Nepal keen to reset India ties: Minister

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

A month after the devastating Bhotekoshi floods, Nepal Prime Minister Balen Shah will make his first foreign visit since assuming office in March, travelling to New York next week to address the UN General Assembly and discuss the country's recovery plans, Nepal Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle has said.

He also confirmed that Mr. Shah's first bilateral visit would be to India later this year, and that the new government was keen to "reset" ties and move away from "jingoism" over sovereignty issues and the border dispute that has led to tensions in the past.

"The old era of jingoism and equating Nepali nationalism with anti-Indianism is over," Mr. Wagle said in an interview to *The Hindu* at the end of a three-day visit here on Saturday.

Mr. Wagle, an economist who has worked in

Swarnim Wagle

Nepal's planning commission and the UNDP, said his talks with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar centred on the flood recovery plan, with Nepal also seeking to revise the 2009 Trade Treaty with India.

He also stressed the need for India to allow overflight permissions for international flights to Nepal's underutilised airports at Pokhara and Bhairahawa, which New Delhi has denied for the past decade citing security concerns.

INTERVIEW ON
» PAGE 10

SHAURYA GSB TPO (8368[illegible]529)

Japan Air Force chief flies in Tejas jet, hails progress in defence partnership

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, Chief of the Air Staff, said on Sunday that the Tejas sortie flown by Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) Chief of Staff General Takehiro Morita was a "very clear example" of the "faith and trust" on the "homegrown aircraft".

"The defence aviation industry and R&D are now set to hit much higher heights," he said.

Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh and JASDF Chief of Staff General Takehiro Morita board Tejas jets in Jodhpur on Sunday. PTI

The chiefs of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the JASDF flew together in a Tejas formation in Jodhpur, underscoring the growing operational cooperation between the two air forces amid the expanding India-Japan defence partnership.

According to the IAF, Air Chief Marshal Singh led the formation in a fighter aircraft, while General Morita flew in a trainer aircraft with Group Captain I. Samrat, Commanding Officer of the Tejas squadron, as the Captain.

Air Chief Marshal Singh said the India-Japan air partnership was based on "mutual respect, professional trust, and shared commitment to peace and stability". He described the synergy between the two air forces as *kizuna*, the Japanese word for enduring bonds forged through trust and support.

General Morita described his Tejas sortie as a "powerful symbol of trust, confidence, and friendship" and said the bilateral engagement had moved beyond exercises aimed merely at refining tactical capabilities. He said increasingly sophisticated training was strengthening the two air forces to contribute to regional peace and stability and pointed to cooperation across exercises, leadership interactions, subject-matter exchanges, and potentially the space domain.

The sortie was part of the second edition of the bilateral air exercise Veer Guardian 2026, which is being held at Air Force Station, Jodhpur, from September 9 to 22. It provided General Morita the opportunity to experience the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft Tejas and its systems.

The IAF is participating in the exercise with Tejas, Su-30MKI and Rafale fighters, while the JASDF has brought F-2A fighters. For the first time, JASDF fighter aircraft have operated from Indian soil.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104520)

Northeast's largest power project initiated in Assam

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday laid the foundation stone for the Adani Group's 3,200 megawatt Ultra-Supercritical Thermal Power Plant at Chapar in Dhubri district of Assam.

"Assam is fast emerging as the region's energy hub, with several mega energy projects in the pipeline. The 3,200 MW Chapar project is a proud outcome of the confidence generated by the Advantage Assam Investor Summit 2.0," the Chief Minister said.

The ₹48,000-crore project, handled by Adani Power Limited, will be the largest power plant in the northeastern region.

"This project will be one of the largest single investments ever made in Assam. Besides providing massive employment opportunities, the State will also benefit through increased economic activity and SGST (State Goods and Services Tax) revenues, and local industries and enterprises will have opportunities to participate in the emerging ecosystem," he said.

Several families, mostly migrant Muslims, were evicted for the project.

Jeet Adani, Adani Group director, said the Chapar plant is part of a ₹63,000-crore power investment in Assam, with commissioning in phases from December 2030. The other projects include two pumped storage plants with a combined capacity of 2,700 MW.

