

INDIA-SWEDEN STRATEGIC COMPASS

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SPECIAL FEATURE

India-EFTA Sign US\$100 bn Free Trade Deal

India has recently finalized a significant Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), comprising Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. The EFTA is an inter-governmental organization set up in 1960 for the promotion of free trade and economic integration between its member states (which at the time included seven states, namely Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom as founding members). The EFTA has about 30 trade agreements with some 40 countries and territories outside the European Union (EU).

In this context, the EFTA-India deal, valued at US\$100 billion in investments into India, marks a milestone in India's economic strategy. This is also important because even though the EFTA member states have a combined population of less than 14 million, the EFTA's trade volumes make it a vital partner for India – with a combined GDP of more than US\$1 trillion, the EFTA member states are the world's ninth-largest merchandise trader and fifth-largest in commercial services. Notably, India is the EFTA's fifth-largest trading partner, with their total trade reaching US\$25 billion in 2023. On the other hand, India itself is one of the fastest-growing economies with 1.4 billion people, which will help boost trade opportunities for the EFTA members, too.

India's exports to the EFTA grouping include aluminum and aluminum products, chemicals, iron and steel, textiles, electrical machinery, and pharmaceuticals, worth US\$2 billion. On the other hand, India's imports from the bloc include gold, silver, clocks and watches, and medical and surgical instruments, totaling about US\$20 billion.

This deal is also expected to reduce the aforementioned trade deficit with the four countries by propelling export investments across sectors in India, such as in pharmaceuticals, machinery, and manufacturing. It will also allow Indian professionals to take up jobs in the EFTA. India's Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal has stated that the deal is a "modern trade agreement, fair, equitable and win-win for all five countries," reflecting the pact's inclusion of essential elements in today's era such as gender equality and non-discrimination. He also reiterated that the deal will "pave the way for mutual growth."

Notably, the EFTA-India free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations started way back in 2008; and only after 21 rounds of talks did the two partners sign the FTA on March 10, 2024. The TEPA covers the following areas: Trade in Goods (including Rules of Origin and Trade Facilitation), Trade Remedies, Technical Barriers to Trade and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Trade in Services, Investment Promotion and Cooperation, Intellectual Property, Government Procurement, Competition, Trade and Sustainable Development, Horizontal Provisions, Institutional Provisions, and Dispute Settlement. Importantly, it reflects common principles, such as the commitment to sustainable development, good corporate governance, and corporate social responsibility.

The main objectives of the trade pact include liberalizing trade in goods and services in accordance with the World Trade Organization (WTO) General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 and General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). It also aims to mutually enhance investment opportunities; promote competition; provide for "adequate, effective and non-discriminatory" protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights; and promote sustainable development that enhances world trade. In practice, the agreement primarily aims to provide "meaningful" tariff concessions, including on

Indian agricultural products, as well as improve market access both in India and in the European bloc.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the agreement's significance in bolstering economic progress and creating opportunities, highlighting the potential for increased prosperity and mutual growth with EFTA nations. After nearly 16 years of negotiations, the FTA entails India lifting most import tariffs on industrial goods from the four EFTA countries in exchange for investments over a 15-year period. These investments are expected to span various sectors, including pharmaceuticals, machinery, and manufacturing. Both India and the EFTA nations need to ratify the agreement before it can take effect. Switzerland aims to complete this process by the next year.

India has more than a dozen FTAs with countries all over the world. In addition, in the past five years, India has signed trade agreements with Australia (Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement [ECTA], signed in 2022); Mauritius (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement [CECPA], 2021); and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Comprehensive Partnership Agreement [CEPA], 2022). Notably, the FTAs with the EU and the UK are undergoing negotiations: Reportedly, the India-UK FTA is likely to get signed by July 2024 and is currently being legally vetted. As for the EU, India relaunched negotiations with the bloc in 2022 after a nine-year gap; and seven rounds have already been held, with the eighth round likely to start after the Indian elections. Hopefully, the EFTA-India deal may give some impetus to the EU-India FTA, too. The ultimate aim is for the Indian government to reach the US\$1 trillion target in annual exports by 2030.

Sources: BBC, March 11; World Economic Forum, March 20; News18, March 10; Al Jazeera, March 10; Business Standard, March 21; Mint, April 8

2024 Elections in India: World's Biggest Democratic Carnival Has Begun

April 19 marked the start of the largest democratic election in world history. During the six weeks in April-June, 2024, Indian voters will elect the members of the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament). Voting will happen in seven phases across India's multiple states



and union territories: April 19 and 26; May 7, 13, 20, and 25; and June 1 are the polling dates. Moreover, assembly elections for the states of Andhra Pradesh (May 13), Arunachal Pradesh (April 19), Odisha, (in four phases: May 13, May 20, May 25, and June 1), and Sikkim (April 19), as well as by-polls (i.e., by-elections held to fill elected offices that have become vacant between general elections) to 26 Assembly Constituencies of the Indian states of Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal will also be held at the same time. The results are expected to be announced on June 4.

