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Amit Pratap Singh

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Daily Brief · Source Plan (Monday to Saturday)

Common Daily

The Hindu · The Indian Express · Deccan Herald · The Statesman

read every day, alongside the day's sources below

Day-wise Sources

Monday

ORF (Observer Research Foundation) · *Foreign Affairs* · *The Diplomat*

Tuesday

MP-IDSA · *EPW* (Economic & Political Weekly) · *Gateway House*

Wednesday

Firstpost · *South Asia Monitor* · *ICWA* (Indian Council of World Affairs)

Thursday

ORF · *Frontline* · *Bar & Bench* · *World Focus*

Friday

MP-IDSA · *Carnegie Endowment* · *VIF* (Vivekananda International Foundation)

Saturday

Firstpost · *Project Syndicate* · *The Economist*

As per relevance, articles from other relevant sources such as NatStrat, ThePrint and The Telegraph (India) will also be included.

In dire straits: UNGA's diplomatic test in West Asia

Firstpost.



TRENDING | US-Iran war Russia elections Battle within Tata Group Merz election woes Lindsay Clancy trial

In dire straits: UNGA's diplomatic test in West Asia

The UNGA faces a diplomatic test as Iran, the US and Gulf states confront two vital maritime chokepoints.



Context

How the Iran war and the Houthi blockade of Saudi shipping have put two chokepoints, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb, at the centre of the UN General Assembly's debate.

Facts

■ **Two chokepoints** : *Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb together handle about 15 per cent of global seaborne trade and 35 per cent of the world's seaborne oil trade.*

■ **Selective blockade** : *only Saudi ships and cargo are blocked, which keeps Western navies out.*

■ **UNSC veto** : *China and Russia vetoed the American resolution on UN monitoring of Iranian sanctions.*

Analytical Crux

The West Asian crisis has become a contest over two straits, and control of a chokepoint gives an actor bargaining power far beyond its size. The Houthi blockade is selective, i.e. by letting every ship through except Saudi ones it has kept the United States and other Western navies away and left Saudi Arabia to fight alone. Written alliances have produced no action, since neither the Mecca Alliance nor the Red Sea Alliance has moved a partner. Oil markets have held because trade has been rerouted through Fujairah, Yanbu and the SUMED pipeline, and not because the danger has passed. Any breakthrough at the UN will therefore come from bargains struck on the margins among Washington, Tehran, Beijing and the Gulf capitals.

Verbatim Quotes

"With the midterm elections fast approaching, Trump is unwilling to open another front in West Asia that would jeopardize the global economy and, more crucially, pump prices in the US."

– R. Swaminathan

Bangladesh Skips BRICS 2026: The Diplomatic Opportunity That Left Dhaka Behind

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FORTNIGHTLY ANALYSIS

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Bangladesh Skips BRICS 2026: The Diplomatic Opportunity That Left Dhaka behind

The question, therefore, is not whether Bangladesh could have secured a particular agreement simply by attending. There is no guarantee that participation in a summit automatically produces investment or diplomatic breakthroughs. The question is whether Bangladesh benefited by being absent.



By Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury | Sep 21, 2026



Context

Bangladesh lost a chance to widen its diplomatic options by staying away from the BRICS Outreach session at the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi (12-13 September 2026).

Facts

■ **Two invitations :** India invited Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to the BRICS Outreach session as BIMSTEC chair and, separately, for a bilateral visit.

■ **Dhaka's reason :** "no scope" to attend, because the invitation went to the BIMSTEC chair and not the Prime Minister.

■ **Bilateral first :** Dhaka wants Rahman's first visit to India to take place in a bilateral, not a multilateral, setting.

Analytical Crux

In a multipolar order, the influence of a smaller state comes from being present in many forums, and a question of protocol is poor reason to give that up. Bangladesh made the capacity of the invitation, BIMSTEC chair or Prime Minister, the deciding issue, and lost a single room holding India, China, Russia, the Gulf states and development lenders. Its membership of the New Development Bank shows it is already inside the BRICS economic system, and absence protected nothing. *The real cause lies in the Hasina dispute and Dhaka's wish that the first meeting with India be bilateral, though bilateral and multilateral tracks can run side by side.* For any state that claims an independent foreign policy, engagement is not alignment, and more channels, not fewer, keep its strategic options open.

