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# GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

1 - 1 5 S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 3

**Myanmar Miffed  
With Islamabad  
Over 'Unfit' JF-17  
Thunder Fighter  
Jets; Military  
Junta Sends  
'Stern Message'  
To Pakistan**

*Chinese President  
Xi Jinping's  
Skipping G20  
Summit Seen As  
New Set back to  
India-China Ties*

**African Union In  
G20 In Sharp  
Contrast To  
China "Debt  
Diplomacy"**

**US, Vietnam To  
Elevate Ties During  
Joe Biden Visit, With  
Eye On China**

**India-Middle East-  
Europe Economic  
Corridor To  
Counter China?**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

## USA

*AVM Sanjay Bhatnagar  
VM, VSM (Retd) , Senior Fellow*

03

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

*Gp Capt A Mathur (Retd)  
Senior Fellow*

06

## BANGLADESH & MYANMAR

*Col VN Shukla, VSM  
Senior Fellow*

09

## CHINA

*Col Tushar Mittal  
Senior Fellow*

12

## AFRICA

*Col Jagat Singh  
Senior Fellow*

14

## CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

*Col Rajesh Grover  
Senior Fellow*

17

## PAKISTAN

*Wg Cdr Vishal Jain  
Senior Fellow*

19

## EUROPE

*Dr Ulupi Borah  
Senior Fellow*

22

## KOREAN PENINSULA

*Ms Arijita Sinha Roy  
Research Assistant &  
Publications Manager*

26

## WEST ASIA

*Ms Anamitra Banerjee  
Research Assistant*



# US, Vietnam To Elevate Ties During Joe Biden Visit, With Eye On China

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-vietnam-elevate-ties-during-biden-visit-with-eye-china-2023-09-09/>

US President Joe Biden visits Vietnam's capital city Sunday where the two countries are expected to declare themselves strategic partners, as the United States seeks to push supply chains from China and both countries to try to counter Beijing's military and diplomatic influence in Asia.

## COMMENTS

At the end of the G-20 meeting the US President Joe Biden visited Hanoi on September 10, 2023. The visit is being viewed in various circles as an attempt on the part of the US to counter China by developing and strengthening ties with its allies in the Indo-Pacific region. Biden was given a warm welcome at the ceremony organised by the ruling Communist Party. The two nations signed a historic deal grading Vietnam the 'Comprehensive Strategic Partner'. This evolution of relationship has been a result of various US high level interaction visits by US Secretary of State and Defence Secretary over the past two years. Both nations seem to be coming-off the more than half a century old rivalry during the protracted War. Mutual trust has gradually built up since resumption of diplomatic ties in 1995. Vietnam has long going territorial dispute with China. The US views the relationship with Vietnam as a new shift in geo-political dynamics as a vital relationship upgrade. It calls it as an appropriate measure for the region towards maintain stability in consonance with its much touted policy of undertaking all activities in accordance with international rules. Whereas, China has been labeling it as an evidence of US's 'cold war mentality'. The US has been increasing its diplomatic and military engagement in the region, increasing its network of strategic partnerships in the region. It has been holding various bi-lateral and multi-lateral exercises in the region. The US also views the growing friendship as an opportunity to generate economic growth, making the supply chains more resilient and creating another manufacturing hub away from China.



Source: CBS7



*Source: India Today*

Vietnam's exports to the US rose 13.6 per cent last year to USD 110, essentially in the garments, shoes, smartphones, electronics and wooden furniture sector. In the present scenario, US views Semi Conductors business as the lynchpin of forthcoming action in the strategic partnership. US estimates Vietnam to be having world's second highest deposits of rare earth materials, China being the first. The US technology companies like Google, Intel, Marvell, Boeing, Global Foundries and Amkor etc are taking initiatives to enhance bi-lateral trade ties and investment in Vietnam. New deals and Memorandum of Understanding are likely to be inked in near future. Vietnam Airlines is known to be in the process of expanding its fleet and has near term plans of acquiring 50 Boeing 737 Max aircraft. At the present juncture no arms deal is in the pipeline.

In 2016, during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Vietnam, bilateral relations were elevated to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. India-Vietnam adopted a historic 'Joint Vision for Peace, Prosperity and People' to guide the future development of bilateral relations in 2020. Vietnam has supported India's bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and join the Indo-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

There have been regular high level interactions between India and Vietnam. On June 19 this year, the Defence Minister of Vietnam, General Phan Van Giang visited India and held high level discussions with the Defence Minister and others. 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' has widened the range of bilateral collaboration including in defence and security cooperation, trade and investment relations, energy security, development cooperation, cultural and people-to-people relations. There have also been talks of selling BrahMos missiles to Vietnam, signaling deepening of defence cooperation between the two countries. India can pro-actively consider selling arms and ammunition and help Vietnam wean away from dependency on Russia.

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### NEW INDUCTIONS

Antony Blinken, America's secretary of state, who is visiting Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, for the third time since the war began, has stated that America would give Ukraine depleted uranium shells used in M1 Abrams tanks, as part of a package of military and humanitarian aid worth \$1bn. Low-cost cardboard drones were used by Ukraine, supplied by Australia, to attack targets in Russia. 10 out of 100 Leopard 1 tanks promised by the Danish Army, Netherlands, and German Army have reached Ukraine. On Sep 11, 2023, the Biden administration stated that it is close to approving the shipment of longer-range missiles packed with cluster bombs to Ukraine, giving Kyiv the ability to cause significant damage deeper within Russian-occupied territory

### KINETIC WAR

#### UKRAINIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE

Ukrainian forces reportedly used the PDDS cardboard drones to attack an airfield in Kursk Oblast in western Russia on August 27. The attack damaged a Mig-29, four Su-30 fighter jets, two Pantsir anti-aircraft missile launchers, and gun systems. The cardboard drones can carry 5kg of weight, have a wingspan of two metres, and a range of 120km. Ukraine's summer counteroffensive has moved more slowly than many of the country's allies and supporters had hoped. Only after three months of grueling combat has Ukraine started to make more significant progress, penetrating some of Russia's entrenched defensive lines in the country's southeast and reclaiming territory in the provinces of Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk. The slow pace of Ukraine's counteroffensive also partly reflects the inherent difficulties of conducting large-scale joint offensive military operations against an entrenched enemy and the delays in getting the right weapons and equipment to the forces on the ground.

## RUSSIA UKRAINE CONFLICT

Ukraine claimed this week to have pierced Russia's first line of defence on the southern front around Robotyne and the eastern flank of Bakhmut. But, the adjustments Russia's military has made are also clearly hindering Ukrainian progress. The Ukraine depends on the supply of ammunition, and fair weather is available for four weeks to push through in the war of attrition. Ukrainian forces claimed to have re-taken control of several gas and oil drilling platforms, known as "Boiko Towers," in the Black Sea close to Crimea. The country's military intelligence said that regaining the sites, which Russia had seized in 2015, deprives Vladimir Putin of the ability to control the Black Sea fully. Russia's defense ministry said that the Sevastopol Shipyard on the Crimean Peninsula was on fire, and two ships were damaged after Ukraine launched ten missiles and three speedboat attacks on the port. Seven missiles were downed, and Russia destroyed all three boats.

### RUSSIAN ATTACKS



*Source: Global News*

A Russian drone strike on a Ukrainian grain exporting port damaged warehouses and set buildings on fire on Sept 04, 2023, Kyiv said, hours before scheduled talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish leader Tayyip Erdogan. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, said that Russian shelling had killed at least 16 people and injured many more in Kostiantynivka, an eastern Ukrainian city—the attack—which may be the deadliest on civilians in recent months.