Notably, the Lok Sabha members are elected through the "first-past-the-post" voting system, where the candidate with the greatest number of votes in a constituency wins the seat (the current Lok Sabha has 543 seats). The direct elections for the state assembly also make use of the same electoral system.

An overview of the number of registered voters across the globe (top ten countries) highlights the extent and strength of India's democracy: The United States has 228 million registered voters; Indonesia has 204.42 million registered voters, followed by Brazil with 155.55 million registered voters. Japan has 105.22 million registered voters. The Philippines, Germany, Thailand, France, and the UK have respectively 65.74 million, 61.18 million, 52.19 million, 48.58 million, and 47.56 million registered voters.

In contrast, according to the Election Commission of India (Bharat Nirvachan Aayog) – the autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India – nearly 968 million voters (of these about 497 million are male voters

and 471 million female voters), in a country of 1.4 billion, are registered to go to the polls. They will choose 543 people's representatives by direct election on the basis of "Universal Adult Suffrage."

According to the Indian Constitution, this implies that "every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than eighteen years of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by or under any law made by the appropriate Legislature and is not otherwise disqualified under this Constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature on the ground of non-residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election." The elected members will occupy the seats in the Lok Sabha for the next five years.

Importantly, all Indian citizens have the right to vote irrespective of their caste, creed, race, gender, or ethnicity. The voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 in 1989. In the 2024 general elections, about 18 million first-time voters (aged 18 and 19) and more than 195 million voters in their 20s. In contrast, about 8.2 million voters are above the age of 85.

As per government notifications, Indian citizens living abroad, those who have not acquired citizenship of any foreign country, are also entitled to be enrolled in the electoral roll. However, there is no special provision for overseas electors. In other words, they have to be present in the country on the day of poll.

Importantly, there are about 48,000 transgender people as registered voters, reflecting India's efforts to promote inclusion in the electoral process: India's Election Commission has been expanding efforts to register members of the transgender community as voters since 1994. In a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of India in 2014, the rights of transgender people were recognized as a "third gender" identity. Even as the Women Reservation Bill ("Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam") was passed by the Indian Parliament in 2023, which promises to reserve 33 percent of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, it will only be enforced after the 2024 elections. Of the 543 seats for elected representatives in the Lok Sabha, 84 seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes

and 47 for Scheduled Tribes, two officially designated groups of marginalized people in India.

Further, the setting up of about 1.048 million polling booths and use of about 5.5 million electronic voting machines (EVMs), as well as the deployment of 15 million polling officials and security staff with 400,000 vehicles for a seamless voting process give an idea of the extensive network needed to conduct such a historic democratic exercise. The importance of the phased approach to conducting Indian elections is based on the Election Commission's need to effectively deploy security forces, make necessary polling arrangements, and uphold the integrity and fairness of the electoral process.

In the 2024 elections, the contest is primarily between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and a multi-party bloc called the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA, of which India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress, is one of the members).

Source: CNN March 16; BBC April 18; BBC April 17; EPRS, April; Lok Sabha; ECI, Deccan Herald (DH), November 6, 2023; United Nations, 2014; India Today; TOI, April 18; Outlook, September 2023; HT, October 3, 2023; Business Standard, March 16; Embassy of India; DH, March 27.

Get, Set, Go: Inaugural India-Sweden JWG Propels Space & Geospatial Cooperation

On March 18, the Sweden-India Business Council and the Geospatial World Chamber of Commerce held the hybrid first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the India-Sweden Space & Geospatial Business Industry at the Indian Embassy in Sweden.

The global geospatial market size is estimated to be US\$ 681 billion in 2025; and is expected to reach US\$1.44 trillion by 2030. Countries like India and Sweden surely would be at the center of this boom. As per some estimates, the Indian geospatial market is set to surpass US\$8 billion by 2025, while the Indian space industry has already reached US\$9 billion. India is looking set to its market size to US\$77 billion by 2030 and US\$100 billion by 2040. Towards this end, India has been strengthening its geospatial policy frameworks in recent years for holistic geospatial development. In 2022, India introduced

its National Geospatial Policy, which aims to develop infrastructure networks, skill sets, knowledge services, standards, and businesses, as well as promote technology innovation. Liberalization of the geospatial sector and democratization of data seem to be the focus.

In the same vein, India announced its Space Policy in 2023, which looks to consolidate the reforms in the space sector. It will also boost private industry participation in the sector by allowing “end-to-end space activities” that include building satellites, rockets and launch vehicles, data collection, and dissemination.



This event, co-hosted between Sweden-India Business Council and the Geospatial World Chamber of Commerce, is a good example of the power of public-private partnerships, as highlighted by Ambassador Tanmaya Lal in his address at the JWG meeting. India and Sweden have a long history of collaborations in various industries including in the space sector. In India’s historic Chandrayaan 3 mission – which became the first-ever spacecraft to successfully land on the south side of the moon – the Swedish Space Corporation (SSC) was crucial as a commercial ground station partner. Notably, all the Chandrayaan missions have been supported by the SSC; the SSC and ISRO have been partners for the last 20 years and the partnership has grown stronger over time.

