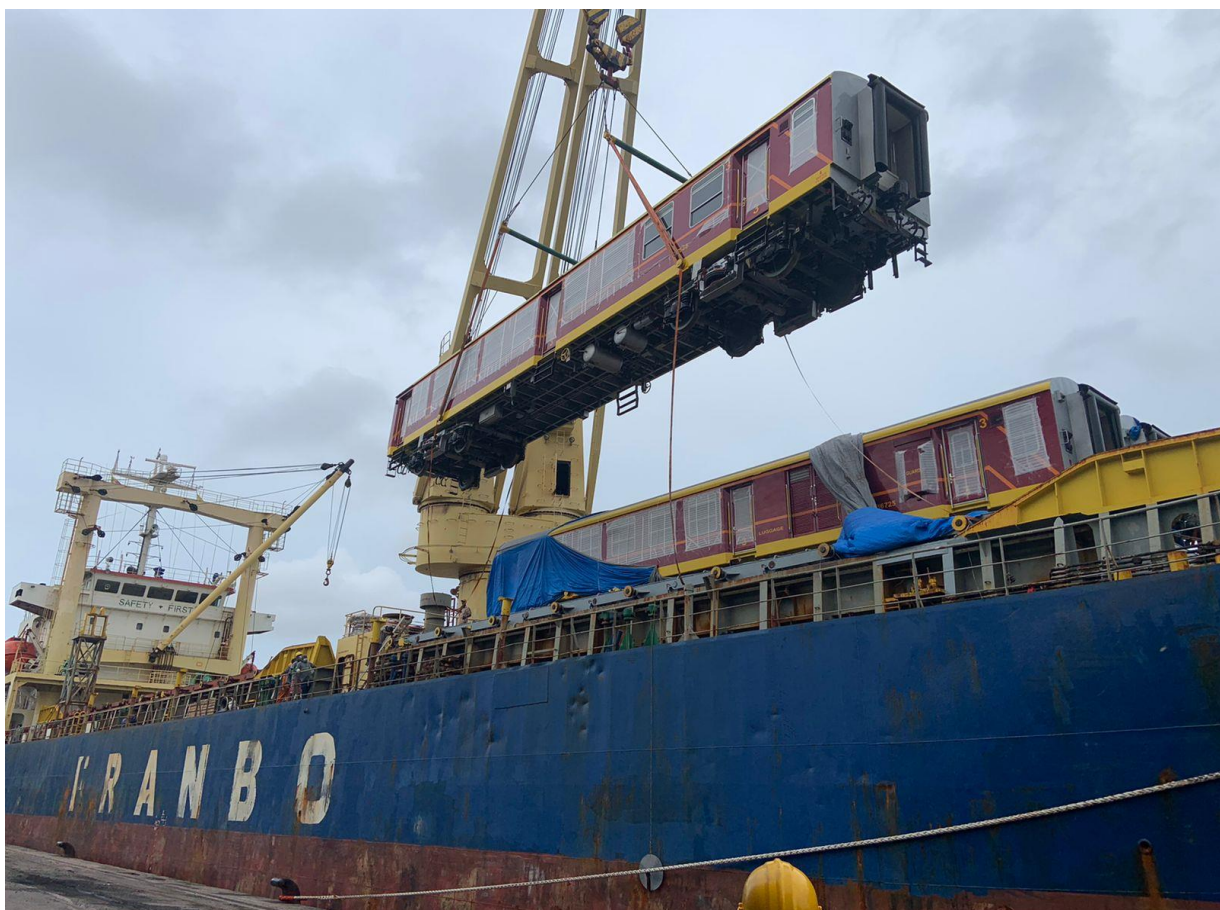
Virtual signing ceremony of the joint development of a small satellite between India and Bhutan, September 24, 2021. Source: Twitter/@IndiainBhutan

During the month, Bhutan also struck a deal with telecommunications company Ericsson for the [rollout of 5G network](#) in the country.¹¹³ Ericsson has operated in the country since 2004 in partnership with Bhutan Telecom and helped deploy 2G, 3G and 4G networks. 5G services in Bhutan will open up new opportunities for businesses, industries and the public sector.

