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SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION - INDIA'S ROLE, SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGES

- The 26th Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, on August 31-September 1, 2026. The summit marked 25 years of the organisation, which was established in 2001.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Background

- The SCO originated from the Shanghai Five, comprising **China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**.
- The grouping was formally established as the SCO on June 15, 2001.
- India and Pakistan became full members in 2017, expanding the organisation's geographical and strategic significance.
- The SCO does not have a collective defence mechanism. Instead, it functions as a platform for political dialogue, security cooperation, counter-terrorism, economic engagement and regional coordination.
- The organisation currently operates through 29 charter bodies and more than 40 working mechanisms, providing regular channels for interaction among member states.

Key Areas of SCO Cooperation

- **Counter-Terrorism and Security**
 - Countering terrorism, separatism and extremism remains a central objective of the SCO.
 - India also highlighted the importance of peace and stability in Afghanistan and called for an inclusive government in the country.
- **West Asian Conflicts**
 - The Bishkek Declaration expressed deep concern over military strikes against Iran and reaffirmed support for Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
 - The SCO also emphasised the peaceful use of atomic energy, supporting the inalienable right of states to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

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- **Connectivity and Sovereignty**

- India supported greater connectivity between markets of SCO member states, while emphasising respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Significance of the SCO for India

- The SCO provides India with access to a multilateral platform involving China, Russia, Iran and Central Asian countries. It enables India to:
 - Engage simultaneously with major Eurasian powers.
 - Advance cooperation against terrorism and extremism.
 - Participate in discussions on Afghanistan and regional security.
 - Strengthen economic and connectivity linkages with Central Asia.
 - Maintain diplomatic channels with China and Pakistan.
 - Engage Russia and Iran within a broader multilateral framework.

Challenges

- The SCO faces structural limitations because its members have significant geopolitical differences. India and China continue to have unresolved border issues, while India and Pakistan face deep bilateral tensions.
- Similarly, members have different positions on conflicts such as Ukraine and West Asia. The organisation's consensus-based functioning can therefore make substantive collective action difficult.

Conclusion

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has evolved into an important Eurasian multilateral platform.
- For India, its significance lies not only in security cooperation but also in maintaining diplomatic engagement with China, Russia, Iran, Central Asia and Pakistan.
- Despite internal differences, the SCO provides India with strategic space to pursue its interests, advocate counter-terrorism, promote regional connectivity and maintain dialogue in an increasingly fragmented international order.

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BRICS AND THE PUSH FOR CROSS-BORDER PAYMENTS

Ahead of the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi (September 2026), with India as Chair, member nations are pushing for new mechanisms to make cross-border payments faster and cheaper — including linking digital payment systems and central bank digital currencies (CBDCs).

Finance ministries and central bank representatives from BRICS countries met in Jaipur recently to discuss this financial cooperation.

How Do Cross-Border Payments Currently Work?

- Sending money internationally isn't a direct transfer — it travels through a chain of intermediaries called **correspondent banks**.
- For example, if a South African importer pays an Indian exporter, the payment doesn't move directly between the two countries' banks.
- Instead, it's routed through a **larger international bank** (usually based in London or New York) that holds accounts with both.
- Since very few banks hold both rupees and rand directly, the payment gets converted rand → **dollar** → rupee, with the US dollar acting as a "vehicle currency" — even though no American party is involved in the trade at all.

The Role of SWIFT

- Alongside the actual money, **payment instructions** also need to travel between banks — this is handled by SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication).
- SWIFT is a Belgium-based cooperative overseen by the National Bank of Belgium and G-10 central banks (including the US Federal Reserve).
- SWIFT works like a secure messaging network — a "post office" for payment instructions — used directly by over 11,000 institutions in more than 200 countries.
- Smaller banks connect to it indirectly through larger ones, making SWIFT deeply embedded and hard to replace.

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Why Does BRICS Want to Change This System?