In the above context, it is another step in the right direction that weeks before the JWG meeting, the SSC and the Indian Spacetech startup Dhruva Space announced in early March to extend their ongoing collaboration to

improve Indian-Swedish new space initiatives and further synergies on the satellite ground station networks.

This commitment is going to help the Indian company obtain more expertise in full-stack space solutions (launching services, mission operations, and satellite manufacturing) due to the Swedish company’s previous experience with the establishment and operations of ground stations. The SSC ground stations will also help with data transfer, communication, control, and tracking of the LEAP-1 mission.

For the Swedish side, the partnership is a prospect for future collaborations such as joint research projects, expertise, operations, and infrastructure. In the words of the Head of Asia Pacific Market Region at SSC, Frederik Gisle, “We are delighted to expand our relations with Dhruva Space and to support their upcoming LEAP-1 mission with our ground station network. Sweden and India have a long history of collaboration in a wide range of industries, including the space sector, where SSC most recently supported ISRO’s Chandrayaan-3 mission. With Dhruva Space, our first private customer in India, we look forward to further exploring the space sector together with an innovative provider of space engineering solutions.”

It is important to note that the March JWG meeting was a follow up to the first-ever India Sweden Space & Geospatial Business Summit held in Stockholm, Sweden, just months earlier in December 2023. It was again co-organized by the Sweden-India Business Council, Geospatial World Chamber of Commerce, and the Embassy of India to Sweden and Latvia to improve collaboration opportunities between tech companies. The December summit served as a pivotal moment, symbolizing the substantial progress in the collaboration between India and Sweden in the dynamic domains of Geospatial and Space Technology. At the time, the Geospatial World Chamber of Commerce entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Sweden-India Business Council with a focus on increasing collaboration on space and geospatial trade, commerce, and related policies between the two countries. The Ambassador of India in Sweden Tanmaya Lal and the CEO, Swedish Space Corporation (SSC) Charlotta Sund, among other dignitaries were present.

Such measures seek to not only deepen space cooperation, but also facilitate knowledge exchange, dialogues via delegations and summits, and enhanced trade and investments between India and Sweden.

Sources: @IndiainSweden December 15; @IndiainSweden March 18; Sweden-India Business Council (SIBC) March 5; FE, December 2023; Geospatial World; Mint, December 30, 2022; India Today, April 6, 2023; SSC, February 12; TOI, March 6; GWCC, December 2023.

SWEDEN

Crossing the Last Frontier: Sweden Is a NATO Member

On March 7, Sweden marked a historic milestone by officially joining the North Treaty Atlantic Organization (NATO), becoming its newest member. By depositing its instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty with the United States Government in Washington DC, Sweden entered the alliance, expanding NATO's membership to 32 countries. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg hailed the moment as "a historic day." He also aptly stated that,

Sweden will now take its rightful place at NATO's table, with an equal say in shaping NATO policies and decisions. After over 200 years of non-alignment Sweden now enjoys the protection granted under Article 5, the ultimate guarantee of Allies' freedom and security. Sweden brings with it capable armed forces and a first-class defense industry. Sweden's accession makes NATO stronger, Sweden safer and the whole Alliance more secure. Today's accession demonstrates that NATO's door remains open and that every nation has the right to choose its own path.

Before Sweden's formal accession to NATO in 2024, the country had a significant history of engagement and cooperation with the alliance dating back to the 1990s. In 1994, Sweden became a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), a program aimed at fostering trust and collaboration between NATO and non-member states in the Euro-Atlantic region. This engagement expanded in 1997 when Sweden joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, providing a platform for political dialogue

between NATO members and partner countries. Over the years, Sweden's armed forces worked closely with NATO to enhance their interoperability and readiness for joint crisis response and military operations. Participation in NATO-led missions in various regions, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq, helped align Sweden's military standards with those of NATO.

Sweden's cooperation with NATO extended beyond operational activities to encompass joint training exercises, standardization efforts, and capability development; the collaboration culminated in Sweden's designation as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner in 2014, deepening political dialogue, training, and information sharing with NATO. The signing of a Host Nation Support Agreement in 2016 further solidified Sweden's ties with NATO, enabling efficient provision and receipt of military support during crises or conflicts. This agreement encompassed both civilian and military assistance, facilitating foreign military operations on Swedish territory and enhancing the country's role as a host for international exercises.

In the wake of the unsettling Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, on May 16 the Swedish Government took the significant decision to pursue NATO membership, signaling a pivotal shift in Sweden's foreign policy and security strategy. Subsequently, on May 18, Sweden began the process of integrating with the alliance by formally submitting its application for NATO membership. Over the following months, from July 5 to September 27, 2022, the accession protocol outlining Sweden's membership was ratified by 28 of NATO's 30 member countries. However, Türkiye and Hungary took their own time to complete the ratification process. March 2023 marked a significant milestone as the Swedish Government adopted the bill formalizing Sweden's NATO membership, culminating with parliamentary approval and reflecting a broad consensus within Swedish political circles regarding the country's alignment with the alliance. The final steps towards full NATO membership were completed as Türkiye ratified Sweden's accession protocol on January 25, 2024, followed by Hungary on March 5, 2024 – after a long wait.