"The project will also create jobs and open up opportunities for local contractors, suppliers and businesses," he added.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during the launch of the thermal power plant at Chapar in Dhubri district. X/@HIMANTABISWA

SAURYA SSB TR... 3[illegible]04529)

Serious escalation

The new U.S. law on Russian oil imports carries more legal weight

The U.S. Russia Sanctions Act, now signed into law by President Donald Trump, and its resultant impending tariffs, present a new and substantially different escalation of tensions between the U.S. and India. The law provides the U.S. President the authority to levy tariffs of up to 100% on countries such as India that import large quantities of Russian oil and gas. This is more serious than the penal tariffs that Mr. Trump had levied earlier. The escalation last year of reciprocal tariffs to 50% on India's import of Russian oil was based on an Executive Order, and could be rescinded through the same method. This latest Act has been passed by the U.S. Congress and so carries a higher order of legal permanence and authority. Mr. Trump will have to justify in writing to Congress any waiver he wants to provide. The 50% tariffs hit Indian exports to the U.S. hard, but the impact was somewhat mitigated by exporters sharing the cost with their American customers. That was, however, a financially devastating and unsustainable bid to retain customers. Sharing a 100% tariff will be impossible for India's largely micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) exporters. The 100% tariffs are also over and above the 10% 'forced labour' tariffs and the 50% Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminium. Indian exports to the U.S. will simply become too uncompetitive should these new tariffs come to pass. India has three options before it: cut Russian oil imports, retain those imports and bear the tariffs, or convince the U.S. to implement a low tariff using the "up to 100%" phrasing of the law.

Continuing with Russian oil imports and bearing the tariffs would be a significant blow to India's export ambitions and MSMEs. The U.S. is India's largest export destination, accounting for about 20% of its total goods exports. In any case, historical data have shown that India has usually complied with U.S. pressure to cut oil imports from particular countries, including from Russia, vocal claims of strategic autonomy aside. Finding other sources will be difficult. Russia accounted for more than 51% of India's oil imports as of July 2026, while supplies through the Strait of Hormuz remain constrained. India will have to chivvy countries such as Oman to hasten their expansion of alternative ports. The price of oil remains well above $100 a barrel, meaning finding favourable deals with new suppliers will be increasingly difficult. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal will have much to do during his planned trip to the U.S. at the end of this month for the G-20 Trade Ministerial. There are still 30 days before the U.S. can levy its tariffs. India's ability to secure a low rate will be a true test of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's friendship with Mr. Trump.

Russia, West Asia energy sites hit, India has a new problem: Sulphur

Prices up three times in one year, affecting availability of major complex fertilisers

Harish Damodaran
New Delhi, September 20

INDIA HAS staved off a potential food crisis by importing enough urea and liquefied natural gas to enable domestic production of high-nitrogen fertiliser.

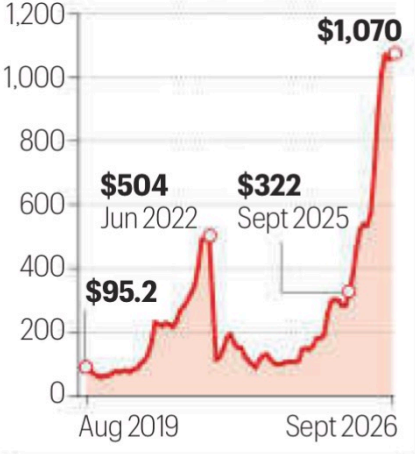
But there is another critical commodity, sulphur, whose soaring prices — again, linked to the escalating West Asia and Russia-Ukraine conflicts — is impacting the availability of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), single super phosphate (SSP) and other major complex fertilisers.

Since the start of this year, landed (cost plus ocean freight) prices of sulphur imported into India have doubled to $1,050-1,100 per tonne. The main reason: Ukrainian long-range drone and missile attacks on Russian oil refineries and gas complexes and Iran, likewise, targeting the energy infrastructure of Saudi Aramco, QatarEnergy and

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Average import price of sulphur

($ per tonne, cost & freight to India)



SANJAY KASHYAP TPG (8368104523)

Sulphur

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

Only a tenth of the world's sulphur output is directly mined. The rest comes as a by-product of petroleum oil refining (56%) and natural gas processing (34%). Environmental rules mandate desulphurisation – removal of sulphur from crude oil and raw gas — for the production of clean, low-emission fuels.