Verbatim Quotes

"In an increasingly competitive and multipolar international environment, standing outside important rooms can become costly—not because every meeting produces an immediate breakthrough, but because influence is often accumulated through sustained presence."

– Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury

A world on the brink, diplomacy and politics as usual

A world on the brink, diplomacy and politics as usual

SOON, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump will meet. World leaders will descend on the UN General Assembly. Yet another forum of leaders, P4M, with Canada, Europe, Brazil, and Kenya, was just announced. The SCO met at Bishkek. The BRICS summit has just concluded in Delhi. The liturgy of international politics continues. Talking is usually good. This has helped put a floor under the multiple crises. In some cases, like trade, these summits have opened up new options for the world and created new alliances. It has, to use the current buzzword, helped build resilience. Who knows what might have happened without all this activity? In all likelihood, we would be worse off.

At the same time, it is not difficult to shake off the deep vertigo this activity is inducing. One of the greatest novels of the 20th century, Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, had captured this well. It is, psychologically, a richly layered novel. I first read it right after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when its pessimism about modernity seemed out of place. But its disorienting force lingers in two respects. The first is the sense of a civilisation that is sophisticated, intelligent, inventive, smart, capable, refined, even if a little amoral and confused. Yet, it has no sense of how to mobilise judgement or political action to avoid impending catastrophe. But the second thing is the weird juxtaposition between a sense of impending danger, even catastrophe, and the normal routines of ordinary life and diplomacy. Leaders and people were not exactly ignorant of what was going on. They were not quite "sleepwalking". Everyone was

aware of the momentous changes in politics, in technology, in society. They were daily news. But in a way, that was part of the paradox. Catastrophe talk or talk of dangers was just another one of those things. It is as if, in our times, the catastrophic melting of the glaciers and not quite getting the proportion of ice right in a cold coffee were on the same level of attention.

There is, of course, a virtue in not catastrophising; frenzy can produce fatalism or bad decisions. But the yawning gap between the machinery and protocols of international politics and the underlying historical dangers is quite striking. One temptation is to put this down to the absence of global leadership. One of the disturbing features of our current condition is that the fate of the world seems increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals: Trump, Xi, a bunch of technology executives, and maybe a bunch of energy barons. In such a world, the characteristics of the few individuals seem to matter disproportionately. And yet never was the world more bereft of global leadership, if by leadership we mean the ability to rise above narrow self-interest and become a bridge between the interests of individual nations and global interest, between the present and the future. No one will expect Xi or Trump to play that role.

But you have to wonder if this is just about the quality of individual leaders we have. While individual leaders seem powerful, they are actually seriously constrained by each other. Neither



PRATAP
BHANU
MEHTA

You have to wonder: On a simple measure of significant risks to humanity — widespread war, climate change, pandemics, nuclear risks, and now possibly AI — is all this activity amounting to making us safer?

China nor the United States can unilaterally frame the global order according to their whims. That is a relief. There are no hegemonies. Countries can constrain each other. But they cannot produce collective action. Foreign policy is made under domestic constraints, and so it should often be. Governments are accountable to their citizens, who will care about the price of food, fuel, and employment. Domestic audiences in big powers also care about their national advantage: Leaders cannot surrender territory, accept defeat without facing domestic consequences, or be seen to concede technological advances to an adversary. The tension between national and global interests is baked into our sense of the normal. Not saving humanity might eventually be a disaster for any country, but trying to save it will often incur a high cost for the leader now. In normal times, these tensions are part of the fabric of international relations. We live with them, and they can be quite productive.