Sources: Government Offices of Sweden, April 3; NATO, March 7

Sweden's Pioneering Role in Satellite Navigation and Space Communication Technology

Sweden has established its inaugural operational Ranging and Integrity Monitoring Station (RIMS) in Gävle, contributing to the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS). EGNOS, a collaboration among the European Space Agency (ESA), the European Commission (EC), and Eurocontrol enhances existing satellite navigation systems like GPS and GLONASS, making them suitable for critical applications such as aviation and maritime navigation.

The system, currently in its testing phase, aims to improve GPS accuracy from 20 m to 2 m, with around 40 stations planned across Europe. RIMS, including Gävle's station hosted by Lantmäteriet, compares satellite positions and sends data to control centers, which then transmit corrected signals to EGNOS satellites for user reception. In parallel, Safran Data Systems partners with the Swedish

Space Corporation (SSC) to introduce an advanced optical ground station named IRIS.

This ground station represents a breakthrough in Earth-space communications, offering data rates 10 to 100 times faster than conventional radiofrequency systems. Equipped with a state-of-the-art 50-cm laser telescope and optronics systems, IRIS ensures comprehensive sky coverage. The utilization of the Cortex Lasercom optical communications modem further amplifies communication speeds, heralding a new era in space communication technology. The collaboration between Safran Data Systems and SSC is a significant stride towards advancing space communication technology. This partnership is supported by the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Swedish National Space Agency, reaffirming Sweden's dedication to innovation and progress in space communication capabilities.

Sources: www.government.se

INDIA-GLOBAL

India-China Border Dispute: Modi Calls for Diplomatic Engagement

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a rare interview with *Newsweek* magazine, stressed the urgent need for India and China to address their longstanding border disputes to enhance bilateral relations. He advocated for constructive diplomatic and military engagement to restore and maintain peace along the borders, spanning over 3,440 km in the Himalayas.

In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a news briefing in Beijing that "China noted Prime Minister Modi's remarks," expressing hope for progress with India on their long-standing historical border dispute. In recent years, amid heightened military tensions along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC), both countries have maintained close communication through diplomatic and military channels to resolve the standoff that has precipitated especially after the bloody Galwan conflict in 2020.

China also asserts its claims over the Indian state of

Arunachal Pradesh, referring to it as Zangnan, part of South Tibet. In a latest development, in late March this year China released the fourth list of "standardized" names in Arunachal Pradesh. India has reacted sharply to China's "baseless" claims and "invented" names. Last year, China had released a new map, claiming not just the Indian territories but also almost the entirety of the South China Sea, raising fresh concerns about the China threat in the Indo-Pacific. On a heartening note for Indo-Pacific solidarity, the US Senate in July 2023 passed a resolution recognizing Arunachal Pradesh as an integral part of India.

The interview with *Newsweek* highlight India's intent to put pressure on China through India's growing ties with the West and US allies/partners, as well as US-led initiatives like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the US) while looking to rebuild "stable and peaceful relations" between India and China.

Sources: *BBC*, April 11; *Newsweek*, April 4; *Arunachal Times*, April 3; *Indian Express*, July 14, 2023; *AP*, September 1, 2023 .

Continuing India-US High-Level Talks Boost “Future-Oriented” Ties

During a two-day official visit from April 10-12, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra conducted a comprehensive review of India-US ties in Washington. Discussions were held with key officials from various departments, including the US State Department, where Kwatra met with Deputy Secretaries Richard Verma and Kurt Campbell, as well as counterparts at the National Security Council, Department of Defense, Department of Commerce, and Department of Energy.

The talks encompassed a wide range of issues, including strengthening defense and commercial ties, ensuring supply chain resilience, and addressing contemporary regional developments. Deputy Secretary Verma emphasized the importance of a close partnership between the two countries for regional security and prosperity after a productive meeting with Foreign Secretary Kwatra. Foreign Secretary Kwatra also met with US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks to assess the progress and significance of the bilateral defense partnership, particularly in promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

India and the US are actively collaborating on defense initiatives such as the co-production of fighter engines and the India-US Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), aimed at fostering defense innovation through partnerships between companies, investors, and universities. Additionally, Foreign Secretary Kwatra engaged with the US India Business Council (USIBC) to explore opportunities for deepening investment channels, fostering innovation, and strengthening commercial ties between the two countries. This visit precedes US National Security Advisor (NSA) Jake Sullivan’s upcoming trip to India, highlighting the continuing momentum in the India-US partnership.

Sources: *BhaskarLive*, April 13; *The Print*, April 13.