North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un is visiting Russia in his bulletproof train on Sep 12, 2023. The planned meeting in the eastern port city of Vladivostok will focus on new military deals and space technology. North Korea is believed to have a large stockpile of artillery shells and rockets compatible with Soviet-era weapons and a history of producing such ammunition. Still, these stockpiles could help replenish those severely depleted in Ukraine.

The Russian armed forces have been improving their battlefield tactics—albeit slowly and at a significant cost in lives and resources. They have learned how to target Ukrainian units and weapons with more efficacy and better protect their command systems. As a result, Russia has been better able to leverage its numerical and firepower advantages, turning what many had hoped would be a swift offensive push into a sluggish, brutal, and tough fight.

- Russia has revitalized its electronic warfare capabilities. For over a decade, Moscow had been modernizing these systems, significantly affecting Syria and its initial 2014 invasion of eastern Ukraine. Helping Russia degrade Ukraine's communications, navigation, and intelligence-gathering capabilities; take down Ukrainian aircraft and drones; and cause Ukrainian precision-guided munitions to miss their targets.

- The Russian military has reconstituted its command-and-control infrastructure and processes, which were devastated by U.S.-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and other Ukrainian long-range precision missiles over the summer of 2022 by pulling its command headquarters out of range of Ukrainian surface-to-air missiles, placing its forward command posts farther below ground and behind heavily defended positions, and fortifying these posts with concrete. Russia has also found ways to ensure that communications between command posts and military units are more efficient and secure, including by laying out field cables and using safer radio communications.
- The Russian military was organized into so-called battalion tactical groups—essentially, formations of artillery, tanks, and infantry that were grouped to improve readiness and cohesion. In Ukraine, this force structure proved disastrous. But in the second half of 2022, as the conflict devolved into a war of attrition, mounting casualties compelled the country's military leaders to change their approach. They revised their infantry tactics and consolidated their artillery into specialized brigades, consolidating their firepower and using drones to coordinate and effectively target their artillery strikes. These adjustments positioned the Russian military to exploit its two primary advantages over Ukraine: personnel and firepower. As a result, these better-trained and better-equipped troops have been able to rotate in and out of action, and they have been spared significant losses in recent months after bearing heavier costs in the war's early stages.

### COMMENTS

Radar involves the transmission of electromagnetic waves, and these are reflected off any object back to a receiving antenna. Cardboard is generally harder to detect by radar – but its components, such as the battery, can be seen. Despite the Russia-Ukraine border being flooded with GPS jammers, Ukraine has had an increased attack by long-range, low-cost drones hitting military installations of Russia. This will have an asymmetric strategic impact. Ukrainians have modified open-source flight control software to include sophisticated algorithms to detect GPS jamming and fall back on alternative means of navigation. Some of these systems include vision-based navigation, which is still at the technological frontier and challenging to use in practice. Ukrainians are also developing artificial intelligence-based algorithms for keeping locks on mobile targets without a human operator. Ukrainians have used social media messages revolving around critical themes- bravery, resilience, and defiance as part of information warfare. They have also enabled the prevention of and response to cyberattacks on its networks and systems.

While Ukraine is gathering advanced weaponry from its NATO backers—and awaiting the green light to receive hardware such as F-16 fighters and the MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile System—Moscow is relying on Iran for kamikaze drones, Belarus for armoured vehicles, and North Korea for ammunition. This is the first time the US is sending the controversial armour-piercing munitions to Kyiv. The war appears to be a long haul, with the onset of the muddy season hitting around November and is likely to extend into 2024, and the supply by Western partners will have to sustain the supply chain to drain the Russian power. For the Ukrainians, the fire control in the South to the coast will make Russian supply more difficult. The aim for Russia is to make gains in their north-eastern offensive

## PM Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina Agree to Expand Cross-Border Connectivity, Trade

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/pm-modi-and-bangladesh-pm-sheikh-hasina-agree-to-expand-cross-border-connectivity-trade/articleshow/103519154.cms>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina held a wide-ranging dialogue on Friday to strengthen cross-border connectivity across sectors, including commerce. "Had productive deliberations with PM Sheikh Hasina.

The progress in India-Bangladesh relations in the last 9 years has been very gladdening," Modi tweeted after the nearly hour-long meeting with Hasina, as part of the bilateral, a day ahead of the G20 summit in Delhi. "Our talks covered areas like connectivity, commercial linkages and more. Following talks, the two sides signed three MoUs in agriculture, culture and national payment systems.

### COMMENTS

Bangladesh was among invitees at the G20 Summit at New Delhi on 09 and 10 September 2023. This was an important formal meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina.

The MoUs signed in this meeting, especially in agriculture and payment system, are likely to provide a boost to the Bangladeshi economy in the near future. Bangladesh has been making serious efforts to strengthen its economic, commercial and strategic relevance, which is indicative from its recent desire to formally join China-led RCEP alongwith simultaneous engagement with India through these MoUs.



Source: Hindustan Times



## Myanmar Miffed With Islamabad Over ‘Unfit’ JF-17 Thunder Fighter Jets; Military Junta Sends ‘Stern Message’ To Pakistan

<https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/world/story/myanmar-miffed-with-islamabad-over-unfit-jf-17-thunder-fighter-jets-military-junta-sends-stern-message-to-pakistan-396711-2023-09-04> - 04 September 2023

- Myanmar’s military junta is reportedly miffed over the JF-17 Thunder Multi-Role Fighter Jets supplied by Pakistan between 2019-21, as they have been declared “unfit for operations”. A total of 11 JF-17 planes are not operational at present due to technical glitches. Myanmar Military Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing expressed his displeasure over the same to Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff of the Pakistani Army General Asim Munir. These planes were delivered as a part of a 2016 deal that the Burmese military junta signed to purchase JF-17 jets produced by Pakistan Aeronautical Complex and China’s Chengdu Aircraft Industries Corporation. The Burmese Air Force, however, had to soon ground the aircraft as many malfunctions and structural flaws were detected, Myanmar-based Narinjara News reported. Similar issues were reported with the JF-17 fleet acquired in 2022.
- In September last year, Pakistani engineers had visited Myanmar to fix the issues with the JF-17 planes jointly manufactured by Pakistan and China. Following a couple of attempts by Pakistani engineers to fix the planes, the military junta is now furious and has sent out a “stern message” to Islamabad to answer for the mess. The military junta is upset since the non-utility of the aircraft has adversely impacted majority of its plans to scale up its airpower for carrying out targeted strikes against Myanmar’s resistance groups fighting under the banner the People’s Defence Force, an armed wing of the National Unity Government. Not only this, the military junta has also been seeking China’s intervention in the matter.
- The jets rely on the Russian Klimov RD 93 aero engine and Western avionics and set up a China-made airframe, all of which led to huge operations and maintenance costs compared to a modern weapon system. The plane also has KLJ-7 AI radar and Weapon Mission Management Computer (WMMC). The planes do not have a beyond-visual-range (BVR) missile or airborne interception radar. These issues affect combat effectiveness and limit its performance. A recent visit by the Myanmar’s Chinese envoy to Naypyitaw reportedly carried a message from the Chinese Communist Party’s top leadership to General Min Aung Hlaing. Sources further said that Pakistan is trying to renegotiate the deal with newer versions of the fighter jet. These new variants are likely to be developed jointly by Pakistan Aeronautical Complex and China’s Chengdu Aircraft Industries Corporation. Much information is not available in public domain on whether the renegotiated deal has been accepted by the Myanmar leadership or not. Following this, Pakistan has been struggling to sell similar aircraft to other countries, especially Latin American nations. China does not have a single JF-17 plane in its Air Force fleet to date.

