

# CSIR- NEWS BRIEF

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The CSIR Newsletter is the compilation of news of international affairs collected from different sources. It also includes opinions and brief news analysis. \*

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## Opinion

### Culturalism as Bharat's Soft Power

**Abhishek Srivastava\***

Culture is the most important source of soft power, and Bharat is in a very advantageous position as far as culture is concerned and has historically enjoyed much exchange in various areas like sciences, spirituality, art, and faith, which developed over millennia. It grew organically in Bharat and found its way across other regions. Bharat has earned a considerable amount of 'soft power' long before the term itself was coined.

In April, Bharat hosted the 1st Global Buddhist Summit in collaboration with the International Buddhist Confederation. As we know, Buddhism offers the message of peace and non-violence, which are crucial in today's world. In this summit, more than 173 international participants took part as delegates. Through these efforts, Bharat seeks to enhance its soft power and project itself as a key player in Asia. With its strong historical and cultural ties to Buddhism, Bharat is well-positioned to play a leading role in shaping the discourse around Buddhist issues on the global stage.

In recent years, Bharat has been trying to use its cultural assets in its foreign policy through more active cultural diplomacy and promotional activities. Being one of the world's oldest civilizations, the outreach of its soft power diplomacy can be witnessed in ongoing world politics. Once a centre of knowledge, the ancient universities of Bharat were the most prominent centres of cultural synergy and 'soft power'.

Bharat's art, classical music and dance, yoga, traditional medicine (Ayurveda), principles of non-violence, philosophy, spirituality, and even cuisine and dresses find more and more supporters around the world. As observed by many scholars, India offers one of the most dynamic alternatives to Western cultural values in international relations.

In a recent speech in Banaskantha, Gujarat, the RSS's Sarsanghchalak Shri Mohan Bhagwat ji mentioned that "Bharat believes in serving others, and this tradition has been followed since the Vedas. Our country is developing to be a righteous nation and governing its religious duties as it paves its way to being a developed nation". He has also said "Bharat's dharma does not take advantage of anyone, we take advantage of each other for mutual existence, but it is an exchange of love and not a bargain".

Bharat's image is of a rising global power guided by sanskriti evam sabhyata (cultural and civilisational), which expresses the nation's desire to leverage its rich historical and cultural links with other countries as a part of its non-coercive "soft power" strategy. Mohan Bhagawat ji has mentioned, "today's Bharat has to grow but not to become a superpower like America, China, and Russia that wield power. We have to become a country that can offer answers to the problems plaguing the world today. We have to become a country that can show the world the path of peace, love, and prosperity through right conduct. For a country to perform its duty, it will need a culture that is based on the unity of the world".

Bharat is an enlightened nation with a vibrant cultural inheritance. Bharat is vividly conscious of the power of its cultural engagement. What's further required is to put in huge effort to present its culture to the world and fascinate the global audience.

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## **Pakistan Minister is Spokesperson of "Terror Industry": S. Jaishankar**

**Vivek Kumar Mishra\***

Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto's visit to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) Council for Foreign Ministers meeting is the first visit by a Foreign Minister of Pakistan to India in the last 12 years. It was, in 2011, when Hina Rabbani Khar visited India as the then-Foreign Minister of Pakistan.

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in his concluding remark as chairman of the meeting in Goa on Friday, on May 5, 2023, expressed his concern about "terrorism," with special reference to Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism. However, Jaishankar has called upon the SCO members to focus on firmly combating terrorism and stated that "the menace must be stopped in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism", in an apparent reference to Pakistan.

India has consistently raised the issue of Pakistan's cross-border terrorism and terrorist infiltration. It is well known that the people of Jammu and Kashmir have been victims of terrorism for decades. The terror incidents took place in Jammu and Kashmir even before and during Bilawal's visit to India. Pakistan-backed terrorists attacked different parts of Jammu and Kashmir, including the recent Rajouri attack, in which five Indian soldiers were killed on May 5, 2023.