- For developing economies, heavy reliance on a **few dominant currencies** — the US dollar, euro, and yen — creates exposure to the monetary policies of the countries issuing them.
- The 2024 BRICS report (under Russia's chairmanship) argued that this system is **effectively monopolised**, driving up transaction costs.
- There's also a **sanctions risk**: several Russian banks were cut off from SWIFT in 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, making other countries cautious about joining any alternative system that a sanctioned nation might use.
- This is exactly why Russia has pushed hardest for alternatives, while others remain wary.

What Is India's Position?

- India's own proposal, reported in January, suggests member nations link their CBDCs specifically for trade and tourism payments.
- Indian officials have been careful to frame this purely as a way to cut transaction costs and speed up settlements — **not as an attempt to displace the US dollar**, unlike some Russian and Brazilian proposals that go further toward reducing dollar dependence.
- This cautious framing may not be accidental. In November 2024, then US President Donald Trump threatened 100% tariffs on BRICS countries if they moved away from the dollar, plus a further 10% tariff on countries aligning with vaguely defined "anti-American" BRICS policies.

Conclusion

BRICS's push for alternative cross-border payment mechanisms reflects developing economies' shared concern over high costs and dollar dependence in global finance, though the group remains divided on how far to go — with Russia favouring dollar alternatives and India framing its proposals purely around efficiency.

As India hosts the 2026 summit, its cautious, cost-centric approach to CBDC linkages will likely shape how far BRICS's payment ambitions actually progress.

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BAR COUNCIL OF INDIA



- It is a **statutory body created by Parliament** to regulate and represent the Indian bar.
- It was established **under the Advocates Act, 1961**, based on the recommendations of the All India Bar Committee.
- **Objective:** Its main objective is safeguarding the rights, interests, and privileges of advocates throughout India.
- **Functions of Bar Council of India:**
 - **Regulatory:** It performs the regulatory function by prescribing standards of professional conduct and etiquette and by exercising disciplinary jurisdiction over the bar.
 - **Setting Standard:** It also sets standards for legal education and grants recognition to Universities whose degrees in law will serve as qualification for enrolment as an advocate.
 - It conducts the **All India Bar Examination (AIBE)** to grant a 'Certificate of Practice' to advocates practising law in India.
 - BCI also **funds welfare schemes** for economically weaker and physically handicapped advocates.
 - It also recognizes on a reciprocal basis foreign qualifications in law obtained outside India for admission as an advocate under this Act.
- **Composition of Bar Council of India:**
 - It comprises members **elected from each State Bar Council, the Attorney General of India**, and the Solicitor of India, who serve as members automatically.
 - The members of the **State Bar Councils** are elected for **five years**.
 - The Council has the **power to choose its own Chairman and Vice-Chairman** from among its members, and they serve for two years.

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KEY FACTS ABOUT GANYMEDE



Magnetic and auroral evidence points to a vast ocean beneath Ganymede, but surface salts do not yet prove a direct connection through its roughly 150-kilometre ice shell.

- It is the **largest of Jupiter's satellites and of all the satellites in the solar system.**
- It is the **only moon** known to possess its **own magnetic field.**
- **Discovered by Galileo Galilei in 1610**, Ganymede's name is derived from a figure in Roman mythology associated with the god Jupiter.
- It has a **diameter** of about 5,270 km, which makes it **larger than the planet Mercury.**
- It is situated about one million kilometers from Jupiter, exhibiting **synchronous rotation**, which means it **always shows the same face to the planet.**
- Ganymede's **relatively low density** of 1.93 grams per cubic cm indicates that its composition is **roughly half rock and half water ice by mass.**
- Ganymede has a **core of metallic iron**, which is **followed by a layer of rock** that is **topped off by a crust of mostly ice** that is very thick.
- There are also a **number of bumps on Ganymede's surface**, which may be rock formations.
- It is **believed** that Ganymede has a **saltwater ocean below its surface.**
- A **thin atmosphere surrounds** Ganymede, **containing hydrogen** and possibly other compounds like carbon dioxide.
- **Ongoing exploration**, including missions like the recently launched **Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer (JUICE)**, aims to **deepen our understanding of Ganymede's geology**, potential oceanic layers, and its role in the broader context of the solar system's formation and evolution.