Sri Lanka

The newly appointed Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India, who took charge on August 30, has drafted a [strategy paper](#) calling for an increase in joint military exercises and high-level military exchanges. The paper also calls for the utilisation of India's USD50million counter-terrorism line of credit and increasing the staff strength of the defence advisor's office.¹¹⁴

India-Sri Lanka co-operation has been wide-ranging in September. India's External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar held "[comprehensive discussion\[s\]](#)" on September 22 with his Sri Lankan counterpart G.L. Peiris in New York.¹¹⁵ They emphasised the need for swift action on a number of [projects](#) that are pending implementation.¹¹⁶ On September 17, the Indian Railways supplied [20 passenger coaches](#), which is part of a USD82.6million contract for India to supply 160 passenger coaches to Sri Lanka.¹¹⁷ The coaches are being financed through an Indian line of credit of USD 318 million, and so far, 60 coaches have been supplied. India has also supplied [150 tonnes of oxygen](#) to Sri Lanka to assist in its fight against COVID-19.¹¹⁸ This is in addition to the liquid medical oxygen that India sent to Sri Lanka in August.



Twenty railway passenger coaches arrived at the Colombo Port on September 17, 2021. Source: Twitter/@IndiainSL

An international collaboration visit for Sri Lankan armed forces' officers to India has been initiated and is being facilitated by the Indian High Commission in Colombo. A delegation of 39 officers will [visit India](#) and learn about "the functioning of all three Service Headquarters at New Delhi... [as well as] the routine of tri-services field formations".¹¹⁹

The navies of India and Sri Lanka virtually held the 31st meeting of the International Maritime Boundary Line ([IMBL](#)) on September 29.¹²⁰ They discussed measures to curb smuggling across the Indian Ocean and agreed to increase border patrols and strengthen “information exchange mechanisms... to curb illegal activities”.¹²¹

On September 30, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) signed an [agreement](#) with India's Adani Group worth USD700 million for a new deep-sea container terminal in the Colombo Port.¹²²

Bangladesh

Two high-level visits from the Bangladesh Army to India took place in September. [Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff](#) Shafiuddin Ahmed met his Indian counterpart General Mukund Naravane in Delhi on September 7 and discussed ways to “deepen defence co-operation”.¹²³ On September 21, [Bangladesh Army Quartermaster](#) Lieutenant General Md Saiful Alam visited India and met Gen. Naravane to “discuss issues of mutual interest”.¹²⁴



Indian Chief of Army Staff Gen. Naravane (L) with his Bangladeshi counterpart in Delhi, September 7, 2021. Source: Tribune India

India and Bangladesh have strengthened connectivity in the past month. [Passenger train services](#) through the Haldibari-Chilahati border will begin soon following a ban due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²⁵ Under a line of credit, India will [finance a rail link](#) within Bangladesh from Bogra to Sirajganj.¹²⁶ India-Bangladesh [land border curbs](#) have also been relaxed; a no-objection certificate is no longer required for valid visa holders.¹²⁷ Further, a new [passenger terminal building](#) was inaugurated on September 17 at the Petrapole Integrated Check Post (ICP).¹²⁸ The ICP is the largest land port in South Asia and handles around 2.3 million passengers annually. [Air travel](#) between India and Bangladesh are also in operation under an air bubble agreement since September 3.¹²⁹

Bangladesh will reportedly send a [formal proposal](#) to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Secretariat, conveying Dhaka's interest in acquiring membership to the trade bloc.¹³⁰ Bangladesh, which currently enjoys duty free access to major economies due to its LDC status, is set to graduate in 2026. Membership to RCEP will allow Bangladesh continued duty-free access to the member countries and, therefore, enable it to maintain its competitive edge, primarily in the case of its textile exports. However, the RCEP has [not yet come into force](#), as only China, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand have ratified the pact.¹³¹ At least six ASEAN countries and three partner countries need to ratify the RCEP for it to come into force.

III. CARs, PAI and The Afghan Vortex²

Shreyas Deshmukh

The looming humanitarian crisis and the probability of a Taliban regime persisting with its repressive governance model has intensified concerns of a prolonged conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Qatar have called for the immediate release of funds from international organisations to avoid a humanitarian crisis. However, core issues like the legitimacy of the Taliban regime have remained unanswered. Pakistan remains in close contact with the Taliban while other countries are taking a more cautious approach. It is broadly in this evolving geopolitical context that the SCO Heads of the States meeting was organised during the month. The developments in Afghanistan constituted the backdrop of discussions.