**COMMENTS**

Repeated failures by Pakistani engineers to fix the issues faced by JF-17 fighter aircrafts supplied by Pakistan to Myanmar over the last few years have exposed the weakness of Pakistani defence equipment maintenance capabilities, which is likely to be a significant factor in renegotiation of deal for likely supply of newer version of these aircraft by Pakistan to Myanmar.

## Myanmar Receives First Shipment of Russia's Su-30 Fighter Jets

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/myanmar-receives-first-shipment-of-russias-su-30-fighter-jets/articleshow/103547543.cms> - 10 September 2023

Myanmar has received the first shipment of two Russian Su-30 fighter jets, Charlie Than, Myanmar's trade minister, told the Russian RIA state news agency in remarks published on Sunday. "Two aircraft have already been delivered," Than told RIA on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum, Russia's annual forum aimed at developing economic cooperation in the region and encouraging foreign investment, which starts on Sunday in the port of Vladivostok. Russia and Myanmar signed a contract in September 2022 for the delivery of six Su-30SME fighter jets, RIA said. The Sukhoi Su-30SME multi-role fighter jet is designed for enemy's aerial targets engagement, aerial reconnaissance, combat employment and pilot training, according to Rosoboron export, Russia's state-controlled arms exporter.

Separately, Than told the Russian TASS state news agency that a number of bilateral agreements will be signed at the East Economic Forum, including on developing tourism between the two countries. The United States has warned that Russia's backing for Myanmar's military rulers is unacceptable and destabilising, with its supply of weapons helping to fuel a conflict that has become a catastrophe for the country.

**COMMENTS**

The operational efficiency of Myanmar Air Force is poor, due to its Pakistan supplied JF-17 being not operational due to technical glitches, which has adversely impacted its plans to increase its airpower to strike against Myanmar's resistance groups. Supply of two Russian Su-30 fighter jets is likely to give a good boost to capabilities of Myanmar Air Force. However, use of such fighter jets for domestic counter insurgency operations, if done, is likely to further isolate Myanmar internationally. Instead, use of drones is a better option for the internal counter insurgency operations.



Source: Dhaka Tribune

# Chinese President Xi Jinping's Skipping G20 Summit Seen As New Setback to India-China Ties

<https://www.reuters.com/world/xi-skipping-g20-summit-seen-new-setback-india-china-ties-2023-09-05/#:~:text=NEW%20DELHI%20BEIJING%20Sept%205,the%20nuclear%20Darmed%20Asian%20giants.>

Chinese President Xi Jinping's decision to skip the G20 summit is being seen in host India as a snub to New Delhi and a new setback to the already frozen relations between the nuclear-armed Asian giants. Neither country has commented on Xi deciding to stay away, but analysts said the decision added to existing irritants, including a military stand-off on their Himalayan border and India insisting that the rest of the relationship cannot move forward without a resolution on the frontier. Asked if Xi's decision reflects China-India tensions, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that Beijing had supported India's hosting of the summit. China-India relations "remain stable" and Beijing is willing to work with New Delhi to better them. However as per India it is hard for China to swallow that for four decades they were the fastest growing economy and now it is India. Relations between India and China nosedived after soldiers from both sides clashed in the western Himalayas in June 2020, resulting in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese troops. Several rounds of military and diplomatic talks have since brought some calm on the nearly 3,000-km (1,860-mile) frontier, but the face-off continues in a few pockets. India wants disengagement at two more disputed points and a return to positions held before the summer of 2020. Meanwhile, both militaries have amassed tens of thousands of soldiers, arms and equipment in the mountains.

## Different Versions

Modi and Xi spoke on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg last month but versions of the conversation put out by the two countries on tackling the border issue differed, another sign of how they do not see eye to eye. India said the two leaders had agreed to direct their officials to work towards a speedy resolution to the border conflict in the western Himalayas. China did not refer to any agreement and said Xi stressed improving ties helps both countries and global peace and stability.

## COMMENTS

Chinese President Xi Jinping not attending the G-20 Summit in India made it the first time Xi has missed the event since taking office in 2013 (although he did attend the 2021 version virtually, due to China's pandemic restrictions). So far this year, Xi has only traveled abroad twice – to Russia in March to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and to South Africa in August to attend the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg. It is clear that maintaining good relations with developing nations remains the priority of Chinese foreign policy and facing a hostile U.S.-led West, it seems imperative for China to keep close ties with Russia.

## CHINA

A few factors could have contributed to Xi's decision to skip the G-20 Summit, hosted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi: ongoing tensions between China and India over their disputed border may have made Xi doubt the warmth of his welcome in Delhi; he may wish to avoid embarrassing questions about a controversial new Chinese map or the troubled Chinese economy; or he may not want to be around a group of unfriendly foreign leaders, especially in the absence of Putin, meaning Xi would have to deal with Western leaders alone.



*Source: WION*

The other thought which is round the corner is that it might have to do with Xi's economic and political problems at home than China's friction with India. Given Xi's focus on domestic issues, he might be unwilling to travel abroad. It is believed that Xi Jinping is setting his own agenda where his top concern is national security and he has to stay in China and make foreign leaders visit him rather than going to foreign countries. The Chinese economy has not entirely come out of the COVID blow and it is facing pressure from multiple fronts. In the month of Aug China's exports dropped 8.8 per cent yr-on-yr and its imports contracted 7.3 per cent. The current economic obstacle that China faces have the potential to create a lethal mix that might spell the conclusion of its 40 yrs long successful growth model.

## China's Military Hierarchy Under Spotlight After Defence Minister Disappears

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-military-hierarchy-under-spotlight-after-defence-minister-disappears-2023-09-18/>

The disappearance of Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu highlights the opaque and complex nature of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Reuters reported on Friday that Li is under investigation over the corrupt procurement of military equipment during his previous role. Eight other senior officials are also being investigated. His fate has not been officially explained. If Li does not appear at the upcoming Xiangshan Forum, Beijing's biggest defence diplomacy outreach event, it could mean that he is still being held for investigation. Diplomats say China is set to hold the forum in the latter half of next month, but has not sent invitations - late by China's standards.

Billed as Beijing's version of the Shangri La Dialogue, the Xiangshan Forum is a high-level conference through which China tries to shape global discussions on defence and security issues. When the forum was last held in-person in 2019, more than 530 defence and military officials and scholars attended, including defence ministers from 23 countries. The Chinese defence minister would typically give the keynote speech at the forum and meet with delegations.

## COMMENTS



Source: GNN

In the Chinese system, the Minister of National Defence is seen as significantly less powerful than the U.S. defence secretary and many international equivalents. The position is essentially a diplomatic and ceremonial role without a direct command function. Even so, Li is among the six military officials under Commander-in-Chief and President Xi Jinping on the core Central Military Commission (CMC) and is one of five State Councilors, a post outranking a regular cabinet minister.

With the start of President Xi Jinping's third term in office, there has been a string of surprise personnel changes, including the replacement of Foreign Minister Qin Gang and firing of a senior official from the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force. Li's absence is related to corruption. It is the most enduring problem for Xi Jinping to fix.