In SCO, Bilawal said, "Countries should not get caught up in weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring." He also said countries need to find "practical and pragmatic" solutions to eliminate terrorism. Bilawal's remarks are full of hypocrisy because Pakistan has always used terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy. In the meeting, Jaishankar reacted well, "It unconsciously reveals the mindset... What does weaponizing mean? It means that the activity is legitimate and somebody is weaponising it. This means they think terrorism is legitimate. Do they mean we will put up with terrorism? That sentence spoke so much about the mindset of that country."

The ridiculous remarks given by Bilawal Bhutto on India's decision to abrogate of Articles 370 and 35A that scrapped the special status of Jammu and Kashmir is incomprehensible. His observation was rightly slammed by S. Jaishankar, "370 is history; sooner people realise the better." He called him a "promoter, justifier, and spokesperson of a terrorism industry".

Terrorism is the mainstay of Pakistan. Jaishankar said on terrorism, "Pakistan's credibility is depleting faster than even its forex reserves. It is estimated that the total foreign reserves "stand at \$9.82 billion in March 2023, with the State Bank of Pakistan holding only \$4.24 billion, which is enough to pay for just three weeks of imports." There is no possibility of bilateral talks until Pakistan stops cross-border

terrorism. Jaishankar said, "Victims of terrorism do not sit together with perpetrators of terrorism to discuss terrorism." On the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Jaishankar said that connectivity is good for development, but it cannot violate any state's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It violates Indian sovereignty and poses a security threat to India.

It is a fact that Bilawal Bhutto came to India as the Foreign Minister of the SCO member state, which is part of multilateral diplomacy, and he was treated accordingly. Some media channels were more optimistic about the possibility of the India-Pakistan meeting. Bilawal Bhutto's visit is less an attempt to improve ties with India than an opportunity to strengthen engagement with the SCO and advance its foreign policy interests.

Narendra Modi's government would go for bilateral talks with Pakistan until the issue of cross-border terrorism was addressed. The firm stand of India is that "talks and terror cannot go together". Pakistan must create a conducive atmosphere for bilateral talks by containing cross-border terrorism.

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### **Trilateral Dialogue among China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan**

**Smita Tiwary\***

On May 06, 2023, the foreign ministers of three countries—China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—participated in the fifth Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue (TFMD) held in Islamabad. The three ministers agreed to advance political engagement and counterterrorism cooperation and enhance trade, investments, and connectivity under the trilateral framework. The fourth edition of TFMD was held in China in June 2021, just before the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021. Launched in 2017, the Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue is a meeting platform between the foreign ministers of China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan aimed at promoting cooperation between the three countries in various fields, including trade, investment, infrastructure development, and security.

The acting foreign minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi, who is subject to a travel ban by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) but was given an exemption to visit Islamabad, met his Chinese counterpart, Qin Gang. Afghanistan is crucial for China regarding geopolitics, serving as a bridge between South and Central Asia in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and, most importantly, the untapped mineral riches and resources worth billions of dollars, attracting China to invest in the country. Besides delivering humanitarian aid, China has already considered taking economic initiatives in the war-torn country. China has maintained direct communication with the Taliban administration, and both sides have met on several occasions, bilaterally and internationally, to discuss plans for Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Besides meeting with his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and discussing key issues of mutual concern, Muttaqi also met Pakistan Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir, and the two discussed various aspects of regional security, border management, and the formalisation of bilateral security mechanisms for improvement in the current security environment. Both China and Pakistan

have said that they oppose interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, illegal unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan, and all acts that undermine regional peace and stability.

Though the Taliban has not been recognised by any country as yet, the Taliban leadership was invited to an international conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, that included delegates from 30 other countries, including the EU, the U.S., and representatives of the United Nations. Western governments, however, insist on seeing the Taliban improve its record on women's and human rights, as well as inclusivity in government, before they can engage in any meaningful way and give the Taliban official recognition. However, humanitarian and economic assistance are being provided to the people of Afghanistan by these countries.

