

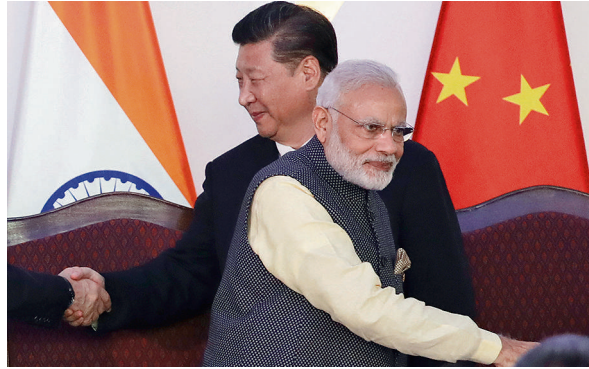
Modi to attend BRICS, SCO, Quad meets in Sept.

Afghan situation likely to dominate agenda amid growing polarisation between the Russia-China bloc, and U.S. and its allies

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair a meeting of BRICS leaders including Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and leaders of Brazil and South Africa on Thursday, the first in a series of summit-level meetings he is expected to attend in September that will be dominated by discussions on the situation in Afghanistan. The meeting will be held in virtual format due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The PM will also attend via video conference the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of Government meeting being held in Dushanbe on September 16 and 17, but is expected to tra-



Forging ties: Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping are expected to appear virtually at the SCO conference. ■ FILE PHOTO

vel later this month to the U.S., to meet U.S. President Joseph Biden and address the UN General Assembly, officials confirmed.

The meetings will see Mr. Modi straddle both sides of views on the future of Af-

ghanistan, given the growing polarisation between the Russia-China bloc, and the U.S. and its allies on engaging the new Taliban regime.

The BRICS leaders summit on September 9 is expected to focus on four

priority areas including the multilateral reforms in bodies such as the UN, the IMF and the WTO, counter-terrorism, technology and people-to-people exchanges, a statement issued by the External Affairs Ministry on Monday said.

“The leaders will also exchange views on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other current global and regional issues,” which is expected to include Afghanistan, where Russia and China have played an important role in talks with the Taliban.

Meanwhile, Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla returned to India after meetings in Washington to firm up Prime Minister Modi’s visit to the U.S., due to begin on September 23.

The PM’s visit, only his second visit abroad during the coronavirus pandemic, is expected to include meetings in Washington with Mr. Biden, a possible Quad summit on September 23 and 24, and his address to the UN General Assembly on September 25.

Details being finalised

MEA officials said the details of the meetings are still being “finalised”, in view of the uncertainty of Japan’s participation after Premier Yoshihide Suga announced he would resign at the end of the month.

While Indo-Pacific security, and Quad cooperation on climate change, critical technologies and vaccines will be at the top of the agenda at

the Summit, the situation in Afghanistan after the U.S. pullout is likely to be discussed as well.

The SCO meeting next Thursday in Tajikistan will see a much greater focus on Afghanistan, given that it comprises regional countries Russia, China, Central Asian nations and Pakistan, and will include a special SCO Contact group meeting.

Mr. Putin, Pakistan PM Imran Khan and other leaders will attend the summit in Dushanbe in person, and Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi are expected to appear virtually at the “hybrid” conference.

India would be represented on the ground in Dushanbe by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, said officials.