# African Union In G20 In Sharp Contrast To China "Debt Diplomacy"

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/g20-summit-news-african-union-indias-push-to-add-africa-to-g20-in-sharp-contrast-to-chinese-debt-diplomacy-sources-4374117>

The inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 underlines New Delhi's efforts to build an inclusive and balanced bloc - which "echoes aspirations of the Global South" and reflects a more accurate portrait of global economic and geopolitical realities - sources said Saturday afternoon. Bringing the African Union into the G20 was among India's key priorities for this summit, and had first been proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June.

## COMMENTS

The PM called for the overturning of a "global trust deficit" and welcomed African Union Chair and Comoros President Azali Assoumani to the G20 family; "the idea of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayas' can be a guide to the world," the Prime Minister said. The African Union became the second regional grouping to be admitted to the Group of 20 leading industrialized and developing nations as a full permanent member. The 55-member bloc of African nations joins the European Union, which has 27 members, as only the second regional organization to become a permanent member of the G20, marking the first expansion of the group since its formation as a group of 20 major economies in 1999. The AU commission's head, Moussa Faki Mahamat, said earlier that the move would allow the continent to make an effective contribution in helping the world meet global challenges.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

### ECONOMIC COOPERATION

The inclusion of the African Union in the G20 would mark a significant turning point in India's economic landscape. This development would likely lead to a series of economic opportunities and partnerships between India and African Union member countries. India may benefit from increased economic cooperation with African Union member countries. One of the immediate benefits for India would be the expansion of its trade horizons. With the African Union as part of the G20, India could expect increased access to African markets, potentially rich in natural resources and burgeoning consumer populations.

### DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

India's diplomatic relations with African Union countries could strengthen as a result of closer collaboration within the G20. This may lead to enhanced political support for India's initiatives on the international stage. An initiative to this has commenced by placements of six Military/Defence attachés Mozambique, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Algeria and Djibouti of the African Continent.

### DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

India's influence in global affairs may grow as it collaborates with a more diverse group of countries within the G20, including those from Africa. This could help India play a more prominent role in shaping global policies and decisions.

## SOUTH AFRICA



Source: The Week

### CHALLENGES

India would need to address challenges related to aligning its interests with those of the African Union and other G20 members. Differences in economic priorities, trade policies, and geopolitical issues could arise.

### DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

India could use its involvement in the G20 to promote development initiatives in Africa, such as capacity-building, infrastructure development, and healthcare cooperation. This could strengthen India's position as a partner in Africa's development.

### TRADE AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Indian businesses may find new opportunities to expand their presence in African markets which is the fastest growing continent, and vice versa. This could lead to increased trade and investment flows between India and African Union countries. The opportunity to propel the trade and investment to 200 Billion US \$ by 2030 between India and countries of African Continent is highly attainable. Last five year bilateral trade between 48 Sub Sahara African countries is tabulated below, which is indicative of a continued intensification and engagement of GoI with African Union. Additionally the strengthening of economic relations with African union will also widen the International Solar Alliance with countries of AU.

Bilateral Trade between India and Sub-Saharan Africa						
Value in USD Billion						
Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	CAGR(5 Years)
INDIA'S EXPORT	22.65	23.55	22.93	33.08	42.85	17.27
INDIA'S IMPORT	35.4	32.15	23.89	41.77	39.27	2.62
TOTAL TRADE	58.05	55.7	46.82	74.86	82.13	9.06
TRADE BALANCE	-12.75	8.6	-0.96	-8.69	3.57	

Source: <https://commerce.gov.in/about-us/divisions/foreign-trade-territorial-division/foreign-trade-africa/>

### STRENGTHEN THE ASIA AFRICA GROWTH CORRIDOR

The inclusion of AU in G 20 will reiterated the resolve of India and Japan to “develop industrial corridors and industrial network for the growth of Asia and Africa.” India-Japan economic engagement of Africa, under the rubric of Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), is based on the recognition that the locus of global economic activities is increasingly shifting towards the Indo-Pacific region. India and Japan as two democracies and robust economies are working together to shape the economic, political and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. The AAGC is a natural outcome of the evolving strategic partnership between India and Japan.

# Cultural Diplomacy Between India And Central Asia: Navigating Complex Challenges In A Changing World

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/13092023-cultural-diplomacy-between-india-and-central-asia-navigating-complex-challenges-in-a-changing-world-analysis/>

Cultural diplomacy serves as a vital instrument in fostering international relations and strengthening the ties between nations. In the context of India and Central Asia, the exchange of cultural elements, ranging from art and music to cuisine and language, plays a significant role in shaping diplomatic relationships.

## COMMENTS

There is no ambiguity in the fact that cultural diplomacy remains prime factor in nurturing international relations and strengthening the bonds between nations. Historical connect between India and Central Asia Region (CAR), economic trade relations in past through famous Silk road route, expansion of Buddhism in region emanating from India and geo strategic location of both regions make them ideal partners at diplomatic forums to face varied global challenges presented by modern and complex world order. CAR, which acts as bridge between West and East world as well North and South, continue to remain important region for India to foster sound diplomatic ties in fast changing world order. Cultural diplomacy plays pivotal role between partners wherein many identical interests exist and mutually beneficial to both. Though keeping evolving Geo-Strategic relations between CAR and India in mind, later has instituted and adopted "Connect Central Asia" policy in June 2012 based on 4Cs: Commerce, Connectivity, Consular and Community however India needs to be more proactive as far as developing cultural and diplomatic relations with CAR are concerned. In the backdrop of conventional influence of Russia over CAR region, persistent efforts of USA to remain a lead player and rapid increase in influence of China makes it imperative for India to further strengthen its ties with region while taking advantage of historical and cultural relations.

Though prior to disintegration of USSR, CAR was largely isolated from the rest of the world including India however post-Soviet era observed revival of cultural linkages between these regions engrained in historical ties but adapted to contemporary frameworks. In modern times, India's "Connect Central Asia" policy and Central Asia's "Multi-Vector" foreign policy have paved way for closer relationship between both the regions. This involves not only economic and political ties but also a renewed focus on cultural diplomacy to strengthen people-to-people connections. India needs to take advantage of its soft power diplomacy and foreign diaspora to further cement its cultural ties with CAR through concentrated academic and artistic exchanges, research on historical connections, music festivals and collaborative literature and film projects. Heritage of India, spiritual, intellectual and cultural ties shall form part of cultural diplomacy to extent wherein these factors should play pivotal role and CAR nations take due cognizance of this aspect in their decision making process with respect to foreign policy matters regarding India.



# Transforming Central Asian Nations To A New Global Economic Hub

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2023/09/956750/transforming-central-asian-nations-new-global-economic-hub>

The Central Asia region at the present stage is beginning to have great importance in the strategy of the leading countries of the world, since it is a kind of "bridge" between East and West, as well as North and South. The countries of the region, due to their geographical isolation, are also looking for reliable partners to access sea routes

## COMMENTS

Regionalism will play an important drift in the scheme of international relations and new world order. Economic interests are proving to be an overriding factor than political and conventional animosity while engaging each other by majority of nations. Integration processes within the region as well as interregional economic cooperation are becoming new normal at the global level. Central Asian countries show strong intra-regional trade growth with a significant leap forward over the last two decades, reaching an average annual GDP growth of 6.2% in real terms. Experts attribute the heightened attention to Central Asia to its stable economic growth amid existing geopolitical turbulence. The region's substantial market potential plays a crucial role. Over the past two decades, the population of Central Asia has grown by 40% to reach 80 million people. Improved macroeconomic indicators have accompanied this growth. According to the latest EBRD forecast, Central Asia is projected to be the fastest-growing region in 2023 with an expected GDP growth rate of 5.2% followed by a 5.4% growth in 2024.



