

INDO-PACIFIC *Insights*

Indo-Pacific Insights is a fortnightly brief tracking key geopolitical, diplomatic, security and economic developments across the Indo-Pacific. It brings together major events and emerging trends to provide a concise picture of the forces shaping the region.

This edition covers 1–15 September 2026, highlighting the most significant developments during the first half of the month.

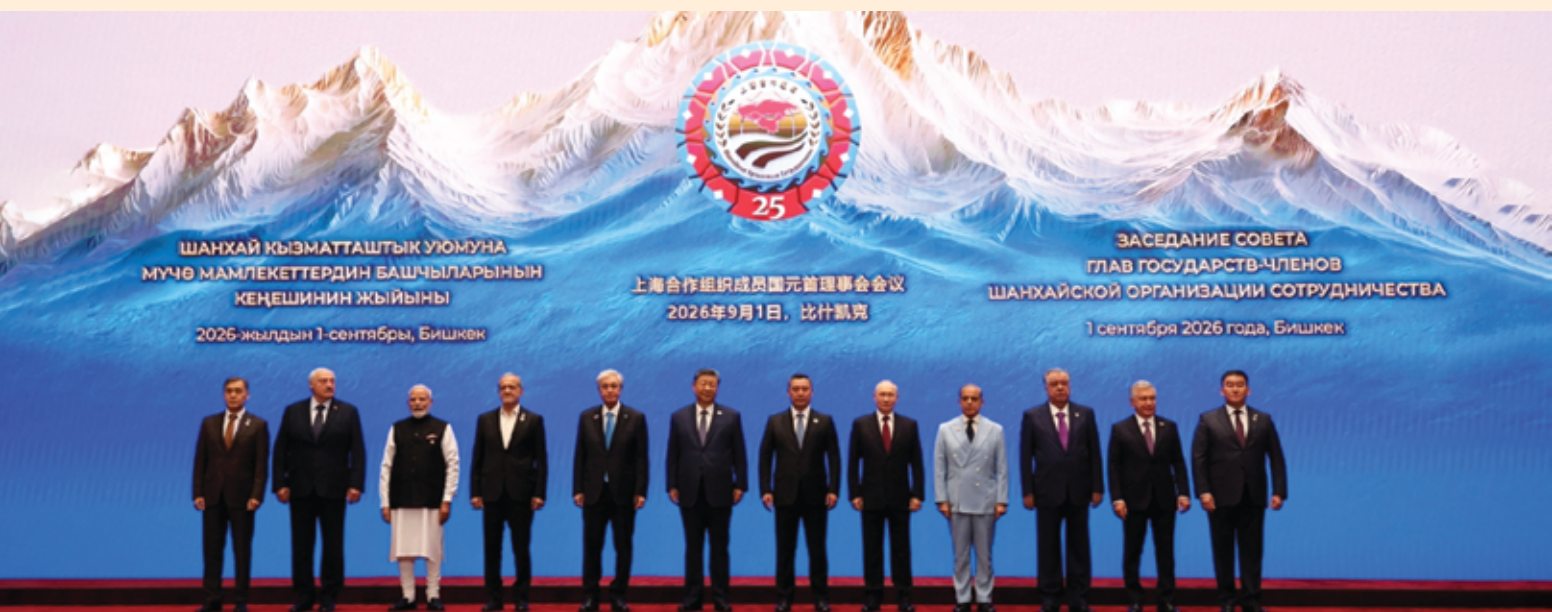
1 SEPTEMBER, 2026

New Zealand, US to fund Cook Islands port upgrade

New Zealand and the United States will jointly fund an upgrade of a World War II-era port on Penrhyn in the Cook Islands, as Western powers deepen engagement in the Pacific amid China's growing regional influence. Washington will contribute \$50 million, while New Zealand will provide NZ\$17.5 million. The project aims to improve shipping, transport links and economic opportunities, including fisheries and potential seabed mining. The investment follows the Cook Islands' 2025 strategic partnership with China, which strained relations with New Zealand. Wellington and the Cook Islands have since signed a defence and security declaration clarifying consultation between them.