SCO Summit

On September 17, the 21st meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The leaders of the SCO member states, observer states, the Secretary-General of the SCO, the Executive Director of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), the President of Turkmenistan, and other guests participated in the summit. [Iran's application](#) to become a full member of the SCO was approved by all seven permanent members.¹³² Iran's membership needs to be viewed in the backdrop of the China-Iran strategic agreement signed in March 2021. No progress on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement and a reduction in US footprints in Eurasia may have also pushed Iran to deepen its engagement with its eastern neighbours. The [joint declaration](#) of the SCO summit called the, 'Dushanbe Declaration', touched upon all aspects of co-operation between the states but mostly focused the security in the region amid the developments in Afghanistan.¹³³

India's External Affairs Minister (EAM), Dr. S. Jaishankar travelled to Dushanbe to participate in the Summit while Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the event virtually. In his address to the Plenary Session, PM Modi, while [discussing regional connectivity issues](#), said, "[A]ny initiative on connectivity cannot be a one-way street. The connectivity projects should be consultative, transparent, and participatory to ensure mutual trust. In this regard, respect for the territorial integrity of all countries should be implicit. Based on these

² CARs stand for Central Asian Republics and PAI stands for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.

principles, SCO should develop suitable norms for connectivity projects in the region.”¹³⁴

On the sidelines of the summit, many other multilateral and bilateral meetings were held with focus on the situation in Afghanistan. In remarks to the SCO-CSTO outreach summit, PM Modi [expressed concern](#) over the transition of power in Afghanistan stating it is “not inclusive, and it has happened without negotiation; if instability and fundamentalism persist in Afghanistan, it will encourage terrorist and extremist ideologies all over the world; an uncontrolled flow of drugs, illegal weapons, and human trafficking.”¹³⁵

On September 16, the [joint statement](#) of a meeting of foreign ministers of China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran noted the need for an inclusive government in Afghanistan and called on the international community to provide “humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan on urgent basis”.¹³⁶ During the meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a [five-point agenda](#) including guarding the spillover of security risks from Afghanistan and urged the US “to earnestly fulfil its obligations and take its responsibility”.¹³⁷ During the summit, Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) also reiterated that his country would work with the Taliban government in Afghanistan.¹³⁸



Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran at quadrilateral meeting on Afghanistan, on the sidelines of SCO summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, September 16, 2021. Source: MOFA Russia

While answering a question on the absence of an Afghan delegation at the summit, [Russian FM Sergey Lavrov](#) said “the Taliban have not yet been officially recognised by a single country. Everyone is saying that contacts should be maintained with them on current issues, primarily security, respect for citizens’

rights, and the normal functioning of diplomatic missions. But no one is in a hurry to grant them official recognition.”¹³⁹

EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar also held bilateral meetings with his Kyrgyz, Tajik and Chinese counterparts on the sidelines of the summit.

Afghanistan

On September 7, the Taliban announced a new caretaker government. The cabinet is mostly dominated by [Pashtun leaders](#) from the Taliban ranks who served during the Taliban regime in the 1990s.¹⁴⁰ On September 22, Taliban announced the expansion of the cabinet by appointing a few deputy ministers from other ethnic communities for less important portfolios. Sticking to their regressive views, the Taliban did not appoint any female minister and [replaced](#) the Women's Affairs Ministry building to offices for the religious morality police.¹⁴¹ Although it has not banned girls from going to school, the Taliban have issued [strict directives](#) such as gender-based segregation of classrooms and directing only female staff to teach girls.¹⁴² They also ordered female employees working in different government and non-government firms to [stay at home](#).¹⁴³



Women gather to demand their rights under Taliban rule during a protest in Kabul, Afghanistan, on September 3, 2021. Source: NPR