Source: ORF

## CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

In spite of promising economic growth and abundant resources, Central Asia continues to yearn for accessibility to sea routes due to their geographical compulsions to expand their oil and gas market and balance world for safe trade routes to region to find markets for their products as well satiate their energy needs.

Leading from the front, India had hosted the first meeting of the India-Central Asia Summit in 2022 with the participation of the Presidents of all five countries, which was the first engagement of its kind. India has always considered these countries as a part of its 'Extended Neighbourhood'. Earlier PM Modi paid a historic visit to all Central Asian countries in 2015 opening doors for improvements in all possible areas, which was followed by exchanges at high-levels at bilateral and multilateral forums like the one at Foreign Ministers' level.

Moreover, in recent years, China has increased its presence in the region, prompting India to streamline its Connect Central Asia Policy, which advocates a broad-based approach towards each-other. Other than strategic interest, China's leaning towards the region is also said to be influenced by the rich reservoir of natural resources like crude oil, natural gas, gold, copper, aluminum, and iron. But for India, security, stability and prosperity of Central Asia is imperative. Moreover, with increasing ties with the Central Asian Countries, India will also get an opportunity to play its role more effectively in stabilising the situation in Afghanistan, which appears to be assuming uncontrolled proportions ever since America left the country.

India views Central Asia as a critical component of its efforts to enhance connectivity across Eurasia. The region offers potential transit routes for Indian goods to reach Europe and beyond. Initiatives like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Ashgabat Agreement are aimed at improving transport links between India and Central Asia. India's engagement with Central Asia is also motivated by the need to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the CPEC. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor for India's closer integration with West Asia and Europe during G 20 Summit on 09 Sep 23. Though India has adopted "Connect Central Asia" since 2012 and have assumed operations of Chahbar port in 2018, challenges of terrorism in immediate neighborhood of the region will prove to be biggest impediment in fostering strong and stable economic ties. Recent impetus given by Government needs to be matched up by developing strong economic ties so that India continue to reap benefits of economic growth of region.

India seeks to strengthen its diplomatic and economic ties with Central Asian nations to maintain its strategic presence in the region. Central Asia's significance for India is multifaceted, encompassing energy security, economic opportunities, historical ties, regional stability, connectivity and a strategic response to China's influence. As India continues to expand its engagement with Central Asia, the region's importance in India's foreign policy is likely to grow, bringing mutual benefits and opportunities for cooperation.

## 4 Soldiers Killed In Taliban Attack In Northwest Pakistan

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1101937-alvi-signs-into-law-bills-amending-official-secrets-act-army-act>

Four soldiers "fought gallantly" during the exchange of fire and were killed, Pak Army said, adding that the area was being sanitised to eliminate any other terrorists found in the vicinity.

### COMMENTS

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan armed group attacked the Pakistani military check posts of Ostai and Janjereet located near the Afghanistan border in the Kalash area of Chitral district of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on 6th September 2023. The attack, reportedly by a large group of terrorists which was armed heavily with modern weapons, claimed the lives of four Pakistani soldiers and seven more were injured while 12 terrorists were reported to have been killed during the skirmish with many more being critically injured. While the attack is being reported to have been a cross-border transgression, the TTP spokesman has claimed that they have already established camps in the Chitral area.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of attacks by TTP in Pakistan, mainly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. In the last month itself, six soldiers of Pak Army lost their lives in South Waziristan and another 12 in Balochistan in the month previous to that. The Pakistan government has been asking the Afghanistan Taliban government repeatedly to disallow the use of Afghan soil by TTP terrorists in launching terror attacks in Pakistan.

## Pakistan Army Chief General Munir Steps In To Address Economic Crisis In Cash-Strapped Country

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1101937-alvi-signs-into-law-bills-amending-official-secrets-act-army-act>

Signalling the powerful military's key role in Pakistan, army chief General Asim Munir has held a series of meetings with the business community, promising all-out efforts to bring in foreign investment worth billions of dollars to the cash-strapped country.



Source: NewsDrum

## COMMENTS

Pakistan Army Chief, General Asim Munir, in a meeting with around 50 Pakistani businessmen of prominence, has promised to help the country in recovering from the serious economic crisis that it is facing. Earlier this year in July, Pakistan received a bail-out package worth USD 3 billion from IMF to help it in its debt repayments. During his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, Gen Munir was assured by the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia of USD 25 billion investments in agriculture, minerals, IT, and defence sectors in Pakistan. He also mentioned that there may be some investments from the UAE too. He also shared his plan to visit Qatar and Kuwait to bring in investments worth another USD 25-30 billion. It was also reported that he was not inclined towards going to the IMF for any more financial aid programmes as it restricted freedom of the government to take steps appropriate to the country's requirement. Pakistan sees a heavy surge in electricity and fuel prices in recent days as a consequence of the conditions placed by the IMF, as part of its bail-out package's reform steps, to cut back on the subsidies provided by the state on power and fuel.

However, certain experts in the country opine that these steps of the military are doomed to fail as the understanding of Pak military, as far as economy is concerned, is pedestrian at best nor is there any background work that has been done in various sectors, even if some of these investments come in. As per Asad Sayeed, an economist and researcher at the Collective for Social Science Research in Karachi, "Rather than chasing silver bullets, such as FDI from the Arabs or the Chinese, what is needed is structural reforms in taxation, energy, allocation of resources for export enhancement, among others"[1]. The Pakistani military establishment has been running the country, directly or indirectly, since its creation and taking part or interfering in the political process of the country. It now sees itself getting involved in the financial decisions of the country as well, for better or worse, only time will tell.

## Pakistan Eases Visa Rules To Attract Foreign Business

<https://enews.hamariweb.com/pakistan/pakistan-eases-visa-rules-to-attract-foreign-business/>

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar is making it easier for foreign businessmen to visit Pakistan.

## COMMENTS

The interim PM Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has taken steps to simplify Visa rules in Pakistan so that people representing business entities can obtain a Visa easily by submitting just one document from their country or from international business organisations. The government also announced, for investors, the issue of long-term visas in a bid to promote foreign investments and invite more businessmen to the country. There is also a plan to enter smartphone production, increase exports through the IT sector and digitise the tax system, all with an aim to create a more suitable economic environment for more and more foreign investments and improvement of the country's international trade relations.