This recovered sulphur is, however, essential for agriculture. The fertiliser sector alone accounts for roughly 60% of the 70 million tonnes (mt) annual global sulphur consumption. Most of the world's sulphur gets converted into sulphuric acid that is, in turn, a core chemical for manufacturing all fertilisers containing phosphorous (P).

"The primary source of P is rock phosphate. But this mined ore cannot be used as fertiliser unless broken down into a water-soluble form (for plants to absorb) by reacting with sulphuric acid. Without sulphur and sulphuric acid, there can be no DAP, SSP or popular complex fertilisers such as 20:20:0:13, 10:26:26 and 12:32:16," explained an industry official.

India's own yearly sulphur consumption is 3.8-3.9 mt, with the fertiliser industry's share at 2-2.1 mt. As a byproduct of the oil and gas industry, sulphur was previously imported at prices well below $200 per tonne — even sub-$100 in many months of 2019 and 2020. Being a flammable material, sulphur cannot be stored for too long.

done to the oil and gas infrastructure of its Persian Gulf neighbours what Ukraine has to that of Russia.

"Today, we have a crisis, with import prices of sulphur and sulphuric acid at about $1,070 and at $330-350 per tonne respectively. They even hit $1,150 and $420 two months back," the fertiliser industry official said.

The EV batteries link

The global supply squeeze from geopolitical tensions — Russia has banned exports of sulphur and sulphuric acid to safeguard its own fertiliser production, while China has done the same with the latter — isn't the only reason for the spike in prices.

The last few years have also witnessed a surge in sulphuric acid demand for extracting nickel from laterite ores and processing it into mixed hydroxide precipitate (MHP), a material used for electric vehicle batteries. Nickel-related demand for sulphuric acid has shot up from 3.5 mt in 2021 to 16 mt in 2025, much of it from Indonesia, which has the world's largest nickel reserves and so-called high-pressure acid leaching plants to turn the ore into MHP.

"Both demand (Indonesia) and supply (wars) side factors are working against us," the industry official added. Indian fertiliser companies source sulphur from domestic oil refineries and sulphuric acid from the smelting complexes of Hindustan Zinc Ltd and Birla Copper in Rajasthan and Gujarat. But the bulk of their requirements is imported.

The likes of Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (Iffco), Co-

"There are storage and disposal challenges also in sulphuric acid, which is a byproduct of copper and zinc smelting. In 2020, we were importing it from non-ferrous metal smelters in Japan and South Korea at even minus $20 per tonne (free-on-board price at the port of origin)," the official said.

That changed with the Russia-Ukraine war. Import prices of sulphur rose to $400-500 per tonne during March-June 2022. It was temporary though, as prices reverted to the earlier sub-$200 levels from late-2022 through early 2025.

The real problems started with a substantial increase in Ukraine's targeted strikes on Russian oil refineries from around August 2025. By December, landed prices had crossed $500 per tonne and have only gone higher post the US-Iran war (*see chart*). Iran has

romandel International and Paradeep Phosphates Ltd have integrated fertiliser manufacturing facilities that import sulphur and rock phosphate. Sulphur is converted into sulphuric acid, which is reacted with rock phosphate to produce SSP or phosphoric acid. Phosphoric acid is further used for making DAP and other high P-containing complex fertilisers.

India has a domestic phosphoric acid manufacturing capacity of around 2.2 mt, meeting half of its requirement of 4.3-4.5 mt for supporting 15-16 mt production of phosphatic fertilisers.

"Iffco, Coromandel and Paradeep Phosphates have secured their supplies of rock phosphate through joint ventures or strategic tie-ups in Jordan, Senegal and Morocco. But rock phosphate cannot be used for making fertiliser without sulphur," the official noted.

SHAURYA SBS TRG (8366104529)

Jaishankar to attend UNGA, may raise Russia sanctions Bill with US

Divya A
New Delhi, September 20

DAYS AFTER President Donald Trump signed the Russia sanctions Bill — allowing the United States to impose penalties on Russia's energy trading partners, including India — External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is set to travel to the US, offering a window for the two sides to have a discussion on the issue.