According to reports, the Taliban [hanged bodies](#) of alleged kidnappers in Herat on September 26.¹⁴⁴ The action has shredded the [earlier propagated](#) narrative that the movement has changed and their views are not the same as it was two decades ago.¹⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the United Nations has warned that [food supply in Afghanistan](#) could run out if the international community does not step in to provide humanitarian support immediately.¹⁴⁶ During the donor conference organised by the UN, more than USD1.1 billion was pledged by countries. However, it was not clear whether the amount is in addition to the pledges made before the Taliban took over or if they are just dispersing the [aid earlier marked](#) for Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ While speaking at the conference on [fair distribution](#) of aid to all Afghans, EAM Dr. Jaishankar said that it is "essential that humanitarian assistance providers are accorded unimpeded, unrestricted and direct access to Afghanistan."¹⁴⁸

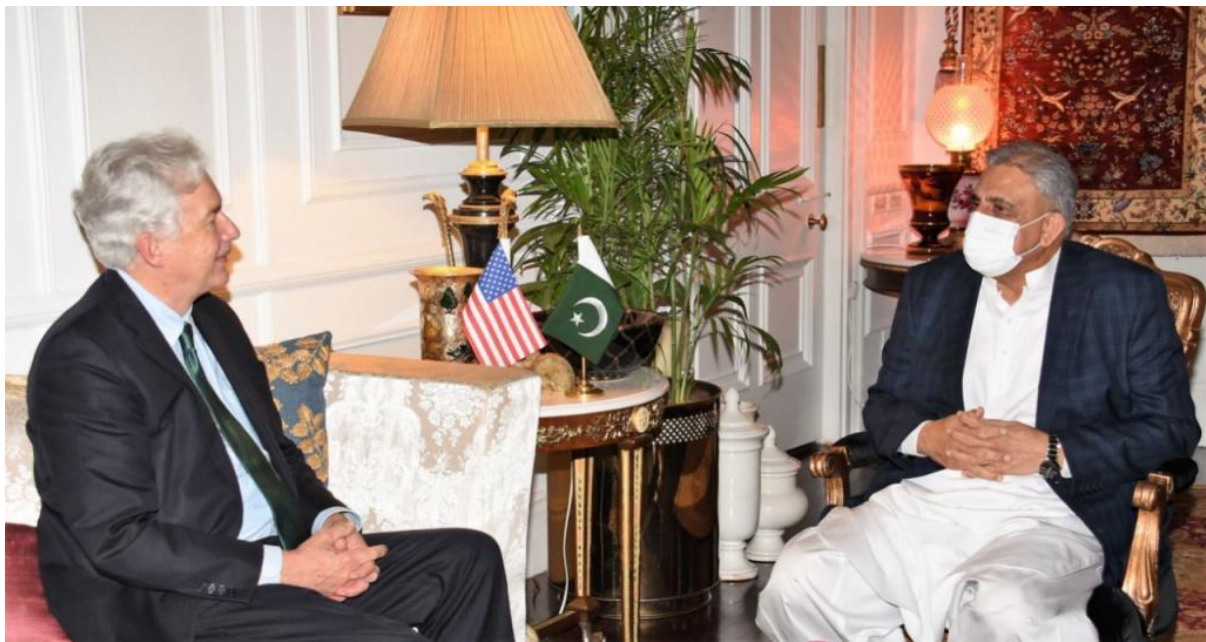
After a [phone conversation](#) between Wu Jianghao, Deputy Foreign Minister of China, and Abdul Salam Hanafi, a member of the Taliban's political office in Doha, China announced USD31 million as aid to Afghanistan.¹⁴⁹ According to the Taliban spokesperson, China has also promised to keep its embassy open. On September 23, in the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the permanent members of the UNSC, [China's Foreign Minister](#) called on all parties to "help Afghanistan to tackle four challenges" – humanitarian, counter-terrorism, economic and political.¹⁵⁰

Pakistan-Afghanistan

Pakistan held [bilateral consultations](#) on Afghanistan with the UK, Saudi Arabia and Qatar among other countries.¹⁵¹ On September 4, the director-general of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, [visited Kabul](#)¹⁵² to meet the Taliban leaders. After a week, on September 11, he [hosted](#) intelligence chiefs of regional countries in Islamabad to discuss the Afghan situation.¹⁵³ The meeting was attended by [intelligence heads](#) from Russia, China, Iran, and the Central Asian states. In the same week, CIA chief William Burns also met Pakistan's military leadership in Rawalpindi.¹⁵⁴ The DG Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), head of the media wing of the Pakistan Army, stated that his [country is satisfied](#) with the security assurances by the Taliban.¹⁵⁵ Reciprocating these views, the Taliban spokesperson admired Prime Minister [Imran Khan's efforts](#) for stability in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁶ PM Khan called on the international community to incentivise the Taliban regime to stop the crisis, and warned that failing to do so would lead to [chaos in neighbouring countries](#) due to refugee problems and terrorism.¹⁵⁷ The leader of the Pakistan

Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of opposition parties in Pakistan, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, has urged his government to immediately [recognise the Taliban](#) government.¹⁵⁸ In his speech at the UNGA, PM Khan made Pakistan's future policy priorities clear as he spent half his time advocating for the Taliban, and the other half talking about Kashmir. A sudden [uptick in infiltration](#) attempts by terrorists on the Line of Control is a worrisome development for India.¹⁵⁹

Afghans currently have two options. They must either endure a prolonged regressive regime or mount a resistance to Taliban, which is difficult to sustain given the lack of support from other countries in the region.



CIA Director William Joseph Burns met Pakistan Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on September 9, 2021. Source: Dawn

Defence Updates

- On September 6, the Pakistan Navy frigate PNS Alamgir (F 260) and German Navy frigate FGS Bayern (F 217) participated in a [PASSEX](#) with guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh (CG 67) in the Arabian Sea. The exercise included advanced manoeuvres and communication drills, improving the crews' abilities to operate together in a dynamic environment, and test and refine combined command and control processes.¹⁶⁰ While speaking about the exercise, [German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas](#) said that "the Indo-Pacific is where the international order of the future will be decided. We want to help shape it and to take on responsibility for upholding the rules-based international order."¹⁶¹
- The 5th edition of the India-Kazakhstan [Joint Training Exercise KAZIND-21](#) was conducted from August 31 to September 10 at Training Node Aisha Bibi, Kazakhstan. The training focused on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations "in the urban scenario as well as sharing of expertise on skills with arms".¹⁶²
- The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) conducted a three-day [military exercise](#) 'Rubezh (Frontier) 2021' on Kyrgyzstan's Edelweis training field in response to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan. Military units from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as operative groups of the CSTO's United Staff and Secretariat, participated in the exercise. Tajik troops were originally scheduled to take part as well but withdrew at the last moment for unspecified reasons. The exercise focused on blocking and neutralizing illegal armed groups that unlawfully enter a CSTO member state's territory.¹⁶³
- The US Embassy in Dushanbe announced plans to build a [border-guard facility](#) on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan border. The embassy said a groundbreaking ceremony to launch the project is scheduled for early 2022. The new border detachment will replace the old one in Shahritus and allow the Border Service to deploy troops in border areas expeditiously in response to threats. The facility will house an unspecified number of border guards and their families.¹⁶⁴

IV. Russia: Multilateralism and Domestic Continuity

Anushka Nair

India-Russia

The Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) was held in Vladivostok from September 2-4 with the theme "The Opportunities for The Far East in A World under Transformation". Prime Minister Modi [addressed](#) the forum virtually, and reiterated India's 'Act Far East' policy, which was announced at the last EEF held in 2019.¹⁶⁵ While taking note of ongoing bilateral co-operation in areas like space exploration, health and pharma, and energy, the Prime Minister announced that India would partner with Russia to help [develop the Northern Sea Route](#) as well.¹⁶⁶

India participated with Russia in several multilateral fora this month. On September 9, PM Modi chaired the [13th BRICS Summit](#). Discussions revolved around the COVID-19 pandemic response and the security situation in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁷ PM Modi and President Putin also attended a [joint session](#) of the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) where the Russian President proposed a resumption of the Moscow format of consultations on Afghanistan as well as the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.¹⁶⁸

On September 8, the Union Cabinet approved the signing of a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) between India and Russia to facilitate co-operation in the field of geosciences.¹⁶⁹ The pact has been finalised between Joint Stock Company Rosgeologia (a state-owned company also known as ROSGEO), and the Geological Survey of India (GSI). The primary intent of the agreement is to jointly develop India's Geoscience Data inventory using Russia's cutting-edge technology, identification and analysis of aero-geophysical data and joint exploration of previously undiscovered mineral deposits.