[1]Das, Yudhajit Shankar (2023), "Pakistan army steps in to repair tattered economy, experts say it's likely to fail", India Today, 06 September 2023. URL: <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/pakistan-economy-in-tatters-army-chief-gen-munir-foreign-investment-saudi-arabia-protests-over-price-rise-2431775-2023-0>

# India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor To Counter China?

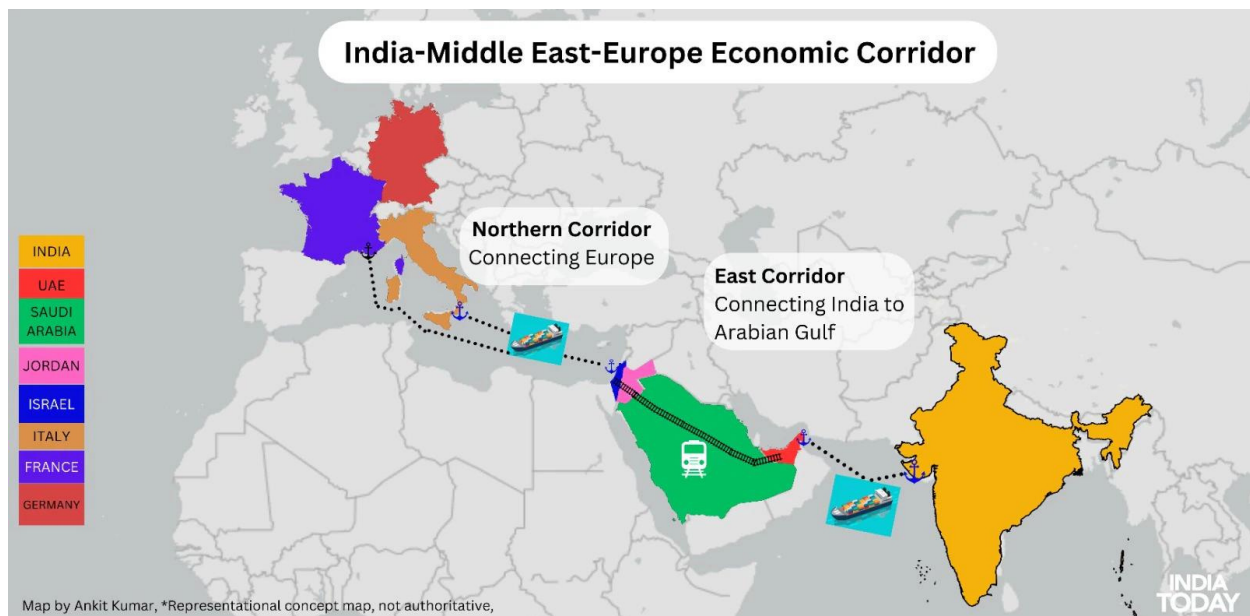
<https://www.dw.com/en/can-new-india-europe-middle-east-corridor-counter-china/a-66799232>

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was announced on the sidelines of the recently concluded G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi. The project, if completed, could act as a foil to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure project that has fueled concerns over Beijing's extensive footprint across at least three continents.

## COMMENTS

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is a transcontinental rail and shipping route spanning two continents which aims to boost economic development by enhancing connectivity and economic integration among Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe. This project consists of two distinct corridors: the eastern corridor linking India to the Arabian Gulf and the northern corridor connecting the Gulf to Europe.

IMEC is not a very recent idea but was conceived as an ambitious project quietly by India and UAE for two and a half years ago before it was announced on the side-lines of G-20 leader's summit in New Delhi on September 2023. After a series of discreet meetings involving the National Security Advisors (NSAs) of India, UAE, and the USA, and with the full backing of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Middle-East corridor project envisions the transportation of goods using standardized containers. This route starts in India, travels to Fujairah Port on the eastern coast of the UAE, and then continues to the Port of Haifa in Israel via a 2,650-kilometer railroad passing through Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Currently, there is a functional 1,850-kilometer railroad connection between the two countries, and Saudi Arabia is in the process of constructing the remaining segment to ensure the smooth transport of goods to the Port of Haifa.



Subsequently, commodities from India and neighboring countries in the subcontinent, such as Nepal and Bangladesh, will be transported to multiple European ports, including those in Italy, Germany, and France.

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated:

*"This will give the whole world connectivity and it will drive sustainable development for the entire world."*

The European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen also affirmed:

*"The corridor will be the most direct connection to date between India, the Arabian Gulf and Europe with a rail link, that will make trade between India and Europe 40% faster."*

Compared to China's BRI, both of these mega projects share similarities, although China's BRI is more extensive in scale. During the G7 summit held in Japan in May, 2023, the world's seven wealthiest nations committed to jointly mobilise \$600 billion (€558 billion) by 2027 as a response to the BRI. The overall proposed budget, has not been disclosed yet and set to be determined in approximately two months. China introduced the BRI in 2013 and has entered into cooperation agreements with over 150 countries and more than 30 international organizations, resulting in the mobilization of nearly \$1 trillion and the launch of over 3,000 projects.

Several countries that have signed onto the IMEC initiative are also participants in the BRI, such as Italy, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Nevertheless, indications suggest that China may be reducing the pace of BRI activities due to its economic challenges. Moreover, certain nations have raised concerns that China is gaining strategic influence without adequately considering local requirements and that BRI projects have negative environmental impacts. Italy has indicated its intent to withdraw from the BRI. On the other hand, IMEC is more self-funded by the member countries and will not have to face this kind of a challenge in the future.

Indian former diplomat Anil Wadhwa, stated:

*"The BRI is opaque and non-transparent in nature with the funding coming from just one country, China. The IMEC has been discussed for a while, and its focus is on viability backed by funding from multiple sources, especially through public-private partnerships."*

He also added that IMEC is not just a connectivity corridor but is also a project which will see pipelines for transport of green hydrogen, underwater cables for digital connectivity and data transfer, as well as telecommunications. Over 70% of the infrastructure for the project is already in place. The project will also become a geopolitical game changer and will also benefit Southeast Asian countries once the eastern and western segments of the corridor are in place.

However, it also faces certain challenges. Turkey has withheld its backing for IMEC. Following the G20 Summit, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated:

*"A corridor without Turkey is inconceivable. The most suitable path for east-west trade must necessarily traverse Turkey."*

Subsequently, Turkey's foreign minister Hakan Fidan has reaffirmed the skepticism. He stated that there were doubts among experts regarding whether the main objective of the IMEC was based on rationality and efficiency. He also hinted the involvement of additional geostrategic considerations. In response to a query from the Financial Times, Fidan stated:

*"A trade route does not only mean meeting trade alone. It's also a reflection of geostrategic competition."*

Highlighting another aspect of the challenge, according to official sources, a study was carried out to assess the current and in-progress railway infrastructure across the Middle East, spanning the UAE and Saudi Arabia. During this assessment, gaps in the existing network were identified, necessitating the construction of new railway sections. There exists a missing link between Ghweifat and Haradh of Saudi Arabia and another missing stretch between Qurayyat in Saudi Arabia and Beit She'an in Israel which will have to be constructed.

The Indian Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw mentioned that although this project will introduce a fresh perspective to trade and transportation in the region but it is a highly complex program. Uniformed standards across various aspects have not yet been firmly established. For example, it involves ensuring that trains operate on the same track gauge, adopting similar engine technologies, and maintaining consistent container dimensions. These critical technical requirements have been defined, however, accomplishing this will entail significant effort and coordination.