SCO summit puts multipolar world order in focus

Leaders from China, Russia, India, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia gathered in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, with geopolitical conflicts, sanctions and economic cooperation dominating discussions. Russian President Vladimir Putin described the SCO as an influential centre of an emerging multipolar world, while Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian used the gathering to signal openness to renewed diplomacy with Washington. The summit also highlighted Central Asia's growing strategic importance as trade, transport and energy routes increasingly connect China, Russia, Europe and South Asia. Members stressed multilateral cooperation while maintaining differing relationships with the United States and other Western powers.



Australia, US pledge \$580 million to Pacific Island nations

Australia and the United States announced a combined \$580 million in support for Pacific Island nations amid growing strategic competition with China in the region. Washington pledged \$150 million, including \$60 million to strengthen fuel storage and power-grid stability as Pacific countries grapple with

energy pressures linked to the Iran war. Australia committed A\$600 million (\$430 million) to combat drug smuggling through increased aerial surveillance and training for police and border officials. Announced during the Pacific Islands Forum in Palau, the funding also signals continued US engagement in a region where China has expanded its influence through infrastructure, aid and security partnerships.

US carrier group made a significant Thailand port visit

The aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln arrived at Laem Chabang, accompanied by other US warships making separate Thai port calls. It was the carrier's first full port stop after a lengthy deployment that included operations in the US Central Command area, and highlights the continuing US naval presence in Southeast Asia.



Australia, US move to deepen defence ties in the Indo-Pacific

Australia and the United States agreed to deepen defence cooperation, potentially expanding the US military presence in Australia as both countries seek to strengthen deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said the American force posture in Australia was growing across multiple domains following talks with US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth in Washington. Cooperation includes rotational US deployments, military training and equipment storage, alongside the AUKUS partnership with Britain. From 2027, four US-commanded Virginia-class submarines are expected to operate from HMAS Stirling in Western Australia. China has criticised AUKUS, warning that it could fuel a regional arms race.



3 SEPTEMBER, 2026

China expands maritime activity east of Taiwan

China said its Ministry of Natural Resources conducted a seabed survey in waters east of Taiwan from August 10 to 31, aimed at mapping geological and structural characteristics for territorial planning and resource management. Beijing's coast guard also carried out what it described as a routine law-enforcement patrol east of Taiwan on September 3, its third such patrol since June.

Taiwan rejected China's claim of jurisdiction over the surrounding waters and said it had monitored the operation. Taipei accused Beijing of using maritime activities to exert pressure and advance its sovereignty claims. The latest moves point to China's growing use of civilian research vessels and coast guard operations, alongside military activity, to assert its claims around Taiwan.

Pacific leaders divided over China's ballistic missile launch

Pacific leaders expressed collective concern over China's July ballistic missile launch into Pacific waters but failed to reach unanimous agreement on condemning Beijing. At the Pacific Islands Forum summit in Palau, Nauru, which has strengthened ties with China, dissociated itself from the statement, while Kiribati was absent from the leaders' retreat where the communiqué was finalised. The disagreement highlights growing divisions among Pacific island states as China, the United States, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand compete for influence across the strategically important region. China had also tested an intercontinental ballistic missile in the Pacific in 2024.

4 SEPTEMBER, 2026

Taiwan-China tensions spill into Pacific Islands Forum

Taiwan has accused China of using coercive diplomacy at this week's Pacific Islands Forum in Palau, where Beijing objected to Taiwan's participation and warned of "consequences". Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung said China's behaviour risked undermining Pacific unity and also alleged that Chinese personnel engaged in surveillance at the summit. Beijing rejected his claims, accusing Lin of promoting Taiwan independence. Palau is one of three Pacific island countries maintaining formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The dispute underscores the Pacific's growing importance in the diplomatic contest between Beijing and Taipei, amid wider strategic competition in the region.