Delhi and Moscow finalised a [two-way channel](#) on intelligence collaboration and information sharing on Afghanistan.¹⁷⁰ Indian NSA Ajit Doval and his Russian counterpart, Nikolai Patrushev, who visited New Delhi during the month, headed the meeting. The discussions also encompassed possibilities for [military collaboration](#) on combatting terrorism, illegal migration and drug trafficking.¹⁷¹



Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev & India's NSA Ajit Doval met in New Delhi on September 8, 2021. Source: Twitter/@IndEmbMoscow

Russia's deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov told the press that Russia is considering India as one of the [first potential buyers](#) for its newly developed S-500 anti-aircraft missile systems, also stating that the two countries' lack of shared regional conflicts make Russia willing to sell weapon systems to India that they may not offer to other countries.¹⁷² While it is yet to be inducted into Russia's own military arsenal, the S-500 system has been hailed by Russia's Aerospace Forces Chief as the [first generation of anti-space weapons](#), capable of destroying even hypersonic weapons up to hundreds of kilometres away in near-earth space.¹⁷³

Military Engagement

Russia hosted military exercises with various partners this month, the first being [Zapad 2021](#), which concluded on September 16. Contingents from Armenia, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia participated, while China, Pakistan and Myanmar were among eight nations that sent observer teams to the drills. The exercise involved 20,000 officers and soldiers, 5,600 items of weapons and military equipment, about 160 tanks, over 100 aircraft and over 100 helicopters, as reported by the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces.¹⁷⁴

The sixth edition of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization's (SCO) joint military exercise '[Peace Mission 2021](#)' was held in Russia's Orenburg region from September 20 to 24.¹⁷⁵ A 200-member contingent from the Indian Armed Forces participated in counter-terrorism drills along with contingents from Russia, China, Pakistan, and the Central Asian Republics. India's Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat also travelled to Orenburg to [witness the exercise](#), and met with his counterparts from other SCO member states.¹⁷⁶

The Russia and Pakistan joint military exercise '[Friendship 2021](#)' will continue from September 27 to October 6 at the Molkino training ground in Russia's Krasnodar Territory.¹⁷⁷ The exercise, hosted alternately by the two countries, seeks to strengthen and develop bilateral military co-operation.

Election Update

On the domestic front, President Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party retained a significant majority in the State Duma elections held from September 17-19. The election was mired in controversy, which included allegations of intimidation and ballot tampering. The United Russia Party managed a [comfortable victory](#), retaining 324 seats in the Duma, a large majority, despite losing 19 seats as compared to the last election.¹⁷⁸ The Communist Party gained 15 seats since the last time, taking its seat share to 57 (18.9 percent).

In the months leading up to the polls, most opposition candidates were deemed unfit to contest, jailed or exiled. Media outlets identified as non-compliant with state views were labelled 'foreign agents' and [faced severe crackdowns](#).¹⁷⁹ Another strategy that was allegedly employed by authorities was that of [propping up 'clone candidates'](#), who bore the same name and a striking resemblance to the opposition candidates, thus suppressing the vote share.¹⁸⁰

Apple and Google [banned a smart voting app](#), promoted by jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny, reportedly under pressure from government authorities.¹⁸¹ The opposition-backed app, which could identify candidates likely to defeat those supported by the Kremlin, was labelled election interference, and the tech companies were told that failure to pull it down would lead to the imposition of large fines.

Persisting Tensions with the West

In addition to concerns about democracy in Russia, there have been growing tensions between Russia and the West on regional security issues. On September 2, the US Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) released a [statement](#) alleging that Russia had refused to

renew the organisation's mandate and financing to observe and monitor two border crossings with Ukraine.¹⁸² There has been [no official response](#) from Moscow to the statement.¹⁸³

Russia too, decried Western actions several times. Its UN Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev [criticised](#) the recently announced pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS), calling it a "military-political bloc with a pronounced pro-American character."¹⁸⁴ He likened the alliance to the Quad and NATO, and said that it was just another attempt by the West to curtail not only China's, but also Russia's influence in Asia's security architecture.¹⁸⁵

The Russian Foreign Ministry released a statement on September 22 accusing the United States of misusing the privilege of hosting United Nations Headquarters on its territory. It alleged that US authorities deliberately [obstructed the issuance of visas](#) to Russian representatives who were to travel to the UN, including Leonid Slutsky, Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, who was part of Russia's delegation to the 76th UN General Assembly.¹⁸⁶ The statement concluded with a declaration of a due reaction to the perceived act of hostility.