Jaishankar is visiting New York for the High Level Week of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly next week, and will also hold several bilateral meetings on the sidelines.

Announcing his visit on Sunday, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement: "EAM's address at the High Level Session of the 81st United Nations General Assembly is scheduled for September 26. During the visit, EAM will also attend various plurilateral and bilateral meetings."

After the US House of Representatives passed the Bill on Wednesday, New Delhi said it "remains firmly committed to ensuring energy security for its 1.4 billion people" and warned of "potential implications" for "the bilateral relationship" with the US.

The MEA underlined that "this issue has been discussed at high levels in recent months with various US interlocutors". The US move comes at a time when Delhi and Washington are trying to firm up a bilateral trade deal after months of negotiations. New Delhi has also conveyed to Washington, in the past weeks and months, the adverse impact of such a punishing move on the bilateral relationship.

EAM S Jaishankar is scheduled to address the General Debate in the afternoon session on September 26. @DRSJAISHANKAR

President Trump is also attending the UNGA Session. He will address world leaders from the UNGA podium on September 22, his second address to the UN session in his second term in the White House. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is also expected to be present for the event.

Jaishankar is scheduled to address the General Debate in the afternoon session on September 26, according to a revised provisional list of speakers for the high-level session.

The year-long 81st session of the UN General Assembly will be presided over by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, who was elected in June to head the 193-member UN organisation.

The session this year comes amid continuing geopolitical conflicts across the world, including the US-Iran war that has had a cascading impact on the Global South, owing to rising food and fuel costs in the wake of the continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz.

The heads of government of Bangladesh and Nepal will address the General Debate on September 24.

Six high-tech Army labs to weed out foreign bugs from drones, cameras

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, September 20

THE INDIAN Army will soon be operating six AASHVAST labs across the country, where all its drones—and eventually CCTV cameras too—will undergo mandatory inspections to identify and eliminate firmware-level vulnerabilities. This will ensure that these do not fail during operations in contested zones and can perform their tasks effectively.

AASHVAST stands for Assessment and Analysis of Electronic Systems Hardware for

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

E. EXPLAINED

Chinese parts cause for concern

This mechanism is significant in light of the Army's large-scale drone procurement initiative through the emergency route. The use of Chinese components in military drones has been a cause of concern for India, especially since many of these drones are used in operations along the eastern borders.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104539)

Army labs

Vulnerabilities and Security Threats. Currently, one lab has been inaugurated in Delhi, with plans to establish at least five more in the coming months.

AASHVAST, a Firmware Analysis and Validation Suite, developed by QuickPay Pvt Ltd for the Directorate General of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering (DG EME), is designed to do more than just physically inspect drones. It also examines the software that operates these unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – to identify and eliminate firmware-level vulnerabilities.

The Army has published a Request for Proposal in April this year to procure customised licensed software for validation of firmware and embedded systems for electronic components, including UAV components.

On August 14, the Indian Army's Additional Directorate General of Public Information had posted on X: "Equipped with advanced capabilities AASHVAST will enable evaluation of critical defence platforms thereby increasing cyber resilience. Aligned with the national vision of #AtmanirbharBharat, the facility will strengthen operational readiness as well as promote growth of the domestic defence ecosystem."

While the lab will initially test all drones, sources said that CCTV cameras procured by the Army in future will also eventually be inspected by it for Chinese proprietary protocols or equivalent, which could be potentially embedded in these.

The idea behind establishing these labs, a first of its kind, was to neutralise the common threats of enemy interference in Indian drones, preventing them from performing their designated tasks in a contested area, Rajib Roy, Director of QuickPay Pvt Ltd, told The Indian Express.

So far, drones procured by the Indian Army did not have firmware-level vulnerabilities checked. The suite will close this critical gap.

Firmware vulnerabilities can be introduced during the manufacturing stage of a component or an upgrade process. For instance, unused codes could be introduced, hidden commands could be invoked at a certain location – thereby preventing the drone from performing its task.