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EXERCISE VEER GUARDIAN 2026



The Japanese Self-Defense Force (JASDF) contingent recently touched down in Jodhpur ahead of Exercise Veer Guardian 2026.

- It is a **bilateral air exercise** between the **Indian Air Force** and the **Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF)**.
- The **first edition** of the exercise was held in **2023** at Hyakuri Air Base, **Japan**.
- It seeks to enhance interoperability, operational synergy, and mutual understanding, reinforcing the enduring bonds of friendship between India and Japan.
- **Ex Veer Guardian 2026:**
 - **Location:** Jodhpur, Rajasthan
 - It will focus on improving the tactical proficiency of participating units and deepening mutual understanding between the two air forces.
 - The training will include **air-combat manoeuvring**, giving personnel from both countries an opportunity to train together in complex operational scenarios.
 - **Japan** is participating with **three F-2A fighter aircraft** from the 8th Air Wing at Tsuiki Air Base, along with approximately 110 personnel.
 - This is the first time that the Mitsubishi F-2 fighter aircraft will participate in an exercise in India.

BHABHA ATOMIC RESEARCH CENTRE (BARC)



- It is **India's premier nuclear research facility**.
- It is headquartered in **Trombay, Mumbai, Maharashtra**.
- It operates under the **Department of Atomic Energy**, which is directly overseen by the **Prime Minister of India**.

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- The **statutory framework** governing its activities is the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**, which vests in the **central government exclusive control over atomic minerals**, fissile material, and nuclear research, superseding the earlier Atomic Energy Act of 1948.
- It is a **multi-disciplinary research centre** with extensive infrastructure for advanced research and development covering the **entire spectrum of nuclear science and engineering and related areas**.
- BARC is the **research backbone of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL)**, which currently operates all nuclear power reactors in India.
- **History:**
 - **Homi Jehangir Bhabha conceived the nuclear program in India.**
 - **Bhabha established the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)** to carry out nuclear science research in **1945**.
 - **Bhabha established the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay (AEET)**, in January **1954** for a multidisciplinary research program essential for the ambitious nuclear program of India.
 - **After the death of Bhabha in 1966, AEET was renamed Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).**
- **Functions:**
 - It is engaged in **research** with the objective of generating knowledge and techniques for **nuclear power production**, the advancement of **nuclear science**, the use of **radioisotopes in industry, health, and agriculture**, and **research in frontier areas of science and technology**.
 - It is responsible for the **design and development of nuclear reactors, fuel cycle technologies**, radiation protection, and safety systems.
 - BARC also plays an important role in **nuclear education and training**. It offers various training programs for scientists, engineers, and technicians in the areas of nuclear science and technology.

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RUDRA RAPTORS EXERCISE



- It is a **high-intensity joint military exercise** conducted by the **Konark Corps** of the **Indian Army**.
- It was conducted in the forward areas of the desert sector in **Jaisalmer, Rajasthan**.

Theme: “One team, one purpose, absolute battlefield dominance”

- The exercise witnessed joint integrated training and active participation from the **elite helicopters** of ‘Thar Raptors’ such as **AH-64E Apaches**, and **tanks** of the ‘**Black Mace**’ Brigade.
- **Black Mace Brigade** is the **Rudra all-arms formation** under **Konark Corps**, which the Army validated during Exercise Akhand Prahar in 2025 as a **combined-arms unit** grouping **armour, mechanised infantry, artillery, air defence, and support elements** under one headquarters.
- The exercise was aimed at establishing **seamless synergy between aerial and ground combat capabilities**, as well as validating integrated battle strategies for realistic battlefield conditions.
- During the joint training, **attack helicopters and tanks** executed operational activities in tandem to demonstrate coordinated actions between aerial and ground military assets.