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## **China's Manoeuvrings in the Russia-Ukraine Crisis**

**Anshu Joshi\***

This seems to be a period of global cataclysm. The world had not yet recovered from the black shadow of COVID-19, and the Russia-Ukraine war created a big crisis for the whole world. On the other hand, in the Indo-Pacific region, the dispute between China and Taiwan has also deepened. This crisis may not only change the destiny of China; it will certainly have a global impact.

Today's world is a world of globalisation, a world of complex interdependence, a world of cooperation rather than conflict, an open economy, and a world painted by the colours of democratic values. We can see the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, but at the same time, mutual cooperation is also being promoted among countries through international forums.

SCO is one such platform through which its eight member nations, along with the observer and invited nations and institutions, try to discuss and collaborate economically as well as culturally, and promote regional and global peace and security. This year, New Delhi is hosting the SCO summit. The defence ministers of the member nations have gathered to discuss various challenges and opportunities. Pakistan is attending the summit virtually. Considering its present situation, it can be understood. This time, our Defence Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh, has done an incredible job. Without mincing his words, he clearly stated that unless and until China resolves border disputes with India, bilateral or diplomatic relations between India and China cannot be normalised. The message is loud and clear. This is the new India. This India will not take any bullying from anyone. Be it its Five Fingers policy, or Salami Strategy, or String of Pearls Strategy, China has always backstabbed India. But gone are the days when India took all the intimidation from China and did not utter a word. This is not the phase of the 1950s or 1960s. Today's India has already strengthened its infrastructural and military capabilities on the North-eastern front, where China intrudes into our borders, and has also created diplomatic support for itself.

Be it China, Russia, or the Western Lobby, India has successfully maintained a balanced diplomatic position. As the external affairs minister of India has mentioned, India is not non-aligned; it is rather aligned with all groups and lobbies to resolve global challenges and promote Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam. SCO generates hope in the direction of accomplishing economic, cultural, and political cooperation and collaboration in the region. The member nations are all set to welcome new members, Iran and Belarus, probably in the month of July, when New Delhi will host the finale of the SCO summit. At the same time, India is promoting the development of economic corridors so that the nations of this region can boost their trade and economic activities. Also, promoting people-to-people connections is a prioritised objective at present for the SCO so that the member nations can promote trusted relationships and then elevate the same to strategic partnerships.

Such platforms do provide new opportunities to grow, provided they are not used for the selfish political agenda of one or two nations. So far, SCO seems to be going in the right direction, and despite China's manoeuvrings to present it as a counterpart to the similar platforms promoted by the western lobby, it is working on positive regional and global objectives. The world likes development, as do the states and the people at the end of the day. I hope not only SCO but all such organisations understand the significance of sustainable development and work to promote global development, peace, and security.

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## **Train to Nepal: Jaynagar Kurtha Train Service Completed its First Year of Operation**

**Amit Kumar\***

The first broad-gauge passenger train service between India and Nepal, which connects Kurtha in Nepal's Janakpur city with Jaynagar in Bihar, completed its first year of operation on April 03, 2023. The 34.9-kilometre-long railway service between the two countries is providing a new dimension for cross-border connectivity. The establishment of the new passenger train service is a key turning point for Indo-Nepal railway connectivity, and will certainly strengthen people-to-people linkages as well as border trade between the two countries. As mentioned in the Press Information Bureau (PIB) release, the Jayanagar-Kurtha section (34.9 KM) is a part of the Jaynagar-Bijalpura-Bardibas rail (68.72 KM) project, which has entirely been funded by the Government of India.

Nepal's history with railways, or the history of the Indo-Nepal railway link, goes back to before 1930. The first railway service in Nepal was initiated in 1927 between Amalekhagunj (Nepal) and Raxaul (India). However, the service on this route could not last long because of a lack of proper maintenance and management and tedious customs service, and it finally shut down in 1960. The second Indo-Nepal railway service, linking Jaynagar in India with Janakpur and Bijalpura in Nepal, was launched in 1937. This route was created to transport timber from the Terai region in Nepal to India. Even though two new locomotives were acquired in 1962, the railway has never been properly maintained, and the

shipper faced additional issues and costs because the Nepalese customs inspection had to be offloaded and reloaded at Jaynagar.