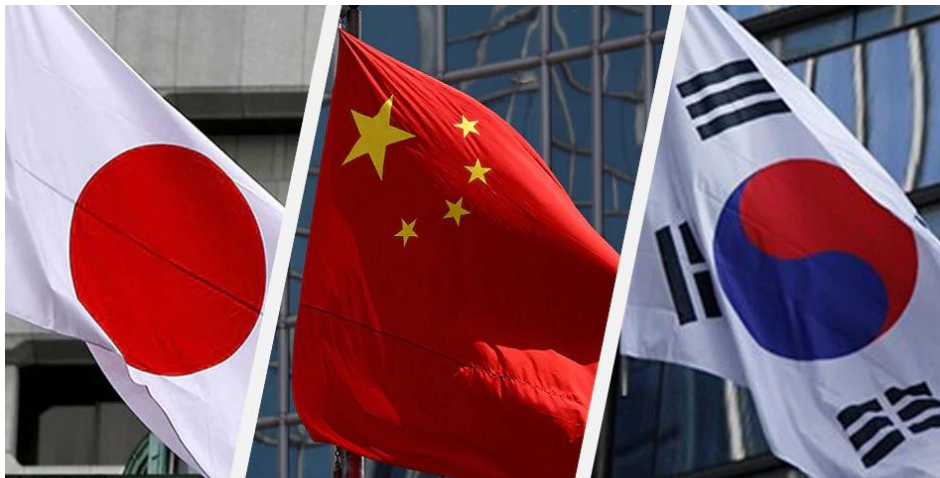
Source: DW

# China, South Korea Top Diplomats Agree To 3-Way Talks With Japan

[https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20230901\\_07/](https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20230901_07/)

The foreign ministers of China and South Korea have agreed to cooperate in resuming trilateral consultations among Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul. Wang Yi and Park Jin held telephone talks on Thursday. China's Foreign Ministry cited Wang as saying China and South Korea should keep their friendly cooperation on track and guard against external interference. This statement appears to allude to Seoul's increased security partnership with the United States.

## COMMENTS



*Source: ABC-CBN News*

The initiation for resumption of talks between the East Asian players arrive at a crucial timing, especially after Camp David and heightened tensions between China and Japan over the discharge of treated nuclear water from Fukushima Plant. The last meeting that took place between the leaders of these three countries was in 2019. The resumption of talks between China, Japan and Korea can drive towards a stable order in the region. China's belligerence may have been the reason behind the reproachment between Japan and South Korea, but if resumption of talks is initiated between the three key players, East Asia can expect consensus on regional challenges.

Japan and South Korea also face a common dilemma of addressing the semiconductor issue. Domestically, both Kishida's and Yul's government have faced stiff resistance from giant companies engaged in the semiconductor business in China, after the CHIP4 Act was put to effect. Additionally, trade between China-Japan and China-South Korea have suffered by huge margins. Although, the resumption of talk may go against the spirit of the recently concluded Camp David between the US, Japan and South Korea, it is time that trilateral talks be held frequently that can carry the potential to alter dynamics in the region. Further, for South Korea it can additionally be the right opportunity to bargain for more diplomatic space to call out North Korea's unprecedented nuclear tests that have alarmed both China and Japan. The spirit of this initiative is appreciable and anticipated. This can pave the way for a stable and inclusive order in the East Asian region.



# South Korea Committed To Boosting Defence Ties With India, Says Envoy

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/south-korea-committed-to-boosting-defence-ties-with-india-says-envoy-8937453/>

South Korea is willing to share technology on submarines and missile systems with India to strengthen defence cooperation, the country's envoy Chang Jae Bok said on Tuesday (13th September). Briefing the media about the meeting between the South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit over the weekend, the envoy said the two leaders had "productive discussions". The meeting between the two leaders was scheduled for 20 minutes but lasted more than 40 minutes, the envoy added. Both leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation in defence, said Chang Jae Bok, referring to K9 Vajra, a 52-calibre tracked self-propelled howitzer designed by a South Korean company.

## COMMENTS

South Korea has emerged as a significant defence partner for India in the region. This year also marks the 50 years of Diplomatic relations between the two countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Yoon Seok Yeol held bilateral talks along the sidelines of the recently concluded G20 Summit in New Delhi. The bilateral talk highlight New Delhi and Seoul's commitment in further forging strengthened strategic relations. The meeting promised a review of the Special Strategic Partnership between the two countries on trade and investment, defence production, semiconductors and EV battery technology. Additionally, South Korea has promised USD 4 billion for India's high value projects for the upcoming years. This line of credit is an indication of Seoul's commitment towards New Delhi for bolstering defence cooperation. The India-South Korea relations had gained momentum after the 2017 New Southern Policy by the Moon Jae-In administration, but both the countries need to continuously engage for broader frameworks related to but not limiting to only economic and technological partnerships. As two emerging middle powers in the Indo-Pacific region, the two countries must also review existing bilateral framework and thrive for cooperation in the region.



Source: The Print



Source: MEA India

## North Korea Says It Has Launched 'Tactical Nuclear Attack Submarine'

[https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20230908\\_08/](https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20230908_08/)

North Korea says it has launched a newly-built "tactical nuclear attack submarine" that will conduct operations in the Sea of Japan. The ruling Workers' Party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said on Friday that the submarine's launching ceremony was held on Wednesday. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was reportedly present at the event. Kim reportedly said in a speech that the submarine is capable of carrying a large amount of nuclear arms and launching pre-emptive and retaliatory attacks. He also said it "will perform its combat mission as one of core underwater offensive means of the naval force" of North Korea.

### COMMENTS

The claims by North Korea on building a 'tactical nuclear submarine' have been reported as a mark of celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the regime's establishment. The first tactical nuclear attack submarine, known as the "Kim Gun-ok Hero Ship," is thought to be an enhanced variant of the Romeo class (3,000 tons). According to estimates, this submarine will be able to deploy a SLBM with a nuclear warhead and a nuclear torpedo.

Although experts in the US have claimed that the submarines have a limited range and further do not add substantive value to North Korea's "robust land based nuclear forces." South Korean Naval Forces resonated with the US on assessing the ability of the newly launched submarines. As both South and North Korea engage in a nuclear submarine weapons race, this sense of peril is growing and the arms race is pushing towards rivalry between the two Koreas. The Korean Peninsula is approaching a point where nuclear sabre rattling is becoming increasingly provocative. Additionally, the constant proliferation of nuclear weapons is pushing the Korean peninsula towards instability characterized by a divide between Great power rivalry.

## Kim Jong Un And Vladimir Putin Meet For Talks In Russia

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66787449>

Talks between Russian president Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on a possible arms deal are set to begin soon. Mr Kim travelled for two days in an armoured train to the Vostochny space centre in Russia's far east, in what was a highly scrutinised journey.

Pyongyang fired a ballistic missile hours ahead of the meeting. The two sanctioned regimes are expected to strike a deal that exchanges weapons for humanitarian aid. The meeting between Mr Kim and Mr Putin is being closely watched by the US and its allies, although Pyongyang and Moscow deny that their talks are about military cooperation.

The White House said it had new information that negotiations between Russia and North Korea were on a weapons deal were "actively advancing". National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu had tried to "convince Pyongyang to sell artillery ammunition" to Russia during a recent visit to North Korea.

**COMMENTS**

The visit by North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un to Russia against the backdrop of the ongoing Ukraine War may have started a new era of bilateral relations between the two countries. However, this summit between North Korea and Russia is one of mutual needs. It has become apparent that Russia is in dire need of ammunitions against the war in Ukraine, and North Korea that has largely remained a closed country with heavy economic sanctions since the pandemic needs support and assistance for his country. North Korea is presently famished and yet the country continues to pursues military modernization. Russia can fill the vacuum by providing the expected assistance.