India’s Era in Chess: Gukesh Becomes the Youngest World Championship Challenger

The 17-year-old Indian grandmaster Gukesh Dommaraju won the Candidates Chess Tournament, becoming the youngest challenger to the world title. Gukesh became grandmaster when he was only 12 years old, the third



youngest person to have done so. Ambassador Tanmaya Lal and Prime Minister Narendra Modi used their X accounts to highlight Gukesh’s talent and dedication and congratulate the young player after the victory at the FIDE Candidates Tournament 2024 in Toronto, Canada. Gukesh will now face the reigning world chess champion, China’s Ding Liren, later this year (dates have yet not been decided). If he wins, Gukesh would become the second world champion from India, after Viswanathan Anand who won it five times. It would also break Garry Kasparov’s long-held record of being the youngest world champion aged 22.

Notably, a group of five Indians had qualified for the Candidates this year, three in the open event and two in the women’s event. Further highlighting India’s strides, in the women’s section, Humpy Koneru and first-timer Vaishali both finished joint second on points. Moreover, FIDE’s rankings list for April 2024 includes five Indian men among the top 25; the women’s rankings include three Indians among the top 15. Also, one-third of the top 30 juniors in the world are Indians.

Source: *Guardian*, April 22; *FIDE*, April 22; *Indian Express*, April 24; *CNN*, April 23; @FIDE_chess March 26; @Tanmaya_Lal April 22; @narendramodi April 22

INDIA-SWEDEN

Indian and Swedish Representatives Discuss Public Health

At the end of April, the State Secretary to the Swedish Minister of Health and Social Affairs Petra Noreback; the Secretary for the Indian Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Apurva Chandra; the Ambassador of India to



Sweden and Latvia Tanmaya Lal; and others gathered to discuss relevant topics related to public health.

The discussions focused on digital transition, innovation in public health delivery, and current and potential areas of public-private cooperation in the health sector between the two countries. A few days before this meeting, Ambassador Tanmaya Lal and Shri Apurva Chandra also met with State Secretary Miria Söderström and others at the India House to discuss avenues for collaboration between the two countries in the health sector.

Source: @IndiainSweden April 19; @IndiainSweden April 22;

Swedish Ambassadors Pay Homage to Mahatma Gandhi

On March 6, thirty Swedish ambassadors from multiple states (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, and Vietnam, among others) were welcomed at the Gandhi Smriti by the Vice Chairman of the Gandhi Smriti Vijay Goel. During the meeting, the Swedish delegation of ambassadors and the State Secretary of Trade, Hakan Jevrell paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Martyr’s Column and took the opportunity to exchange ideas and have discussions.

Source: @GandhiSmriti_ March 6; @VijayGoelBJP March 6.

FIKA with Swedish Chamber of Commerce India

On March 21, representatives of more than twenty Swedish companies in India (Spotify, Ovako Group, MannTel, Essity, Geting Global, Tekompaniet, among others) met

with the Consul General of Sweden in Mumbai Sven Östberg for a FIKA with the Swedish Chamber Commerce India. During the event, they exchanged stories and took the opportunity network. Consul Sven Östberg and the Swedish Chamber Commerce India have been working towards a close approximation of Swedish companies with the Indian community and market.

Source: @SwedenCGMumbai March 22.



Building India-Sweden Maritime Connect

A delegation from the World Maritime University (WMU) in Sweden met representatives from the Indian Maritime Administration on March 18 in Mumbai. The representatives visited various facilities of the Indian Coast Guard, including India Coast Guard Regional Headquarters (West), the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Mumbai, and the Pollution Control Vessel (PCV) ICGS Samudra Prahari. The delegates were briefed



on topics related to maritime safety, pollution response, and coastal state guard. Such events foster convergence on areas of mutual interest and increase maritime domain awareness.

Source: @IndiaCoastGuard March 18; Imphal Times, March 21.

Swedish Consul in Mumbai Visits Bombay Chamber

In March, the Swedish Consul in Mumbai, Sven Östberg, visited the Bombay Chamber – one of the oldest Chambers in India with several thousand members from small, medium, and large companies. The visit will help Sweden in fostering activities for promoting trade and investment with small, medium, and large companies in India. In turn, such actions will result in furthering strategic partnerships between India and Sweden in the near future.

Source: @SwedenCGMumbai March 17.



Celebrating India-Sweden Sustainability Day

On March 4, India and Sweden inaugurated Sustainability Day, highlighting the two bilateral partners' intent to accelerate green transition efforts. The two sides have already committed toward adopting green practices in the areas of energy, environment, and urban development via several memoranda of understanding (MOUs). The event was held by Team Sweden, which includes the Embassy of Sweden, the Consulate-General in Mumbai, and Business Sweden in collaboration with the Swedish Energy Agency and Vinnova. It is important to note that sustainability, green transition, and innovation as the three main pillars of India-Sweden economic ties.