Furthermore, the Koshi Railway was built in 1997 as a component of the Koshi Bridge project in order to transport building materials and equipment from Bathnaha to Birpur and Bhimnager (the location of the Koshi barrage), as well as building materials (gravel and stone) from Dharan and Chatra to the project site. It was not accessible for the delivery of public commodities.

Now, after the completion of the Jaynagar- Kurtha railway line, the governments of India and Nepal are looking forward to turning the proposal for the ambitious Raxaul-Kathmandu railway into a reality. In August 2018, the two countries signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a preliminary engineering cum traffic survey. And later, in October 2021, an MoU on performing a final location study was signed by the two counties. This proposed rail route is being considered a response to China's effort to extend the railway up to Kathmandu (the Kerung-Kathmandu railway). Although China's railway project was planned a little earlier, the Indian project is leading on the implementation front. The Chinese technical team is struggling with the feasibility study for the proposed Kerung-Kathmandu cross-border railway, while India has almost completed a detailed feasibility study.

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## **Explained:** The Forum for India–Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC)

### **What is FIPIC?**

The FIPIC is an intergovernmental forum that promotes collaboration and communication between India and the Pacific Island countries (PIC). In order to improve engagement and strengthen ties with the PIC, India formed it in 2014. It was launched during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Fiji in November 2014.

### **Who are the members of the FIPIC?**

The FIPIC comprises India and 14 Pacific Islands countries- Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federal States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

### **What is the history of the Forum for India–Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Summit?**

The Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) was established during the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi's visit to Fiji in November 2014. India had provided several significant assistance initiatives when FIPIC was first introduced in 2014. Establishing a special USD \$1 million fund for clean energy and climate change adaptation, opening a trade office in India and establishing a Pan Pacific

Islands e-network to improve digital connectivity, and extending the visa on arrival policy to all 14 Pacific Island countries at Indian airports were among the key proposed projects.

The second summit of the Forum for India Pacific Cooperation (FIPIC) took place in Jaipur on August 21 and 22, 2015, and it significantly improved India's relationship with the 14 Pacific Island nations. The third Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Summit held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea on May 22, 2023. It was co-chaired by the Prime Ministers of India and Papua New Guinea. The 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) were participated in the Summit.

### **What are the key highlights of the third FIPIC Summit?**

The third summit of the India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) was co-chaired by PM Modi and PM James Marape of Papua New Guinea. On May 21, during the Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that he views the Pacific Island countries as "large ocean countries" rather than discrete island entities. The Prime Minister asserted, "For me, you are large ocean countries and not small island states."

PM Modi launched a comprehensive 12-step initiative designed to advance India's partnerships with Pacific Island countries. As media reported, the 12 steps include opening up a new 100-bed regional super speciality hospital in Fiji, establishment of Regional IT and Cyber Security Training Hub in Papua New Guinea, Sagar Amrut Scholarships -1000 scholarships in the next 5 years, Jaipur Foot Camp in Papua New Guinea in 2023, and, set up of Jan Aushadi Kendras Yoga centres.

Source: PM Modi announces 12-step action plan to boost ties with Pacific Island countries, 22 May 2023, <https://theprint.in/world/pm-modi-announces-12-step-plan-to-propel-indias-partnerships-with-pacific-island-countries/1587463/>  
Forum for India- Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), <https://ficci-fipic.com/about.html>

## **News Brief**

### **India and the World**

#### **The Global Buddhist Summit: An Affirmation of India's Developing Soft Power**

The two-day 'Global Buddhist Summit', jointly hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) concluded on 21 April 2023 in New Delhi. Over 170 eminent monks, academics, and practitioners from 30 nations discussed how to apply Buddhist knowledge to tackle today's pressing global issues. The summit's resolution, the "Delhi Declaration," might be seen as an affirmation of India's developing soft power, efforts to boost the nation's credentials as a leading player in Buddhism, particularly at a time when rival China has sought to host comparable gatherings, and an endeavour to pledge a Buddhist response to the extraordinary contemporary global crisis.