But when the magnitude of the risks has changed considerably, these tensions skirt at the edge of a breaking point, which is where we are now on every issue. In none of the wars that have systemic consequences for the world — Russia-Ukraine, America-Iran, Iran-Saudi, Israel and its neighbours — is there a bargaining solution within the current frameworks of territory, power and prestige. In AI, the incentives to accelerate, when driven by the quest for technological advantage, come just at the moment when

the technology requires slowing down regulation and deeper forms of information sharing. Climate negotiations have proved nearly impossible as each state protects its own energy security. Global debt seems an easy solution to economic woes. We want to continue to act normally where the stakes are no longer normal.

The summits will occur. The commitment to dialogue will be announced. The communiqué will be hailed as a triumph as it was in the recent BRICS summit. The machinery working gives us a sense of normalcy. But you have to wonder: On a simple measure of significant risks to humanity — widespread war, climate change, pandemics, nuclear risks, and now possibly AI — is all this activity amounting to making us safer?

Musil's subtle point was not that we are foolish, ignorant or even depraved. It was rather that we might be rational, a bit too rational in taking our cues from normal times. Our leaders are doing what they are supposed to do: Preserve economic growth and energy security, compete for technological superiority, worry about the next election and even stage the pageantry of summits. But conventional rationality and normalcy will not cut it. As in Musil's novel, a character says, "The function of diplomacy is to keep what we have." To this, the character Arnheim gives a dark reply, "Keeping what we have leads to war." The focus on Xi and Trump may make us forget just how stuck and how much at risk, we are.

*The writer is contributing editor
The Indian Express*

Context

The Xi-Trump meeting, the UN General Assembly, the SCO at Bishkek and the BRICS summit in Delhi all fall within a few weeks. The question is whether the season of summits is making the world any safer.

Facts

■ **The summit season :** Xi Jinping and Donald Trump are to meet, and world leaders gather at UNGA. A new forum of leaders, P4M, with Canada, Europe, Brazil and Kenya has been announced.

■ **Wars without settlement :** none of the four systemic wars, i.e. Russia-Ukraine, America-Iran, Iran-Saudi, and Israel and its neighbours, has a bargaining solution within the current frameworks of territory, power and prestige.

■ **Domestic limits :** leaders cannot surrender territory, accept defeat or concede technological advances to an adversary without paying a price at home.

Analytical Crux

The danger is structural rather than personal. Power is spread so that neither China nor the United States can impose an order, which prevents hegemony but also prevents collective action. Leaders answer to voters on prices, territory and technology, and the cost of acting for humanity falls on them today while the benefit lies far in the future. In normal times this tension is manageable. Now, with wars that have no bargaining solution, an AI race that needs slowing down and climate talks stuck on energy security. Summits keep up a sense of normalcy, but diplomacy only tries to keep what we have may end in war. Therefore, countries have to continue to act normally when the stakes are no longer normal.