The Russian and US [military chiefs met](#) in Helsinki on September 22 for the first time since 2019.¹⁸⁷ The meeting came as Washington is in search of locations from which to mount surveillance on Islamist terror groups like the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State following its complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. The US is seeking a presence in Central Asian countries neighbouring Afghanistan, which Russia views as being in its sphere of influence.

V. India-West Asia: Consolidating Strategic Partnerships

Sanket Joshi

The Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, [travelled to New Delhi](#) during the month to hold talks with External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar. They “reviewed the implementation of the [Strategic Partnership Council](#) Agreement signed during PM Modi’s visit to Saudi Arabia in October 2019 and expressed satisfaction on the progress made thus far”.¹⁸⁸ They exchanged views on the Taliban take-over of [Afghanistan](#), and the developments in the Gulf and the Indo-Pacific.¹⁸⁹ Articulating [Saudi Arabia’s position on Afghanistan](#), the foreign minister stressed that the Taliban “have made commitments to the international community on ensuring regional security by not allowing transnational terrorist groups to take root [in Afghanistan]... we need to find ways to hold them accountable to these commitments by adopting a co-ordinated approach among the international community”.¹⁹⁰ Saudi Arabia is reportedly perturbed over [Pakistan, Turkey, and Qatar’s](#) growing role in a Taliban-led Afghanistan.¹⁹¹



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, H.H. Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, September 20, 2021. Source: Twitter/@narendramodi

The foreign minister also called on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.¹⁹² PM Modi expressed "India's keenness to see greater [investment from Saudi Arabia](#), including in key sectors like energy, IT, and defence manufacturing".¹⁹³

Saudi Arabia celebrated its [91st National Day](#) on September 23. Riyadh's Ambassador in New Delhi shed light on Saudi Arabia's '[Vision 2030](#)' of creating [business opportunities](#) for the Kingdom's strategic partners in areas such as "construction projects, telecommunications, information technology, pharmaceuticals and more".¹⁹⁴ Saudi Arabia had "issued 44 new licences for Indian investments" in 2020 and has "invested USD2.81 billion in the areas of renewable energy, petrochemicals, agriculture, health, and technology".¹⁹⁵

India-UAE Strategic Partnership

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephone conversation with the [Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi](#), Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on September 3 and "assessed the progress in bilateral co-operation in various areas under the India-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership".¹⁹⁶



Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal held a dinner meeting with UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Trade, September 23, 2021. Source: [Twitter/@PiyushGoyal](#)

The Indian Minister for [Commerce and Industry](#), Piyush Goyal met UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, in New Delhi to "formally launch negotiations on the India-United Arab Emirates

[Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement](#) (CEPA)".¹⁹⁷ Delhi and Abu Dhabi aim to conclude CEPA negotiations by December 2021 and sign a formal agreement in March 2022.¹⁹⁸ It is expected that the CEPA will "increase bilateral trade in goods to USD100 billion within five years... and increase trade in services to USD15 billion".¹⁹⁹ It is likely to [enhance exports](#) in gems and jewellery, engineering, leather goods and chemicals.²⁰⁰ Earlier in the month, there were reports that India is "seeking to double its exports to the UAE this fiscal and substantially increasing its exports to the US, UK, Singapore, and Hong Kong to achieve [USD400 billion in merchandise exports](#) this year".²⁰¹

As the UAE approaches its Golden Jubilee, Abu Dhabi has issued 10 principles, which [focus](#) on building a sustainable economy, harnessing resources for a more prosperous society, and fostering diplomatic relations for global peace. that will guide the country's [progress over the next 50 years](#).²⁰² The UAE reportedly plans to expand trade in Asia and Africa, possibly drawing USD150 billion in foreign investment to reposition itself as a [global hub for business](#) and finance.²⁰³ Further, the UAE is easing visa restrictions to attract foreign talent.²⁰⁴ A new [Green Visa](#) scheme "will allow expats to apply for work without being sponsored by an employer, and include children up to the age of 25 on their permits".²⁰⁵

India-Bahrain Partnership

To further deepen [India's partnership with Bahrain](#), India's Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, V. Muraleedharan, visited the Gulf Kingdom where he met Bahrain's foreign minister and "discussed bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues of mutual interest".²⁰⁶ Mr. Muraleedharan also met Bahrain's Minister of Labour and Social Development to discuss the [welfare of Indian workers](#).²⁰⁷



Indian Naval Ship (INS) 'Tabar' undertakes a naval exercise with Egypt's frontline frigate 'Alexandria' in the Mediterranean Sea, September 07, 2021.