In this context, Jan Thesleff, Ambassador of Sweden to India, states, "Sustainability will become the norm within a

short time, and it's better to start the transition now. ... We cannot prescribe how India should do it, but we can inspire others to do things. ... It is not a luxury to go green, but it is a necessity. Once green systems start functioning, we can also make them profitable."

The Consul General Sven Ostberg has highlighted the need for sustainability as a means for conducting efficient business: "For example, saving energy is good for all stakeholders."

Håkan Jevrell, Sweden's State Secretary to the Minister for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, has emphasized the imperative for industry transition.

Sources: Business Sweden, March 22; Outlook, March 6

Connecting Cultures: Indian State Showcases Heritage and Wildlife to Swedish Tourism

The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB) – the centrally located Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (literally, Central Region or State) is the second-largest state in the country area-wise – successfully hosted a roadshow on March 13 in Stockholm to highlight the wide variety of travel experiences available in the Indian state. Under the leadership of Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary of Tourism & Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh, the event offered a unique opportunity for MPTB and its partners to network with key Swedish travel agents, tour operators, media, filmmakers, and industry specialists.

The Indian Ambassador to Sweden, Tanmaya Lal, underscored the goal of strengthening tourism relations between India and Sweden. The event provided participants with a direct look into the unique attractions and activities that Madhya Pradesh offers, such as the Khajuraho temples, Sanchi Stupa, Bhimbetka rock shelters, and wildlife reserves like Bandhavgarh and Kanha, drawing attention to the state's historical significance and natural splendor. MPTB reaffirmed its dedication to sustainable tourism, highlighting its efforts toward responsible travel, community involvement, and preserving the natural and cultural heritage of Madhya Pradesh.

Sources: @MPTourism, March 13 @IndiainSweden

Indian Ambassador Meets Swedish ITP Delegation

The Indian Ambassador to Sweden and Latvia, Tanmaya Lal, met Helen Ågren, Director, Swedish Ministry of Climate, and Per Andersson, Head of LeadIT Secretariat, among other representatives ahead of the Swedish team's departure to India for the inaugural meeting of the India-Sweden Industry Transition Partnership (ITP). The ITP has been established by the governments of India and Sweden to accelerate ambitious transitions in the industry sector.

Source: @IndiainSweden April 22.

INDIA-NORDIC

Iceland-India Chamber of Commerce Explores New TEPA Prospects

The Iceland-India Chamber of Commerce convened a meeting to explore the opportunities provided for various business stakeholders by the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the EFTA (comprising Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland), a historic agreement that was signed on March 10, as detailed above.

Presentations were delivered by Martin Eyjólfsson, the Permanent Secretary of State, Ambassador B. Shyam, and Þórður Jónsson.

In another meeting, Ambassador B. Shyam engaged in fruitful discussions with Mr. Einar Þorsteinsson, the Mayor of Reykjavik, focusing on enhancing bilateral ties through initiatives such as yoga, cultural exchange, climate action, and community involvement, among other areas.

Sources: @IndiainIceland, March 13; @IndiainIceland, March 15.



Strengthening India-Norway Research Collaboration in Oceanography

A delegation from India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) visited the Nansen Environmental and Remote Sensing Center (NERSC) in Norway on March 12. Led by Prof. Sunil Kumar Singh, Director of CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), the delegation included Dr. C. Anandharamakrishnan, Director of CSIR- National Institute For Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST), and Dr. Sridevi Annapurna Singh, Director of CSIR- Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), among others.

During the visit, Nansen researchers presented insights into operational oceanography, showcasing the ongoing collaborations between India and Norway in addressing climate change challenges. Prof. Sunil Kumar Singh delivered a succinct overview of CSIR-NIO's current oceanography research initiatives, paving the way for discussions on potential future research collaborations to tackle mutual interests and challenges, specifically for addressing pressing environmental concerns.

Sources: @ToreFurevik, March 22.

Journey to Tampere: India-Finland Explore Business Opportunities

Ambassador Raveesh Kumar visited Tampere, the third largest city in Finland and home to a significant Indian community. He had fruitful discussions with the Mayor of Tampere Kalervo Kummola, exploring promising business prospects, avenues for talent attraction, and the welfare of the vibrant Indian community. During his visit, he also toured the Wirepas headquarters, a Finnish company specializing in innovative smart meter technology using wire-mesh networks.

Additionally, Ambassador Kumar also met the burgeoning Indian community. At a gathering organized by Tampere Indians Oy and FINERAC (Finland India Network of Researchers and Academics), he facilitated an exchange of perspectives on matters pertinent to their well-being and integration within Finnish society. India's presence in Finland continues to flourish under such a dynamic engagement.

Source: Embassy of India, Helsinki, April 5.

TCS-Nuuday Secure Multi-Million-Dollar Cloud Transformation Deal

India's Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) – the information technology (IT) services wing of the Indian conglomerate Tata Group – has secured a multi-million-dollar deal with Nuuday, Denmark's leading digital connectivity and communications provider. This partnership focuses on a comprehensive cloud transformation initiative, wherein TCS will build Nuuday's IT infrastructure and migrate it to TCS's hybrid cloud platform. TCS will leverage its Enterprise Cloud Platform, renowned for its advanced hybrid cloud architecture and integrated tools and accelerators, enabling Nuuday to streamline its processes, facilitating quicker time-to-market for new products and services.

