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Bishkek Before Delhi: What India Wants From the SCO Summit, and What Has Actually Been Confirmed

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Bishkek Before Delhi: What India Wants From the SCO Summit, and What Has Actually Been Confirmed

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

The Prime Minister arrived in Tashkent on August 29, 2026 and was received at the airport by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, on the first leg of a visit that takes him to Bishkek for the 26th Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation on August 31 and September 1, 2026. Reporting on August 30 indicated that a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping is being sought on the summit sidelines, ahead of the 18th BRICS Summit that India hosts at New Delhi on September 12 and 13, 2026.

As this edition is published, the Bishkek summit has not begun. The welcome dinner is on August 31 and the plenary Council of Heads of State meets on September 1. No declaration has been adopted. No bilateral has taken place. Anything you read this week describing what the SCO “decided” at Bishkek is describing something that has not happened yet.

WHAT IS CONFIRMED, AND WHAT IS NOT

This distinction is the whole story, and most coverage blurs it.

ITEM	STATUS AS OF AUGUST 30, 2026
Modi's arrival in Tashkent, received by Mirziyoyev	Happened , August 29
Tashkent delegation-level talks and agreements	Expected , no signed outcome on record
Modi-Putin bilateral at Bishkek	Scheduled and confirmed by the Ministry of External Affairs
Modi-Xi bilateral at Bishkek	Not announced by either India or China
Putin's attendance at the Delhi BRICS Summit	Confirmed by the Kremlin
Xi's attendance at the Delhi BRICS Summit	Not confirmed by Beijing

At the MEA briefing, the only bilateral named was with Russia. Asked specifically about both Putin and Xi, the Ministry confirmed **Putin alone** and said it was working on further meetings subject to time.

On Xi's travel to India, the refutation is unusually clean. China's Foreign Ministry announced Xi's itinerary for **August 30 to September 3** covering **Kyrgyzstan and Egypt**. **No India leg was announced.** Coverage that treats a September visit to Delhi as settled is running ahead of the record.

If Xi does come, the framing matters. His last visit to India was the informal summit at **Mamallapuram in October 2019**, which issued no joint statement. A September 2026 visit would be his first in close to seven years.

THE ORGANISATION, CORRECTLY DESCRIBED

Three Prelims traps sit in this subject, and all three appear in circulating coverage.

*The SCO has two permanent bodies, the **Secretariat in Beijing** and the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure with its Executive Committee in Tashkent**. RATS was created by an agreement at **St Petersburg on June 7, 2002** and became operational in **2004**. A widely copied claim that RATS moved to Moscow is unsupported and contradicted by the SCO's own material. **Write Tashkent.***

*The SCO was founded in **June 2001**. **Bishkek in 2026 is therefore the 25th anniversary summit**, not Pakistan's 2027 summit, as several outlets state.*

*The decision to establish an **SCO Development Bank** was taken at the **Tianjin summit in September 2025** and remains **under consultation**. An **SCO Investment Fund** is a **proposal**. Neither is **established**, and **neither is operational**. Beijing pressed for the bank for more than a decade against Russian reluctance.*

Membership. Ten full members: the founding six of **China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan** from June 2001, then **India and Pakistan in 2017, Iran in 2023 and Belarus in 2024**, the most recent admission.

India's standing dissent. India is the **only member that refuses to endorse China's Belt and Road Initiative**, because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor runs through Indian territory. India's formulation is that connectivity "must uphold the principles of **sovereignty** and territorial integrity." Every other member has reaffirmed support. This dissent recurs in successive summit declarations and is directly examinable.

THE CHAIR PASSES TO PAKISTAN

After Bishkek, the **chairmanship of the SCO Council of Heads of State passes to Pakistan**, which hosts the **2027 leaders' summit**. Whether the Prime Minister would travel to Islamabad is an open question that India has not answered; the MEA's public line is that "India deals with SCO as an entity, as an important organisation."

The sequencing is worth holding in mind. **Bishkek precedes the Delhi BRICS Summit by under a fortnight**, and what India secures at the first shapes what it can attempt at the second.

THE LARGER PROBLEM: A CENTRAL ASIA POLICY THAT HAS STALLED

Beyond the summit, the visit is an attempt to repair a relationship that has drifted.

The India-Central Asia Summit has not met since 2022. Officials hope a date will be fixed during this visit. The delay has fed a perception in the region that Delhi lost interest, measured against **2015, when the Prime Minister visited all five Central Asian states** in a single tour and, in a speech at Nazarbayev University in the Kazakh capital, promised to rebuild connectivity to the region.

The numbers explain the anxiety.

MEASURE	FIGURE
India's goods trade with Central Asia, 2010	About \$500 million
India's goods trade with Central Asia, 2025	More than \$2 billion
China's trade with Central Asia, 2025	\$106 billion

Growth of four times in fifteen years, against a competitor operating at fifty times the volume.

Every land route India planned is currently closed

This is the sharpest way to hold the problem, and it is a strong Mains paragraph.

Through Pakistan: foreclosed since the rupture in ties from 2016, which ended road connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia and the **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline**.

Through Chabahar: as background from the spring, the **United States sanctions waiver expired on April 26, 2026**, and the **Union Budget for 2026-27 allocated nothing to Chabahar**, against **₹400 crore the previous year**. That budget line is the clearest official signal of the project's status.

Through the INSTC: the **International North-South Transport Corridor**, a **7,200 km multimodal** route to Russia and Central Asia via Iran and the Caspian, has been imperilled by the war.

The result is that India's soft power in trade, education and information technology has to carry a relationship that has no reliable physical route.