US tariff threat puts South Korea's chip investments in focus

South Korea and the United States are discussing further semiconductor investment in the US as Washington prepares a new tariff policy targeting imported chips. Seoul said semiconductor investment formed part of broader bilateral negotiations and acknowledged that trade issues were affecting other areas of the relationship. Under a deal reached last year, South Korea committed \$350 billion to US manufacturing, with Korean chipmakers promised tariff treatment no less favourable than major competitors. The talks are particularly significant for Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, the world's leading memory-chip producers, as booming AI investment increases the strategic importance of semiconductor supply chains.

6 SEPTEMBER, 2026

China-Nepal border disaster leaves thousands missing

Chinese rescue workers recovered 12 more bodies as searches continued at the devastated Gyirong crossing on the China-Nepal border, where a massive mudslide followed the collapse of a glacier on the Nepal side on August 26. More than 1,300 people have been killed on both sides of the border and over 5,000 remain missing. On the Chinese side, 43 deaths had been confirmed and 519 people were still missing as of September 5, including 261 foreigners from 23 countries. The disaster destroyed China's main border crossing with Nepal, highlighting the growing vulnerability of critical Himalayan infrastructure to extreme natural hazards..



7 SEPTEMBER, 2026

Philippines warns of regional impact from cuts to US-South Korea drills

Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro warned that China could seek to exploit perceived gaps in the regional security environment following reductions in US-South Korea military exercises. Washington and Seoul shortened their annual Ulchi Freedom Shield drills after US President Donald Trump ordered a substantial reduction, citing relations with North Korea and disagreements with Seoul over the US-Iran war. Teodoro said, however, that Washington had given Manila "definite assurances" that US commitments to the Philippines remained unchanged. Meanwhile, the United States, South Korea and Japan are proceeding with separate trilateral Freedom Edge exercises focused on responding to North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

countries deepen. The one-kilometre bridge, agreed during Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2024 visit to North Korea, can handle up to 300 vehicles a day and will eventually carry both freight and passengers. It supplements existing rail and air connections and links North Korea more directly with Russia's road network. The project comes amid expanding bilateral cooperation since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including North Korea's deployment of troops to support Russian forces.

Russia, North Korea open first road bridge as ties deepen

Russia and North Korea opened their first road bridge across the Tumen River, creating a new transport link as economic and military ties between the two



South Korea assesses Strait of Hormuz security amid deployment debate

South Korea sent an inspection team to the United Arab Emirates to assess security conditions in the Strait of Hormuz as Seoul considers options for supporting freedom of navigation through the strategically important waterway. The defence ministry said no decision had been made on deploying troops. The issue has also emerged as a point of tension in the US-South Korea alliance after Washington scaled back joint military exercises partly because Seoul declined to assist in the US-Iran war. Iran warned that any South Korean military participation in Gulf operations would be viewed as support for US military action and could have serious consequences.

India, China hold rare military talks in Arunachal sector

Senior Indian and Chinese military commanders held talks in the Arunachal Pradesh sector for the first time, signalling continued efforts to manage tensions along their disputed border. Two sessions were held on the Indian and Chinese sides of the Line of Actual Control, focusing on maintaining peace and tranquillity in the

eastern sector. The talks followed an August meeting between India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, which produced an agreement to establish mechanisms for military-level discussions in the eastern and middle sectors. The latest engagement comes as India and China seek to stabilise relations after years of border tensions.

Maldives seeks reopening of Chagos Islands sovereignty talks

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu asked British Prime Minister Andy Burnham to reopen discussions over the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands, challenging the UK's decision to transfer sovereignty of the Indian Ocean archipelago to Mauritius. Muizzu expressed disappointment that the Maldives had not been consulted when the agreement was reached under former British prime minister Keir Starmer. Britain rejected the call for Maldivian involvement in the sovereignty negotiations, maintaining that the issue is a matter between the UK and Mauritius. The intervention brings renewed attention to competing regional interests surrounding the strategically located Chagos archipelago in the Indian Ocean.