There are approximately 14 types of vulnerabilities that the labs can detect. These include geospatial vulnerabilities, such as a malfunction that occurs when flying over a certain location, or issues that prevent a drone from reaching its preset destination. Other vulnerabilities involve unused and hidden codes that could cause a drone to terminate before reaching its target. Additionally, there are time and location bugs that may cause a drone to operate normally except at specific times or locations.

The use of Chinese components in military drones has been a cause for concern for India, especially since many of these drones are used in operations along the eastern borders. Considering significant national security risks and possible data vulnerabilities, India has previously prohibited domestic military drone manufacturers from using parts made in China. In 2025, the Army Design Bureau submitted a detailed framework to the Ministry of Defence aimed at eliminating Chinese-origin components from UAVs.

People involved with the project said that AASHVAST labs will also examine drones for Chinese and/or other foreign-origin active components, as well as hidden passwords, embedded keys, remote access tools and location-based security controls.

"This will help prevent situations where active components sourced from China are misrepresented as 'made in India' or another country, based solely on the invoice indicating their point of purchase," a person involved with setting up the lab said.

"There is no mechanism to determine what is embedded within the silicon. What is visible is merely the invoice, which shows (from) where the part was purchased. But that does not necessarily indicate its true origin," the person said.

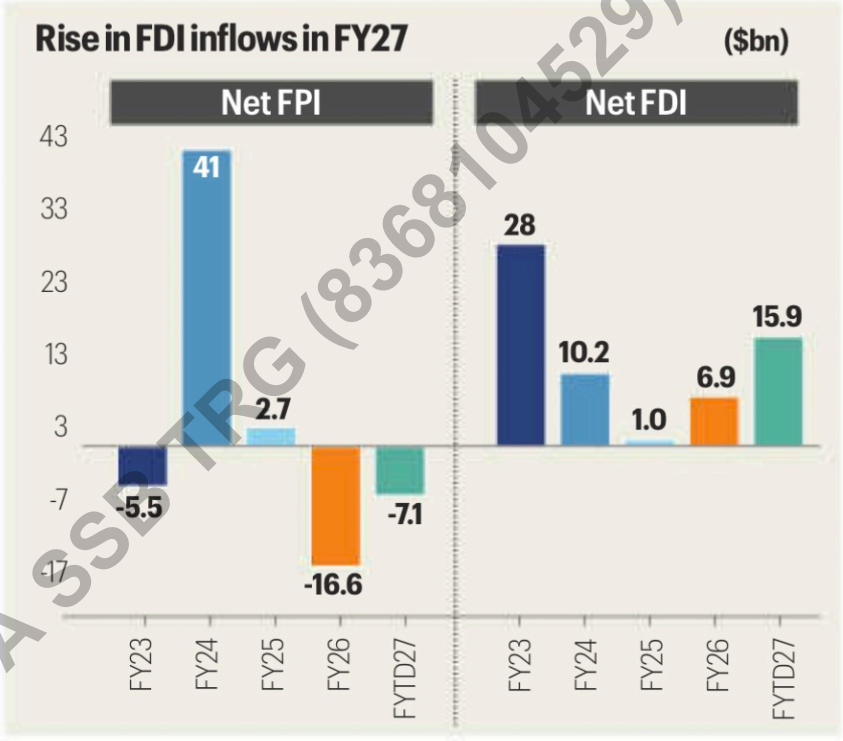
SHAURYA ASSR TRG (9568104139)

• India's external situation improving even beyond FCNR(B)

$127 billion+

of inflows through FCNR(B) deposits have improved India's external buffers, the situation has also improved due to other factors.

- According to Gaura Sen Gupta, Chief Economist at IDFC FIRST Bank, net FDI in the year as a whole could be more than $20 billion. This would be two-and-a-half times the net inflow of $7.9 billion in 2024-25 and 2025-26 put together.
- "If this sustains, then the reliance on other highly volatile capital inflows such as FPI to fund the current account deficit will be lower," Sen Gupta said.



Net FDI inflows in the first four months

2025-26	$9.3 billion
2026-27	$15.9 billion

Gross FDI inflows, which hit a new record of **$95 billion** in 2025-26, are up 15% so far this year.