Verbatim Quotes

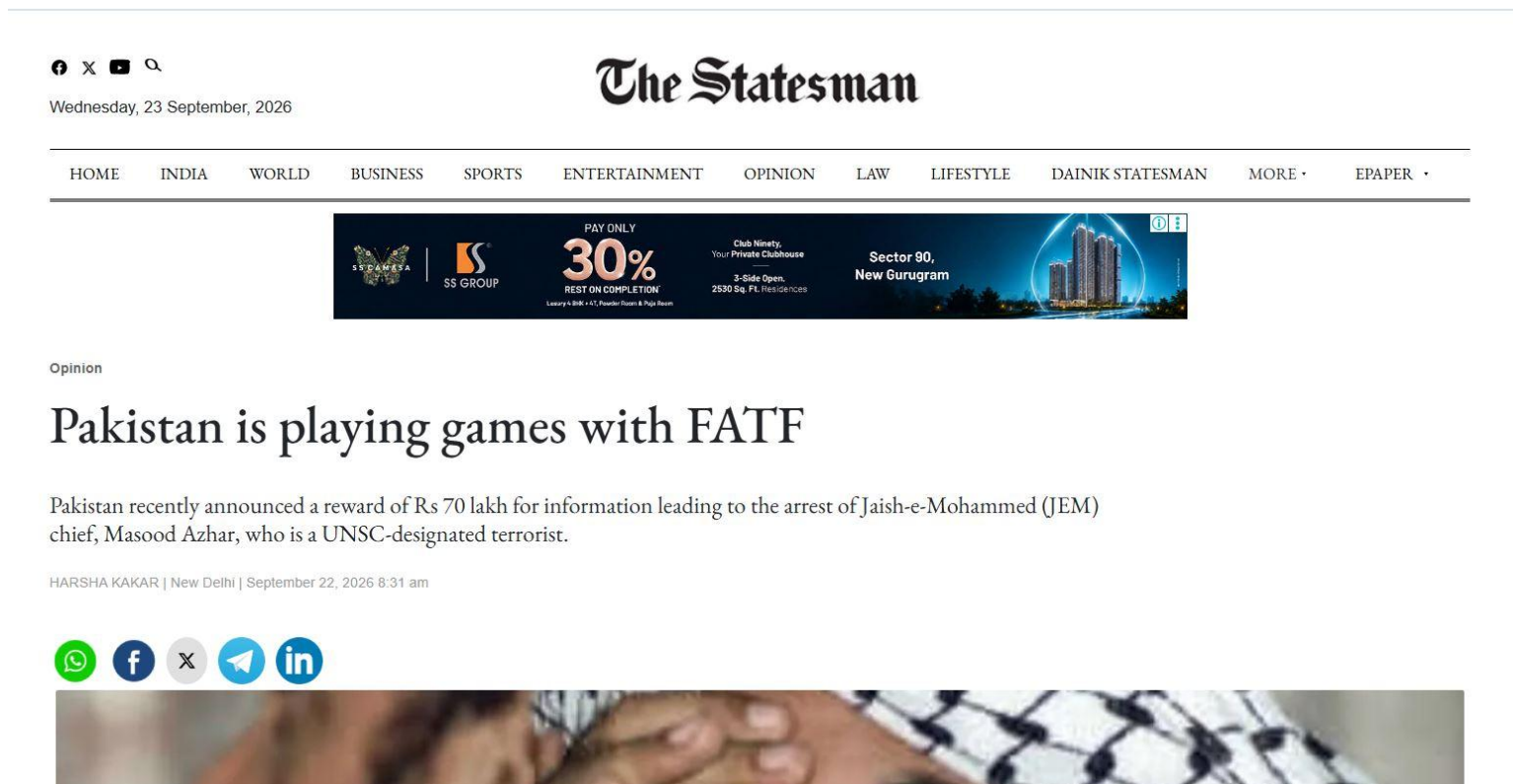
"There are no hegemons. Countries can constrain each other. But they cannot produce collective action."

- Pratap Bhanu Mehta

"Not saving humanity might eventually be a disaster for any country, but trying to save it will often incur a high cost for the leader now."

- Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Pakistan is playing games with FATF



Context

Before the FATF plenary in Paris, Pakistan has raised the reward for Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar to Rs 70 lakh. It is to avoid FATF scrutiny and not a real step against terrorism.

Facts

■ **Grey list** : Pakistan was put on the grey list in 2018 and taken off in 2022. It is still under evaluation by the Asia Pacific Group, and the next audit is due in 2029.

■ **US Congress report** : 12 of the 15 terrorist groups operating from Pakistan are designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the United States.

■ **Wanted by India** : the number of terrorists India seeks from Pakistan rose by 35 per cent, i.e. from 1330 in 2021 to 1804.

Analytical Crux

Pakistan's higher bounty on Masood Azhar is a gesture timed for the FATF plenary. It does not match the conduct of a state that shelters him, helps rebuild his Bahawalpur base and lets its officers attend the funerals of his cadres. For Pakistan the grey list is mainly an economic penalty, i.e. lost investment, costlier loans and USD 38 billion of lost growth. Removal from the grey list in 2022 did not dismantle the terror infrastructure. The number of terrorists India seeks from Pakistan rose from 1330 to 1804, and JeM raises money openly through more than 290 online wallets. *FATF pressure works when monitoring judges action on the ground and not announcements. The irony is that Pakistan is offering money to locate a terrorist who, apart from operating from its soil for decades, is protected by its own security agencies. Therefore, Pakistan must take concrete action and not make phoney announcements.*

Verbatim Quotes

"The reality is that the state supporting terrorism against all its neighbours – India, Afghanistan and Iran is today embroiled in its own internal security crisis."