At the inaugural Global Buddhist Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised that the Buddha's teachings are the basis for solutions to the greatest challenges confronting the world, including war, economic instability, terrorism, and climate change. "Buddha is beyond the individual, it is a perception. Buddha is a thought that transcends the individual. Buddha is a thought that



transcends form and Buddha is a consciousness beyond manifestation. This Buddha consciousness is eternal, ceaseless. This thought is eternal. This realisation is distinctive”, the Prime Minister said. Moreover, the Prime Minister asserts, “There is no problem in the modern world whose solution we could not find in the teachings of the Buddha hundreds of years ago. The war and unrest that the world is suffering today, the Buddha had given solutions centuries ago. Buddha said: जयन् वेरन् पसवति, दुक्खन् सेति पराजितो, उपसंतो सुखन् सेति, हित्व जय पराजयः i.e., Conquest begets enmity; the conquered lie down in distress.”

Full text of PM speech at Global Buddha Summit is available at:

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1918232>

Source: Global Buddhist Summit: An assertion of India’s growing soft power, The Federal, <https://thefederal.com/news/global-buddhist-summit-an-assertion-of-indias-growing-soft-power/> Buddha’s teachings offer solution to global problems: PM Modi at Buddhist summit, Hindustan Times, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pm-modi-addresses-global-buddhist-summit-says-lord-buddha-s-teachings-hold-solution-to-world-s-greatest-challenges-including-war-terrorism-and-climate-change-101681997059302.html>

### India, SCO, Shared Buddhist Heritage

An international conference on ‘Shared Buddhist Heritage’ with a focus on India’s civilisational connection with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was organised on 14-15 March at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. The conference, a first of its kind event under India’s leadership of SCO, aimed to bring SCO member countries, observer states and dialogue partners on a common platform to discuss ‘Shared Buddhist Heritage’. Later, India also hosted SCO Tourism Ministers’ Meeting (TMM) on 17th -18th March 2023 in Varanasi. Varanasi was nominated as the first-ever SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital during the 22nd Meeting of SCO Council of Heads of State in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on September 16, 2022. Amid China's attempts to claim the legacy, India is prepared to position itself as the country from which Buddhism spread throughout the region.

Source: SCO’s ‘Shared Buddhist Heritage’ meet explores civilizational connects in Delhi, TMM meet in Kashi, News On Air, March 14, 2023 <https://newsonair.com/2023/03/14/scos-shared-buddhist-heritage-meet-explores-civilizational-connects-in-delhi-tmm-meet-in-kashi/>

### China Reopens Kailash Mansarovar Yatra with New Restrictions: Report

After keeping them closed for three years, the Chinese government has reopened several crossings on the Nepal-China border leading to the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage. The increased cost of travel permits for both tourists and tour operators as well as the additional restrictions have been reported in Nepali media to deter pilgrims from visiting Kailash Mansarovar. According to Nepali travel agents, the complicated procedures are intended to regulate the entry of international pilgrims, primarily Indians.

Source: China reopens Kailash Mansarovar Yatra with new restrictions to discourage Indian pilgrims: Report, 10 May 2023, <https://www.opindia.com/2023/05/china-reopens-kailash-mansarovar-yatra-with-new-restrictions-to-discourage-indian-pilgrims-report/#:~:text=The%20tour%20operators%20in%20Nepal,away%20from%20Kailash%20Mansarovar%20Yatra>

## **Culture is a Significant Factor in the Formulation of Global Policy**

Speaking at the second meeting of the G20 Culture Working Group's delegate-level discussions, Union minister G Kishan Reddy noted that culture is a significant factor in the formulation of global policy. "Culture plays an important role in global policy-making as it leads to more inclusive and sustainable solutions to address contemporary challenges. In this light, the G20 Culture Working Group plays a pivotal role in fostering collaboration and promoting dialogue among members," the minister said.