China, Philippines trade accusations over South China Sea

China and the Philippines exchanged sharp criticism over their competing South China Sea claims after Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr urged adherence to a 2016 international arbitration ruling that rejected the legal basis for China's expansive maritime claims. During a security forum in South Korea, Teodoro publicly criticised Beijing's refusal to recognise the ruling after receiving a note restating China's position. China responded by accusing Philippine officials of "stirring up trouble" and undermining bilateral relations and regional stability. The dispute comes amid continuing maritime confrontations in the South China Sea, a major global trade route and persistent regional security flashpoint.

New Zealand, Australia move towards deeper military integration

New Zealand and Australia are moving towards greater military integration, including the possibility of personnel from each country operating and maintaining the other's aircraft. The shift goes beyond traditional interoperability towards greater interchangeability between the two forces. The countries have conducted several joint exercises this year, with Australian F-35A stealth fighters joining New Zealand forces for training. Closer integration of their P-8A Poseidon fleets could strengthen joint maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, search-and-rescue and humanitarian operations. The arrangement could also help both militaries address personnel shortages during deployments and enable

faster operational coordination across the Indo-Pacific.

China, Russia reaffirm strategic ties with North Korea

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin reaffirmed their countries' strategic relationships with North Korea in messages marking the 78th anniversary of its founding. Xi told North

Korean leader Kim Jong Un that strengthening bilateral relations remained an "unwavering" Chinese policy and called for continued strategic coordination. Putin pledged to deepen Russia's comprehensive strategic partnership with Pyongyang, saying stronger ties would contribute to regional security and a multipolar world order. The messages come as North Korea's relations with Russia have expanded significantly, while Beijing continues to emphasise its longstanding political and strategic partnership with Pyongyang.

10 SEPTEMBER, 2026

Philippines, US and Japan push Luzon Economic Corridor towards investment

The Philippines, United States and Japan are accelerating efforts to turn the Luzon Economic Corridor from a strategic initiative into financed infrastructure and investment projects. Launched in 2024, the corridor aims to connect Subic Bay, Clark, Metro Manila and Batangas while attracting investment in semiconductors, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, maritime industries and critical minerals. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr called for projects that transfer technology, develop Filipino talent and strengthen local supply chains. Washington pledged support for transport, energy and technology investment, while Japan emphasised mobilising financing and expertise to make projects commercially viable and implementable.

Pakistan says no military response planned under Mecca Pact

Pakistan said it was not discussing a military response under the Mecca Pact following Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, despite the three-way defence agreement with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye stipulating that an armed attack on one member would be considered an attack on all. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sajjad Haider Khan said Islamabad would act under the agreement "when the time comes", without specifying what such action could involve. Pakistan has condemned the Iran-backed Houthis' attacks and urged Tehran to rein in the group, while also mediating between Iran and the United States. Islamabad said there were currently no plans to expand the alliance.

Kim praises North Korean troops deployed overseas

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un praised troops participating in "overseas military operations" during celebrations marking the 78th anniversary of the country's founding, an apparent reference to forces deployed in support of Russia's war in Ukraine. Western and South Korean officials estimate that Pyongyang has sent 14,000–15,000 troops to fight alongside Russian forces since late 2024. South Korean intelligence estimated in February that around 6,000 North Korean soldiers had been killed or wounded. Seoul has also said North Korea received economic assistance and military technology from Russia in return for troops and munitions, highlighting the deepening military relationship between Pyongyang and Moscow.



11 SEPTEMBER, 2026

Taiwan vice president's rare Europe visit draws protest from China

Taiwanese Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim made a rare visit to Italy to attend the Ventotene Conference for Freedom and Democracy, as Taipei seeks closer engagement with Europe despite diplomatic pressure from Beijing. Hsiao travelled with Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung, although no meetings were planned with



senior Italian government officials. China, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory, lodged protests with Italy and the European Union over the visit. The trip highlights Taiwan's efforts to expand its international engagement beyond its formal diplomatic partners, while underscoring the continuing sensitivity surrounding contacts between senior Taiwanese officials and European countries.