– Harsha Kakar

Taliban Rule Marks Five Years: Afghanistan’s Evolving Resistance Landscape and Implications for India



Taliban Rule Marks Five Years: Afghanistan's Evolving Resistance Landscape and Implications for India

Dr. Anwesha Ghosh | 21 September 2026

Abstract: The day of August 15 marked five years since the Taliban returned to power, during which it has projected Afghanistan as being firmly under its control. While the small armed opposition in Panjshir, Badakhshan, and Baghlan's Andarab district failed to mount a significant challenge to Taliban dominance in the years, the emergence of new anti-Taliban movements has begun to expose cracks in the regime's narrative of unassailable authority. Although these developments remain limited in scale and coordination, they merit close attention, particularly for India as it balances pragmatic engagement with the de facto authorities against a longer history of shifting Afghan alignments.

Context

Five years after the Taliban returned to power on 15 August 2021, new armed groups and quarrels within the Taliban's own ranks are testing its claim of complete control.

Facts

■ **Pakistan–Taliban hostility :** *in late 2025 and early 2026, the dispute over Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan turned into open fighting and called it "open war".*

■ **UN monitoring :** *3,687 security and safety incidents between February and April 2026, a 57.7 per cent rise as compared to 2025.*

■ *Russia is the first country to formally recognise the Taliban 'government'.*

■ **Badakhshan matters :** *borders Pakistan's Chitral region and has Tajik and Uzbek population. It contains the Wakhan Corridor and has gold and lapis lazuli mines.*

Analytical Crux

Five years after taking Kabul, the Taliban hold the cities, the state institutions and the means of coercion. Since July 2026, however, their claim of total control has been dented. A district centre fell for a few hours for the first time since 2021, fighting has spread from north to south, and security incidents have risen by 57.7 per cent. The resistance lacks what the Northern Alliance had in the 1990s. Pakistan, now hostile to the Taliban, may try to fill that gap, though Afghans remember how Islamabad drops the factions it builds up. *The lack of a secure rear base and reliable external patronage has, therefore, kept the opposition fragmented, under-resourced and confined largely to hit-and-run operations.* New Delhi should continue practical dealings with the de facto authorities and keep contact with a wider set of Afghan actors.

Verbatim Quotes

"In Afghanistan's fluid political environment, strategic prudence lies in preserving multiple channels of engagement rather than relying exclusively on a single interlocutor."

– Dr Anwesha Ghosh

- PSIR Paper II, 2026: India has recognised that West Asia is not a single contest, but a tangle of rivalries, bargains and anxieties. Comment.
- PSIR Paper II, 2026: Discuss the main features of the land-boundary agreement between India and Bangladesh.
- PSIR Paper II, 2026: What strategic options can India exercise as a response to the tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- GS Paper III, 2026: “Discuss counterfeit currency and money laundering as major sources of terror funding in India. State the actions being taken at International level to check these menaces. Highlight the role of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and methods of compliance by its member states in preventing terror funding.”
- PSIR Paper II, 2025: China’s growing footprint and a tangible shift in power dynamics in Bangladesh has weakened India’s leverage in Dhaka. Comment.
- GS Paper II, 2025: “The reform process in the United Nations remains unresolved, because of the delicate imbalance of East and West and entanglement of the USA vs. Russo-Chinese alliance.” Examine and critically evaluate the East-West policy confrontations in this regard.
- GS Paper II, 2025: “With the waning of globalization, post-Cold War world is becoming a site of sovereign nationalism.” Elucidate.
- PSIR Paper II, 2024: Discuss the future of SAARC in the light of India’s increased focus on other regional groupings like ASEAN and BIMSTEC.

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