Source: India committed to promoting cultural dialogues with different countries: Reddy, The Week, 15 May, 2023, <https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/national/2023/05/15/cal27-od-g20-culture.html>

## **Global Military Spending at a Record High, India Fourth**

India's military spending of \$81.4 billion in 2022 was the fourth largest in the world, a jump of 6% from the previous year. According to the latest data released by SIPRI, total global military spending increased by 3.7% in real terms to reach \$2,240 billion in 2022, with the steepest year-on-year increase in at least 30 years due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The 10 largest military spenders are the US (\$877 billion), China (\$292 billion), Russia (\$86.4 billion), India (\$81.4 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$75 billion), UK (\$68.5 billion), Germany (\$55.8 billion), France (\$53.6 billion), South Korea (\$46.4 billion) and Japan (\$46 billion). Ukraine is placed at 11th rank with \$44 billion and Pakistan at 24th spot with \$10.3 billion.

Source: Global military spend at record high, India fourth, Times of India, 25 April <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/global-military-spend-at-record-high-india-fourth/articleshowprint/99741599.cms>

## **PM Narendra Modi Reiterated India's Position on the Russia-Ukraine Crisis at the G7 Working Session**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated India's position on the Russia-Ukraine crisis during a speech at the G7 Working Session in Hiroshima, Japan. PM Modi sees the current state of Ukraine as a matter of humanity and human values more than politics or the economy. He asked the international community to speak out against any unilateral attempt to alter the "status quo." "We have said from the beginning, that dialogue and diplomacy is the only way. And to solve this situation, we will try as much as possible, whatever can be done from India," PM Modi said.

Need to raise voice together against unilateral attempts to change status quo, PM Modi at G7 Summit, The Mint, 21 May 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/pm-modi-at-g7-summit-russia-ukraine-china-japan-hiroshima-need-to-raise-voice-status-quo-zelensky-11684682844864.html>

## **PM to Visit US on June 22**

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, will pay a state visit to Washington, DC, on June 22, at the invitation of US President Joe Biden, the White House announced on 10 June 2023. During the visit, Biden and First Lady Jill Biden will also welcome Modi for a state banquet. In the midst of shared concerns over China's moves in Asia and beyond, Modi's state visit is seen in Washington DC as a sign of the strengthening India-US strategic cooperation. Additionally, the Biden administration is sending a clear message that it is dedicated to working with the Modi-led administration in spite of criticism

from some sectors of the US political and media ecosystems regarding India's alleged "democratic backsliding." The visit is anticipated to place a substantial emphasis on the two nations' more recent areas of collaboration, including emerging technologies, supply chain diversification, and the knowledge partnership.

Source: Narendra Modi invited to the US on a state visit: What are state visits? Indian Express 12 May 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/narendra-modi-the-us-state-visit-8603499/>

### **India, Israel Sign Agreement on Agriculture and Water Cooperation**

Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Eliyahu Cohen, visited India on May 9, 2023. A 37-member corporate delegation, in addition to senior Israeli government officials, was with him. His trip to India was his first as Foreign Minister. The ongoing Sudanese conflict, current events in West Asia, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, among other topics, were discussed by Israeli Foreign Minister Eliyahu Cohen during his first visit to India on May 9 2023.

On behalf of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Mr. Cohen called on Shri Narendra Modi and extended his best wishes. PM Modi emphasised the expanding collaboration on innovation and knowledge between India and Israel. "India and Israel exchanged two Letters of Intent (LoI) for setting up Centres of Water Technology at IIT, Roorkee, and IIT, Madras, and another LoI for the establishment of an upgraded Centre of Innovation in Agriculture at ICAR, Pusa, New Delhi."