Drone attack shuts Myanmar's Mandalay airport

Flight operations at Mandalay's Tada-U International Airport were suspended following a drone attack by resistance forces fighting Myanmar's military-backed government. Myanmar Airways International cancelled international flights, while domestic services were diverted to another airport. State media said the People's Defence Force launched six first-person-view suicide drones but reported no casualties or damage to the runway or vehicles. The attack highlights the expanding use of drones by resistance groups as Myanmar's civil war continues more than five years after the 2021 military coup.

12 SEPTEMBER, 2026

BRICS calls for restraint in Middle East, backs multilateral diplomacy

BRICS leaders adopted the New Delhi Declaration, expressing deep concern over escalating tensions in the Middle East and calling for "maximum restraint" as fighting between the United States and Iran resumed. The declaration, agreed unanimously at the BRICS summit in New Delhi, emphasised resolving international disputes through dialogue, consultation and diplomacy and advocated a multilateral approach that respects national positions. Reaching consensus was significant given that BRICS

includes both Iran and the US-allied United Arab Emirates. The group also raised concerns over unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures that distort global trade, amid US sanctions on Iran and Russia.



13 SEPTEMBER, 2026

Xi pushes deeper 'Greater BRICS' economic cooperation

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed new initiatives to deepen economic and technological cooperation across an expanded "Greater BRICS", as the grouping seeks a larger role in the Global South. At the BRICS summit in New Delhi, Xi called for more integrated markets and stable industrial and supply chains, while proposing a BRICS Special Economic Zone partnership, a service trade forum and an AI Open Source Zone. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said solutions developed within BRICS should be adaptable to the wider Global South, while Russian President Vladimir Putin described the grouping as a driving force towards a multipolar world order.

Myanmar military-backed government challenges UN envoy's status

Myanmar's military-backed government said it had revoked the status of the country's UN ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, accusing him of illegal activities and seeking legal action against him. Kyaw Moe Tun was appointed by the government of Aung San Suu Kyi

before the 2021 military coup and has remained Myanmar's representative at the UN despite publicly opposing the military takeover. His position has continued because the UN Credentials Committee has deferred a decision over Myanmar's representation. The dispute could return to the committee following the UN General Assembly, keeping Myanmar's contested international representation at the centre of a wider struggle over political legitimacy.



15 SEPTEMBER, 2026

South Korea, Kazakhstan deepen ties on nuclear energy and critical minerals

South Korea and Kazakhstan agreed to expand cooperation in nuclear energy, critical minerals, energy and technology as Seoul seeks to diversify its strategic supply chains. President Lee Jae Myung and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev oversaw the signing of 13 agreements, including a memorandum on the peaceful use of nuclear energy and cooperation on crude oil, science and technology. Seoul is also looking beyond Kazakhstan's traditional exports of oil and uranium towards lithium and other critical minerals. The agreement reflects South Korea's broader effort to deepen economic ties with resource-rich Central Asia and secure supplies needed for its high-tech industries.

Cambodia, Thailand begin UN-backed process over maritime dispute

Cambodia and Thailand began a UN-backed conciliation process in Singapore aimed at resolving their long-running maritime boundary dispute in the Gulf of Thailand. The two countries have competing claims over roughly 26,000 square kilometres of sea, an area estimated to contain significant oil and natural gas reserves. Cambodia is seeking a treaty establishing a maritime boundary but has also expressed willingness to jointly develop and share the disputed resources. Thailand said it was participating in good faith while maintaining that direct negotiations should have preceded the process. The conciliation mechanism operates under UNCLOS, but its recommendations are not legally binding.

Indo-Pacific Insights Contributors :

Tanzila Hosain Tonny, Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies

Debi Karmakar, Research Associate at Centre for Governance Studies

Jahanara Jaba, Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies

Fawzia Afrin, Research Intern at Centre for Governance Studies

CGS Centre for
Governance Studies

45/1 New Eskaton (2nd Floor), Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Tel +880 2 58310217, +880 2 222223109

Website: www.cgs-bd.com