North Korea recently concluded its 75th Founding Anniversary, where high level officials from both China and Russia were invited for the grand military parade at Pyongyang. The visit by Kim Jong Un to Russia confirms bloc formation in the Northeast Asia region presenting a security dilemma. It is evident that Pyongyang has confirmed no dialogue with the West and its allies and rather is driving towards realigning itself with Moscow and Beijing. This realignment serves dual purpose; one it allows North Korea to carry its 'adventurous behaviour' in the region and provides an opportunity for China and Russia to challenge the newly revived trilateral relations between US, Japan and South Korea at Camp David. The meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korea Leader Kim Jong Un could possibly strike an arms deal. Russia has ***promised to provide North Korea with Space Technology [1] for the country to accomplish its military modernization and at the same time receive an augmented military support by North Koreans for Russia's War in Ukraine.*** The evolving situation in North East Asia appears volatile and provides an outright challenge to the US and its allies on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.



Source: ABC News

[1] Kuhn Anothony, "Kim Jong Un Vows Full Support For Russia As Putin Pledges Space Tech For North Korea," NPR, September 13, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/13/1199190066/russia-north-korea-putin-kim-jong-un-summit>

# No Corridor Without Turkey': Erdogan Opposes India-Middle East-Europe Mega Project

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/no-corridor-without-turkey-erdogan-opposes-india-middle-east-europe-mega-project-13113812.html>

One of the biggest successes of the G20 Summit 2023 under India's presidency was the announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor. Still, one of the leaders of the group member countries, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been opposing it.

## COMMENTS

This comes after the formalisation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the recent G20 summit in New Delhi, marking a milestone in India's aspirations for interconnectivity with the northwestern regions of the subcontinent. Bilateral talks between PM Modi and President Erdogan took place for collaboration in the fields of commerce military, aviation and maritime shipping.

IMEC is regarded as the alternative to the Chinese BRI. Beijing has increased its proactive involvement in this region and as the mediator for the Saudi-Iran agreement has strengthened its credibility as a key international player in the Middle East. The lack of participation from the Chinese and Russian leaders at the G20 summit fuels reservations that the upcoming project could diminish their prominence in the region.

To recognise the geostrategic significance of the IMEC project, it is necessary to look at current regional collaboration initiatives. The Greece-Israel-Cyprus Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, the 3 Seas Initiative (3SI) and the India-Israel-United States-United Arab Emirates (I2U2) forum in the financial and defence sectors are among them. Before the formation of IMEC, these efforts took place by the US leadership or were backed by America. As a world leader and the centre of a regulated world order, America seeks to form regional agreements to reorganise global financial ties.



Source: News Bharti

The idea of expediting shipping by 40% while saving on added costs and energy usage gave rise to the opening up of possible maritime and railways linkages between India and the Middle East, during NSA Ajit Doval's meeting with his US counterpart Jake Sullivan in May 2023. The formalisation of IMEC additionally demonstrates the European increasing involvement in securing energy within the Middle East. The war in Ukraine disrupted the energy supply to Europe[1]. Reports allude, that Europe is visibly warming towards Gulf nations.[2]

This initiative bears socioeconomic significance for India because of its substantial regional population, supporting its energy security demands and providing industry for Indian goods. It strategically also positions Indian supremacy across the Indian Ocean region and further spreads up to both the Mediterranean and Transatlantic areas.

The entire region is experiencing the signing of multiple accords offering a sense of equilibrium, although the extent of these events is dubious. In addition, practical concerns such as Greece's poor locomotive connectivity due to rugged terrain and the arid regions of the Arab world would provide challenges in developing the corridor. Lastly, financing may pose a concern to several stakeholders, but the prospects of obtaining investments quickly remain modest through the 'Build-Back-Better-World (B3W)' project, sponsored by the United States, intending to attract private-sector investment[3]. Moreover, Israeli engagement is critical for the viability of IMEC. While relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv are warming up, the probability of Saudi Arabia joining the Abraham Accords remains slim.

Despite President Erdogan backing India's quest for membership in the UNSC while proposing a rotational tenure for every member, Turkey asserts that the region is making efforts to enhance its influence via economic transportation routes and reiterated Istanbul's commitment to an alternative route via Iraq Development Road Project planning to connect the Persian Gulf, EU nations with Ankara through an extensive rail and highways network to the ports of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Iraq. Turkey has been attempting to establish an Istanbul-to-Islamabad railways connectivity through Iran, but the plan is on hold due to the deteriorating state of the Zahedan-Quetta track.

Due to deteriorating ties between Ankara and the West, Turkey was left out of the IMEC efforts. Turkey's dismissal from the project represents a severe blow towards the Turkish economy and geopolitical desires. Among the factors that contributed to this progression was the procurement of the Russian S-400 air defence technology. In addition, Turkey's foreign policy has proven erratic under Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's leadership, focusing on internal political ends and an authoritarian style in international affairs. As a result, the NATO alliance and America have lost faith in Ankara as a credible ally.

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[1] International Energy Agency report the European Union might face a potential shortfall of almost 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2023. How the European Union can avoid natural gas shortages in 2023 - News - IEA. (n.d.). IEA. <https://www.iea.org/news/how-the-european-union-can-avoid-natural-gas-shortages-in-2023>

[2] Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the EU | EEAS. (n.d.). [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gulf-cooperation-council-gcc-and-eu\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gulf-cooperation-council-gcc-and-eu_en)

[3] Singh, B. R. (2023, September 11). A corridor of immense promise. BusinessLine. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/a-corridor-of-immense-promise/article67296263.ece>

# Israel Sees South Lebanon Airport As An Iran-Backed Springboard For Attacks

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-says-iranians-setting-up-airport-lebanon-attacks-it-2023-09-11/>

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant accused Iran of setting up an airport in southern Lebanon to enable attacks against Israel. Israel is troubled by arch-foe Iran's nuclear programme, missile build-up and support for militants in the region.

## COMMENTS

The assertion has the ability to spark tensions that have been intensified in recent months through enticements by Iran-backed Hezbollah including establishing militant camps in Kfar Chouba of which, one of the tents was subsequently razed.[4] When Israelis took control over southern Lebanon in 1982, it declared the region an active combat zone, prohibiting any individual from accessing, owing to its proximity near Nabatieh, and Beqaa administrative divisions. Following Israel's withdrawal in 2000, Hezbollah also designated the region to be a combat zone. In May 2023, Hezbollah carried out military drills in Aaramta, some 2 km from the claimed airfield. However, interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati on behalf of the Lebanese government dismissed Hezbollah's wargames stating such a display of arsenal necessitates broad national agreement.[5] Reports allude that the site was capable of storing massive drones, several of them being combat drones, based on proposed Iranian projects.[6] The design and layout of the airstrip indicated that drones deployed using this site could potentially be employed in external and internal military actions. The strip is reportedly 20km from the Blue Line.

The Lebanese government maintained silence in the midst of Israeli charges alleging Tehran and Hezbollah teaming up to carry out strikes towards Israeli sites. Hezbollah's indifference in response to the Israeli charges is neither indicative of refusal nor reservations in verifying those claims[7]. Lebanon is still significantly divided between individuals who perceive Hezbollah as a resistance force fighting Israelis and others who see the organisation as an opposition to legitimate national institutions. Since the past few years, Lebanon has been struck by a severe recession that has ravaged various sectors, notably the PSUs and oil sector. To stabilise its energy sector, the maritime deal with Israel brokered by the US last year [8], provided critical foreign investments to the nation. Although the agreement emphasises Beirut's acceptance of Israel and reflects positively on the development of bilateral relations, the current geopolitical landscape in Lebanon raises concerns about the agreement's viability, due to the lack of serious legislative modifications and steps to limit Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanese politics.

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