As part of the agreement, TCS will oversee the hosting and management of all IT domain services for Nuuday throughout the transformation process. This entails a significant responsibility for TCS, given Nuuday's extensive reach, catering to over 4.1 million Danish households and 1.8 million businesses. Moreover, TCS's hybrid cloud architecture provides Nuuday with the flexibility to distribute workloads between private and public clouds, enhancing operational efficiency and scalability.

This approach aligns with Nuuday's business objectives and allows for a seamless transition to next-generation technologies. The deal signifies a strategic collaboration between TCS and Nuuday to drive innovation and digital transformation in Denmark's digital connectivity landscape. With TCS's expertise and Nuuday's market presence, the partnership is poised to deliver significant benefits for both companies and further strengthen the India-Denmark relationship in the technology sector.

Sources: *TheEconomicTimes*, @IndiaandDenmark, TCS, March 14.

INDIA-EU

Easing Travel for Indians: EU's New Multiple Entry Visa Scheme

On April 18, the European Commission adopted specific rules for issuing multiple entry visas to Indian nationals. This new visa regime – called the “cascade” system – will allow Indian citizens to get five-year, multi-entry Schengen visas stamped on their passports. The regime offers multiple entry trips for frequent travelers. So Indian citizens who have used a short-stay Schengen visa twice within the last three years could apply for a two-year multiple entry visa. This could be followed by a five-year visa, if their passport has sufficient validity.

The Schengen visa allows stays of up to 90 days within a 180-day period across 29 European countries, namely Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden, along with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (the so-called Schengen areas; 25 are EU member states while four are EFTA members). These visa holders will “enjoy travel rights equivalent to visa-free nationals.” The visa, however, does not grant the right to work.

The “favorable” rules are part of the two sides' efforts under their Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM signed in 2016), which “seeks comprehensive cooperation on migration policy between the EU and India, with facilitation of people-to-people contacts being of key aspect due to the importance of India as a partner for the EU.” In other words, it aims “to facilitate the mutually beneficial movement of persons between India and the European Union, while ensuring the better management of these migration flows and mobility”.

The EU Ambassador to India Hervé Delphin hailed the step: “The EU takes another step towards enhancing people-to-people contact with India. ... Europe delivers on the partnership!”

Sources: *Euronews*, May 1; *Print*, April 22; @EUAmbIndia, April 22

India-EU TTC Propels Sustainability Narrative via New EoI for Startups

On April 4, the EU and India launched an Expression of Interest (EoI) for startups working in Battery Recycling Technologies for Electric Vehicles (EVs) for a “matchmaking” event. It pushes forward the intent of the two strategic partners to create convergences and cooperation between European and Indian Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and startups in the clean and green technologies sector.

The project aims to not only exchange technical know-how and expertise but also advance efforts toward creating a circular economy, particularly in rare materials and helping the transition into carbon neutrality for both the EU and India. The just-launched matchmaking event is one of the key short-term actions under the Working Group on Green and Clean Energy Technologies.

This project is part of the projects under the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), announced by India and the European Commission in April 2022. Notably, the TTC with India is the EU’s only second such strategic coordination mechanism – the first one was with the United States. The India-EU TTC was established in February 2023, with a view to dealing with multi-level challenges and enhancing cooperation in the trade, trusted technology, sustainable development, and security sectors.

The TTC comprises three Working Groups: Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance, and Digital Connectivity; Green and Clean Energy Technologies; and Trade, Investment, and Resilient Value Chains.

As part of the EoI for the matchmaking initiative, twelve innovators, six each from India and the EU, will be selected and get an opportunity to pitch their innovative solutions during the Matchmaking Event. The event has been scheduled for June 2024. After the pitching presentation, six finalists (three from the EU and three from India) will be selected and awarded the possibility to visit India and the EU. The last date for submission of EoI for interested startups and SMEs from the EU and India was April 30, 2024.

Talking about the matchmaking partnership, Ajay Kumar

Sood, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and Co-Chair of the India-EU TTC Working Group on Green and Clean Energy Technologies stated: “Our objective is to harmonize efforts with EU innovators to jointly develop battery recycling solutions that drive industry expansion. We are dedicated to fostering a collaborative environment where sustainability and innovation form the cornerstone of a flourishing circular economy.”

Similarly, Mr. Marc Lemaître, Director-General for Research and Innovation at the European Commission and Co-Chair of the India-EU TTC Working Group on Green and Clean Energy Technologies, highlighted the need for such collaborations and stated, “The match-making event is a step-ahead to unlock innovative possibilities leading to a green and circular economy. We encourage innovators from the EU to seize this opportunity and explore potential collaborations with their Indian counterparts.”