SOURCE: CEIC, IDFC FIRST BANK ECONOMICS RESEARCH

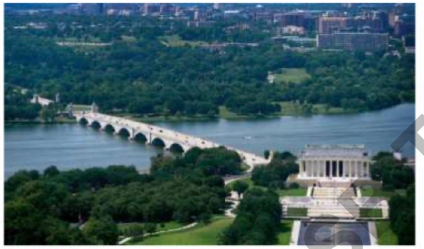
SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104529)

Trump floats plan to convert proposed Washington arch into military complex

Reuters
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday the triumphal arch he plans to build near Arlington National Cemetery in Washington would double as a "military complex" housing drones and snipers, as well as storing large quantities of ammunition.

The President cited national security concerns for the move, echoing the rationale offered for the roughly $400 million ballroom complex being built on the site of the White House's former East Wing.



Ground zero: Memorial Circle, the proposed site for Donald Trump's 'Triumphal Arch', seen from the Washington Monument. AP

In a social media post, Mr. Trump said that at the "strong request" of the military he had agreed to turn the 76-metre arch "into a top grade Military Complex/Triumphal Arch, to house, store, and have the rapid ability to use large numbers of drones, plus Snipers, on both the roof and plaza areas, and additionally have and hold large quantities of sniper ammunition in storage."

The projects are part of Mr. Trump's ambitious effort to reshape Washington.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan earlier this month ordered the Trump administration to give 48 hours' notice before engaging in any activity on the site of the triumphal arch.

Aviation experts have raised safety concerns given its proximity to Reagan Washington National Airport.

North Korea launched two ballistic missiles into East Sea: Seoul

Agence France-Presse
SEOUL

North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea off its eastern coast on Sunday, South Korea's military said.

South Korea's military said the first missile was launched from the Wonsan area and flew around 450 kilometres into the East Sea, a body of water also called the Sea of Japan.

The second missile "flew more than 600 kilometres, and South Korean and U.S. authorities are conducting a detailed analysis to determine its exact specifications," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

Japan lodged a "stern protest" with North Korea over the launches, condemning them as a threat to regional peace and security, the Kyodo news agency cited the government as saying.

The launches came days after Pyongyang reasserted its status as a nuclear-armed state and rejected a UN resolution demanding it halt its nuclear activities.

Ukraine fires over 1,000 drones at Russia as polls come to a close

Two people killed as Ukraine launches largest attack on Russia's capital Moscow on last day of parliamentary elections; Russia's Defence Ministry vows to intensify attacks in response; Zelenskyy praises 'significant impact' of long-range strikes

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

Ukraine fired waves of drones at Moscow and the surrounding region early on Sunday, killing two people and setting an oil refinery ablaze as Russians voted in a final day of parliamentary elections, officials said.

The attack was the largest on Moscow since the Kremlin launched its Ukraine offensive in 2022 and involved some 1,600 drones, 450 of which were aimed directly at the capital, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said.

The strikes came on the third and final day of parliamentary elections that are widely expected to result in another win for the ruling United Russia party which backs President Vladimir Putin.

Capital strike: Smoke rises at an oil refinery following Ukrainian drone strikes in Moscow on Sunday. REUTERS

Moscow vowed to intensify its strikes on Kyiv in response to the attacks.

"In response to the Kyiv regime's attacks on civilian targets within Russia, the Russian Army will continue and intensify its high-accuracy strikes against military targets in Kyiv," Russia's Defence Ministry said.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy praised the strikes, saying: "Our long-range responses had a very significant impact"

"One of Russia's key oil industry facilities and the aggressor's logistics facility were hit. These are billions of dollars that sustain the war machine," he said.

At least two people – a 44-year-old woman and an elderly man – were killed in two separate locations in the attacks, Moscow regional Governor Andrey Vorobyov said.

A fire triggered by a drone crashing into a 21-storey building also led to 400 people being evacuated, Mr. Vorobyov said.

Meanwhile, Russia's electoral chief said there had been a wave of cyber-attacks targeting election infrastructure.

Four killed in Kyiv

A Russian strike in Ukraine's Kyiv region killed at least four people, three of them children, the Ukrainian authorities said on Sunday.

The attack late on Saturday also damaged 31 sites, including apartment buildings, according to the regional Governor.

SHUBHYA SB TRG (8368104519)