Source: India, Israel sign agreement on agriculture and water cooperation, May 10, 2023, <https://newsonair.com/2023/05/10/india-israel-sign-agreement-on-agriculture-and-water-cooperation/>

### **NSA Ajit Doval in Saudi Arabia to Discuss Infrastructure Projects**

On May 7, in Saudi Arabia, the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval met with his colleagues from the US, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a plan put up by the US to utilise Indian expertise in rail connectivity and create sea lanes linkages between South Asia and the Middle East. The planned project sends a message that India and the United States are prepared to extend their coordinated efforts to balance China outside of the Indo-Pacific. As Axios reported, the new initiative's concept was discussed over the past 18 months in a forum called I2U2, which includes, Israel, the UAE, and India, the forum was created in late 2021 to talk about important West Asian infrastructure initiatives.

Source: India, US Join Hands To Counter China's BRI In The Middle East, Propose Joint Rail Link Project In NSA Meet In Riyadh; Israel May Join Later, 08 May 2023, <https://swarajyamag.com/world/india-us-join-hands-to-counter-chinas-bri-in-the-middle-east-propose-new-rail-link-project-in-nsa-meet-in-riyadh>

### **Japan and France to Ensure Peace and Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region**

On 09 May 2023 in Tokyo, Japan and France reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific area, where China has been gaining economic and military sway. During their "two-plus-two" discussions, the foreign and defence ministries of the two countries confirmed that their fundamental stances on Taiwan are unaffected. The statement has a new connotation, as in the midst of a heated rivalry between the US and China over the Taiwan problem, Macron drew

criticism from his Western allies when he stated in a media interview that Europe must not be a "follower" of any country. Following the virtual security talks, the French ambassadors Catherine Colonna and Sebastien Lecornu, along with the Japanese foreign ministers Yoshimasa Hayashi and Yasukazu Hamada, expressed "grave concerns over the situations in the East and South China seas."

Source: Japan, France vow to ensure peace, stability in Indo-Pacific region, Kyodo News, May 9, 2023, [A05/228d42041960-refiling-japan-france-Avow-to-ensure-peace-stability-in-indo-pacific-region.html](https://www.kyodonews.net/news/2023/05/a05/228d42041960-refiling-japan-france-Avow-to-ensure-peace-stability-in-indo-pacific-region.html)

### **Xi Jinping Names 19 Sea bed Features in the Indian Ocean**

A day before China renamed 11 various geographic places in India's Arunachal Pradesh which was swiftly rejected by New Delhi, it designated 19 sub-surface features in the South Indian Ocean. Out of the 19 named seabed features in the Indian Ocean, six are east of the ridge feature in the deep Indian Ocean towards Antarctica, four are off the coasts of Madagascar, eight are on the south-west ridge, six are off the coasts of Oman and the Chinese port of Djibouti off the African horn, and one is west of the ridge feature in the Indian Ocean. Chinese propaganda media has called it a projection of Beijing's "soft power".

Source: Xi Jinping projects dominance in Indian Ocean, names 19 sea bed features, Hindustan Times, 17 April, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/xi-projects-dominance-in-indian-ocean-names-19-sea-bed-features-101681693691689.html>

### **Bangladesh Unveiled a 15-point Outlook Policy Document on Indo Pacific**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh issued a 15-point vision and strategy document on the Indo-Pacific region before her trip to the three nations- Japan, Australia and the US. "This is a clear signal to all QUAD members—India, Japan, Australia, and the US—that Dhaka is now willing to cooperate with them to support a rule-based international regime," as Financial Express quoted the remarks of a Bangladeshi expert. As media reported, the 15-point perspective stressed the importance of stability as a precondition for economic growth and also made it clear that Dhaka had no preference in the region's rising geopolitical confrontation between China and the United States.

Source: Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Strategy envisions a free, secure, open, peaceful inclusive Indo-Pacific region, 25 April 2023, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-bangladesh-unveils-indo-pacific-strategy-expert-says-it-is-still-trying-to-placate-china-3062557/>

### **UN Urges Countries with Influence in Africa to Help End Sudan conflict**

Following the reports of progress in the cease-fire negotiations between the army and the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, the UN urged the countries with influence in Africa to assist to end the crisis in Sudan. Volker Turk, the UN representative for Sudan, stated that both parties had violated international humanitarian law. He encouraged "all states with influence in the region to encourage, by all possible means, the resolution of this crisis."

