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Belgrade at 65: India Returns to the Birthplace of Non-Alignment, at Minister Level

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Belgrade at 65: India Returns to the Birthplace of Non-Alignment, at Minister Level

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

*India will take part in a **High-Level Commemorative Meeting at Belgrade, Serbia on August 31 and September 1, 2026**, marking **65 years since the first Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement** was held in that city. The Indian delegation will be led by **Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju**. The theme is “**The Legacy of Non-Alignment: Lessons for Today’s World**”.*

*The Belgrade meeting runs on **exactly the same two days** as the **26th SCO Summit at Bishkek**, which the **Prime Minister** attends. India will therefore be present at two multilateral gatherings simultaneously, built on **opposite theories of how a state should position itself among great powers**. The seniority of the two delegations is itself the answer to which one India now considers load-bearing.*

WHAT IS BEING COMMEMORATED

The **Non-Aligned Movement** was formally founded at **Belgrade**, then the capital of **Yugoslavia**, when the **first Conference of Heads of State or Government** opened on **September 1, 1961** and ran to September 6. **Twenty-five countries** attended.

The founding trio was **Jawaharlal Nehru of India**, **Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia** and **Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt**, alongside leaders including **Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana** and **Sukarno of Indonesia**.

Its immediate ancestor was the **Bandung Conference of 1955** in Indonesia, where newly independent Asian and African states first set out to chart a course independent of either Cold War bloc.

The founding agenda was **sovereignty, anti-colonialism, peaceful coexistence, disarmament and economic development**.

THEN AND NOW	FIGURE
Countries at the first Belgrade summit, 1961	25
Member countries today	121
Years elapsed	65

At 121 members, NAM remains the **largest grouping of states outside the United Nations itself**. That fact is often forgotten because its influence has not scaled with its size.

WHY SERBIA KEEPS THE FLAME

Serbia has deliberately revived the movement's founding city as a diplomatic asset. Its government **designated September 1 as Non-Aligned Day** in 2025, and describes these gatherings as an opportunity to recall the "historic contribution" of NAM's founding countries. Belgrade also hosted the **60th anniversary commemorative meeting in 2021**.

For a state outside both the European Union and NATO, the inheritance of non-alignment is a usable identity rather than a museum piece.

INDIA'S AMBIVALENCE, STATED PLAINLY

This is the honest part of the story, and an aspirant should not write around it.

India is a **founding member** and its official position is continued commitment to the movement's principles. Its **attendance record tells a more complicated story**.

OCCASION	INDIA'S REPRESENTATION
2016 summit (Venezuela)	Vice President
2019 summit (Azerbaijan)	Vice President
2020 Contact Group summit (virtual, COVID-19)	Prime Minister , his first NAM meeting since 2014
2026 Belgrade commemorative meeting	Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs

The pattern is a movement India will not leave and will not lead.

The intellectual argument behind the drift

The case that non-alignment is obsolete. The movement was defined against a bipolar world. With one of those poles gone since 1991, "non-alignment" describes an absence rather than a policy. India's own vocabulary shifted years ago to **strategic autonomy** and then to **multi-alignment**, which means

participating in many overlapping groupings, including some that contain rivals, rather than abstaining from all of them.

The case that it still matters. With 121 members, NAM is a standing majority in the UN General Assembly on questions of sovereignty, development finance, technology transfer and climate equity. For a state seeking a **permanent seat on the Security Council** and a **non-permanent seat for 2028-29**, a bloc of 121 votes is not a sentimental attachment. It is arithmetic.

*India did not abandon non-alignment; it **inverted** it. Non-alignment meant joining nothing. **Multi-alignment** means joining everything. Both are answers to the same underlying question of how a large developing state preserves freedom of action, and this week India is practising both at once, in two cities, on the same two days.*

READING BISHKEK AND BELGRADE TOGETHER

Set the two meetings side by side and the contrast is a ready-made answer structure.

	BISHKEK, SCO	BELGRADE, NAM
Founded	2001	1961
Members	10	121
Organising idea	Regional security and connectivity among neighbours, including rivals	Autonomy from great-power blocs
Contains India's rivals?	Yes , China and Pakistan are members	No comparable adversarial dynamic
India's representation	Prime Minister	Union Minister

What this reveals. India now invests its highest-level diplomatic attention in groupings where its rivals are also present, because those are the venues where outcomes are contested. The movement built on staying out of other people's quarrels receives ministerial attention. **Influence has migrated to the rooms where the arguments happen.**

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. NAM is a recurring Prelims and Mains subject, and the 65th anniversary is a natural peg for a question on its contemporary relevance.

GS Paper 1: The Freedom Struggle and post-independence consolidation. Nehru's role in founding NAM, and its descent from Bandung 1955, sits in the post-independence foreign policy segment.

A Mains question you should be able to answer in five sentences. "Non-alignment has been replaced by multi-alignment in India's foreign policy. Discuss." Structure it as: the original logic, what changed in 1991, what strategic autonomy retained, what multi-alignment added, and what India still draws from NAM, namely General Assembly numbers.

Prelims focus. Founding year and city, the founding leaders, the Bandung Conference, current membership, and the fact that NAM has **no permanent secretariat**, with the chair rotating between summit hosts.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

A High-Level Commemorative Meeting marking 65 years of NAM is at Belgrade on August 31 and September 1, 2026.

Its theme is "The Legacy of Non-Alignment: Lessons for Today's World"; Kiren Rijiju leads the Indian delegation.

NAM was founded at Belgrade, then in Yugoslavia, at the first summit that opened on September 1, 1961.

Twenty-five countries attended the first Belgrade summit; NAM today has 121 member countries.

NAM's founding leaders were Nehru of India, Tito of Yugoslavia and Nasser of Egypt.

Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sukarno of Indonesia were also among the founding leaders at Belgrade.

The Bandung Conference of 1955 in Indonesia was the immediate forerunner of the Non-Aligned Movement.

NAM's founding principles were sovereignty, anti-colonialism, peaceful coexistence, disarmament and development.

Serbia designated September 1 as Non-Aligned Day in 2025 and hosted the 60th anniversary meeting in 2021.

NAM has no permanent secretariat; the chairmanship rotates to the country hosting each summit.

India was represented by its Vice President at the 2016 and 2019 NAM summits.

Prime Minister Modi attended a virtual NAM Contact Group summit in 2020, his first NAM meeting since 2014.

At 121 members, NAM is the largest grouping of states outside the United Nations.

Source: Belgrade at 65: India Returns to the Birthplace of Non-Alignment, at Minister Level — Ujiyari.com | Free

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