THE IRAN QUESTION, AND THE STRAIT

The summit is also the **first occasion for the Prime Minister to meet Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian since the war began**, with India's concerns over the **Strait of Hormuz** on the agenda.

*Fighting began in **late February 2026**. Iran closed the **Strait of Hormuz**; the United States began an aerial campaign on **March 19, 2026** and imposed a **naval blockade from April 13, 2026**. A **ceasefire** agreed in April, mediated by Pakistan, and a memorandum in June both collapsed in July, and the blockade was reimposed. In late August, **Iran and Oman have been negotiating a temporary shipping corridor and mine clearance**, with Qatar also mediating. **The war is ongoing.***

The scale of the disruption. Roughly **130 ships transited Hormuz daily before the war**. Over nineteen days in **August 2026**, **236 ships passed in total**. About **20 per cent of world petroleum** moved through the Strait before the conflict.

India also wants Iran to take a more flexible position at the Delhi BRICS Summit, where **tensions between Iran and the UAE have held up consensus on a joint statement**.

A CONTEST INDIA COULD LOSE

One item in this visit has nothing to do with Central Asia and everything to do with New York.

India and Tajikistan are both candidates for the Asian group's non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, in an election due in **June 2027** for the **2028-29 term**. India's preferred outcome is that Tajikistan defer its candidature, which is why meetings with **President Emomali**

Rahmon and other Central Asian leaders carry weight beyond protocol.

Recent General Assembly votes justify the caution. Germany lost out to Portugal and Austria. The Philippines lost to the Kyrgyz Republic. For President of the General Assembly, **Bangladesh's Khalilur Rahman** defeated a Cypriot rival in a tight race even though the United States, European states and India were understood to favour Cyprus. **A larger diplomatic footprint has repeatedly failed to convert into votes.**

THE TASHKENT LEG

This is the Prime Minister's **fourth visit to Uzbekistan**, after 2015, 2016 and 2022. Posting on X after landing, he described the welcome as reflecting "the depth and growing momentum of our bilateral relations."

What has already taken place. The Prime Minister visited **Yangi Uzbekiston Park** and laid a wreath at the **Independence Monument**, accompanied by President Mirziyoyev. The monument was raised to mark the **30th anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence**.

What is scheduled but not yet done. Delegation-level talks covering trade and investment, defence, digital connectivity, energy and education, framed around the pairing of India's **Viksit Bharat** with Uzbekistan's **Yangi Uzbekiston**, or New Uzbekistan. Uzbek officials have said the visit is expected to conclude with a package of agreements. **No signed outcome is on record as this edition goes out.**

Two further engagements are examinable. The Prime Minister is to visit the **Shastri Memorial** and the **Mahatma Gandhi Centre at Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies**. Prime Minister **Lal Bahadur Shastri** died at Tashkent on **January 11, 1966**, the day after signing the **Tashkent Declaration** with Pakistan's President Ayub Khan, which ended the **India-Pakistan war of 1965**. It was mediated by Soviet Premier **Alexei Kosygin**.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Prime Minister is **expected to attend the opening ceremony of the 6th World Nomad Games**, described as a celebration of Central Asia's living heritage.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. The SCO is a standing topic and this cycle supplies unusually clean material: the chair rotating to Pakistan, India's lone dissent on the BRI, and a financial architecture agreed in principle but not built.

GS Paper 2: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests. The closure of every land route to Central Asia, each for a different external reason, is a compact case study in how third-party decisions constrain Indian connectivity policy.

Mains framing worth rehearsing. India's Central Asia problem is not diplomatic attention but **physical access**. Summits can be scheduled; corridors cannot be improvised.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

The 26th SCO Summit is at Bishkek on August 31 and September 1, 2026, hosted by Kyrgyz President Sadyr Zhaparov.

The SCO was founded in June 2001, so the 2026 Bishkek summit is its 25th anniversary meeting.

The SCO's two permanent bodies are the Secretariat at Beijing and the RATS Executive Committee at Tashkent.

RATS was created by an agreement at St Petersburg on June 7, 2002 and became operational in 2004.

The SCO has 10 full members; Iran joined in 2023 and Belarus in 2024, the most recent admission.

India and Pakistan joined the SCO together in 2017 at the Astana summit.

India is the only SCO member that does not endorse the Belt and Road Initiative, citing CPEC's route through Indian territory.

The SCO Development Bank was agreed in principle at Tianjin in September 2025 and is still under consultation.

Pakistan takes the SCO chairmanship after Bishkek and hosts the 2027 leaders' summit.

India holds its fourth BRICS Chairship in 2026; the 18th Summit is at Bharat Mandapam on September 12 and 13.

Xi Jinping last visited India in October 2019 for the Mamallapuram informal summit, which issued no joint statement.

The INSTC is a 7,200 km multimodal corridor linking India to Russia and Central Asia through Iran and the Caspian.

The US sanctions waiver for Chabahar expired on April 26, 2026; the Union Budget 2026-27 allocated nothing to the port.

India's trade with Central Asia rose from about \$500 million in 2010 to over \$2 billion in 2025; China's was \$106 billion.

The India-Central Asia Summit has not met since 2022; India seeks a date during this visit.

India and Tajikistan both seek the Asian group's UN Security Council non-permanent seat for 2028-29, voted in June 2027.

Lal Bahadur Shastri died at Tashkent on January 11, 1966, a day after signing the Tashkent Declaration.

Source: Bishkek Before Delhi: What India Wants From the SCO Summit, and What Has Actually Been Confirmed
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