Source: Twitter/@indiannavy

According to reports, 2000 [Indian migrant workers](#) from the state of Andhra Pradesh have allegedly been ill treated by Nasser S. Al Hajri Corporation (NSH), a sub-contractor of Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO).²⁰⁸ Even as the Indian Embassy in Bahrain resolved the issue, "around 600-700 workers have expressed desire to return home".²⁰⁹

Defence Outreach

India continued its defence outreach in West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region. An Indian Naval Ship "Tabar" carried out [joint drills with Egypt's frigate "Alexandria"](#) in the Mediterranean Sea to ensure stability and maritime security in the region.²¹⁰ Further, Indian Navy Chief [Admiral Karambir Singh](#) arrived in Oman for a three-day visit beginning September 27.²¹¹ The visit aims to "consolidate bilateral defence relations with Oman and explore new avenues for defence co-operation".²¹²

In a boost to India's air defence capabilities, Indian Air Force has received its first [medium range surface-to-air missile](#) (MRSAM) system designed and developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in partnership with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).²¹³ Further, the Indian Army has ordered over 100 tactical kamikaze [Israeli drones, 'SkyStriker'](#), to beef up its operational capability along the borders with China and Pakistan.²¹⁴

India-Turkey Relations

At the 76th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), Turkish President Erdogan reiterated Ankara's stance in "favour of resolving the [Kashmir issue](#) through dialogue between the parties and within the framework of relevant UN resolutions".²¹⁵ In an evident rebuke to President Erdogan's assertions, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar emphasised the importance of "adhering to the relevant UN Security Council resolutions in respect of Cyprus" in a meeting with his Cypriot counterpart.²¹⁶

At the same time, the Turkish Ambassador in New Delhi has reiterated calls for "improved and multifaceted relations between [Turkey and India](#)".²¹⁷ He asserted that "improving comprehensive bilateral relations in all fields... was Turkey's main foreign policy goals".²¹⁸ He praised India for its contacts with the Taliban, underscoring "steady and gradual engagement with the Taliban as one of the key factors for stability in Afghanistan".²¹⁹ In another development, Turkey [scrapped the mandatory 14-day quarantine](#) requirement for fully vaccinated Indians.²²⁰

Multilateral Institutions, Trade and Economy

BRICS [New Development Bank](#) (NDB) has admitted the UAE, Bangladesh, and Uruguay as its new members.²²¹ India welcomed the three countries and stressed that “expansion of membership will add value and enable NDB to position itself as the premier development institution of emerging economies”.²²²

Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) is “working with Indian Oil Corporation to provide technical grade urea that would help reduce India’s nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) [emissions from diesel vehicles](#) by up to 70 per cent to meet Bharat Stage VI (BS-VI) standards”.²²³ In another development, Oman has signed a “land reservation agreement with Indian company ACME that aims to set up a [green hydrogen and ammonia project](#) in Oman’s Special Economic Zone at Duqm”.²²⁴

In term of investments, [Gulf Islamic Investments](#) LLC is planning to increase its investments in India and Saudi Arabia in the next three years.²²⁵

On the energy front, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is likely to “revise downward its optimistic 2022 [oil demand growth forecast](#) as the coronavirus Delta variant outbreak has put the speed of global recovery in doubt”.²²⁶

Tehran has been admitted as a full member of the ‘[Shanghai Cooperation Organization](#)’ (SCO) at the 21st summit of the SCO leaders in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.²²⁷ Iranian President Raisi stressed the “strategic role of the SCO in global economy” and described the China-led block as “one of the few” opportunities for dialogue in the region.²²⁸ President Raisi reiterated that his foreign policy will prioritise “economic multilateralism” and strengthening the “neighbourhood first” policy.²²⁹

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