Sources: Print, April 9; ET, April 10; Outlook, April 10; European Commission, February 6, 2023

Journalists from Central Europe Visit India

In March, the Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad, hosted a delegation of 22 journalists from thirteen countries in Central Europe (Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia) at. The event was organized by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. During the event, a Familiarization Program was offered to the journalists to get to know more about the country’s food, culture, infrastructure, initiatives, research endeavors, and developments.

The journalists exchanged not only experiences with





Indian journalists on the challenges of producing news in a multicultural country, but also the prospects of higher education landscape. According to the participants, they had a pleasant stay in the country, enjoyed the food and culture, and were positively impressed by India's diversity, progress, and innovations.

Source: @ISBedu March 20; @IndianDiplomacy March 23;

Insights from the 16th India-France Joint Working Group Meeting

The 16th Meeting of the India-France Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism convened in New Delhi, with a primary focus on addressing state-sponsored cross-border terrorism, particularly in South Asia. Led by K.D. Dewal, Joint Secretary of External Affairs for India, and Olivier Caron, Assistant High Commissioner for Counter Terrorism and Organized Crime representing France, the discussions delved into various facets of counter-terrorism efforts.

Both delegations engaged in an extensive dialogue, covering terrorist threats prevalent in their respective regions, including state-sponsored terrorism in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Additionally, attention was directed toward terrorist activities in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

The emergence of new and evolving technologies utilized by terrorists, the internet's misuse for nefarious purposes such as radicalization of youth, and the financing of terrorism were also integral parts of the discourse. A key aspect of the meeting involved India presenting its perspectives on the National Master Plan on Terrorism (NMFT) and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which prompted an exchange of views and positions between the two sides.

Emphasis was laid on the criticality of bolstering counter-terrorism cooperation through enhanced information-sharing mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives, training programs, and joint exercises. Furthermore, cooperation at multilateral platforms such as the United Nations (UN), FATF, and NMFT was underscored as a vital avenue for collective action against terrorism. In a bid to sustain and

advance their collaborative efforts, both sides agreed to convene the 17th Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism in France at a mutually agreed-upon date in the near future.

Sources: *Economic Times* April 15.

Strengthening Strategic Partnership: India-EU Upcoming Security and Defense Consultation

In 2022, India and the EU held their first security and defense consultation in June 2022. It highlighted the growing strides toward building a vital bilateral security cooperation. To push the envelope further, the two sides are reportedly expected to hold the next edition of the security and defense consultation in May this year. The discussions will likely include newer themes such as space security, and how to boost the defense industry cooperation.

In 2022, both sides had explored ways for implementing the European code of conduct on arms export to India's neighborhood; co-developing defense equipment; furthering EU-India collaboration on maritime security; and India's potential involvement in the EU's Permanent Economic and Security Cooperation Organization (PESCO, which was launched in 2017). Considering the global security landscape after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the fragile situation in the Indo-Pacific due to the China threat, a closer partnership with India is of interest to both sides, particularly in security matters related to the Indo-Pacific, Europe and India's neighborhood.

Source: *Livemint* April 22.



EDITOR'S NOTE

In an election year, as is true for both in India (Lok Sabha) and in the EU (European Parliament), it is difficult to focus on objectives beyond the present for all countries involved. However, to not dilute the hard work of recent years, it is extremely important for India, the EU, and the Nordic-Baltic countries, particularly Sweden, to sustain the pace of the ongoing upward trajectory.

In January this year, the European Parliament, too, commended the growth in the momentum of the EU-India strategic partnership in recent years, “reflecting the strong political, economic, social and cultural ties and a renewed political will to strengthen their partnership across a number of sectors and policy areas.” It has rightly noted that the ties have not yet reached their full potential. Nonetheless, no partnership is perfect, and there is always room for growth.

The historic signing of the India-EFTA TEPA; the EU-India startup collaboration (developing battery recycling technologies for EVs); ongoing negotiations for the EU-India FTA; and the adoption of new Schengen visa rules under the “new cascade regime” highlight the latest constructive engagements in India-Europe ties. India’s

trade with the Nordic-Baltic states has been on the rise, too. Moreover, as the China threat becomes bigger and stronger and as India gains in strengths, the strategic ties with India will assume greater resonance for Europe as a whole, not just Sweden.

This is primarily because the Indo-Pacific – on which Europe is dependent for its trade, investments, and economic opportunities – is at the center of the world’s economic and political imperatives, India is one of the main drivers of that growth. Moreover, India is seen as a conduit between the East and the West; it is increasingly recognized as a leading voice of the Global South; and it is the world’s biggest democracy and most populous country, which is also set to become the third-largest economy with a burgeoning talent force in the near future.

Naturally, the same is true for India-Sweden ties, which are gaining newer grounds of convergence, from space tech to defense and cybersecurity. The months after the parliamentary elections both in Europe and India will surely reveal a clearer picture.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed here are as published in the original sources and not of the ISDP or the SCSA-IPA.

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The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute’s primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe’s neighborhood.

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