Source: UN urges countries with influence in Africa to help end Sudan conflict, 11 May, 2010 <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/un-urges-countries-with-influence-in-africa-to-help-end-sudan-conflict-13198667>

### EAM S. Jaishankar Visit to Latin American Countries

29 April, 2023 marked the conclusion of S. Jaishankar's nine-day travel through Latin America, which included stops in Guyana, Panama, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. The tour underscores the strategic importance of these countries in India's foreign policy objectives. The visit of Jaishankar began on April 21 in Guyana, where he co-chaired the 5th India-Guyana Joint Commission Meeting with Foreign Minister Hugh Todd and discussed issues like infrastructure development, energy, and defence collaboration. Jaishankar also held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Trinidad and Tobago, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, and Barbados. Moreover, Guyana's president Irfaan Ali and Foreign Minister Todd commissioned the India-built ferry MV Ma Lisha to increase accessibility and mobility inside the country. In addition, on 22nd April, EAM Jaishankar co-chaired the fourth India-CARICOM ministerial meeting with his Jamaican counterpart Kamina J. Smith. Along with other Foreign Ministers from Caribbean countries including Surinam, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, and Dominica, Jaishankar discussed ways to cooperate in the areas of commerce, agriculture, medicines, digital infrastructure, counterterrorism, and more.

On April 24, Jaishankar arrived in Panama and met with the president Nito Cortizo and the Foreign Minister Janaina Tewaney Mencomo. They discussed medicines, renewable energy, logistics, and other topics. Panama, a major economic and logistical hub, contributes significantly to India's foreign policy goals as the largest trade partner in Central America, reported annual trade of \$610 million in 2022. Jaishankar arrived in Colombia on April 25. Here, he attended the India-Colombia business summit and met his counterpart, Alvaro Leyva Duran. The Cultural Exchange Programme for 2023–26 was formally signed by the two leaders. On April 27, Jaishankar arrived in the Dominican Republic to conclude his journey through Latin America. Apart from bilateral discussions on business, mining, technology, and other topics, he also inaugurated the Indian Embassy in the Dominican Republic with Vice President Raquel Pea, and the Plaza Mahatma Gandhi in Santo Domingo with Foreign Minister Roberto Alvarez.

Source: Energy, trade & climate change — EAM Jaishankar's 9-day visit to Latin America puts focus on key issues, The Print, 02 May, 2023, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/energy-trade-climate-change-eam-jaishankars-9-day-visit-to-latin-america-puts-focus-on-key-issues/1550457/>

## Neighbourhood First

### Sri Lanka is Recreating the Ramayana Trail

The Ramayana route is being recreated in Sri Lanka. This trail passes by a number of well-known landmarks, including Sigiriya, Ashok Vatika, and Divurumpola Temple, among others. Numerous temples connected to the epic can be found in the well-known temple town of Trincomalee. The idea of permitting transactions in Indian Rupee on the island exists as well. Many Sri Lankans take pride in imparting their knowledge of the epic to visitors since the Ramayana has had a profound influence on Sri Lankan culture.

Source: Ramayana Trail to be developed in Sri Lanka; visitors may be allowed to use Indian Rupee, Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/travel-news/ramayana-trail-to-be-developed-in-sri-lanka-visitors-may-be-allowed-to-use-indian-rupee/articleshow/99187118.cms>

### PM Sekh Hasina Called for Promoting 'Culture of Peace'

Inaugurating the two-day Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) on 12 May 2023 at Dhaka, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called for promoting 'culture of peace' and people centric development in the region. She further noted, women, half of the total world population, should get due attention, for building peaceful and inclusive societies in the region. She also stressed the need to promote open, transparent, rules-based order that facilitate equitable and sustainable development in the region and beyond through inclusive economic growth.

Source: PM Hasina raises 6 priorities for Indian Ocean region's 'resilient future', 13 May, 2023, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/3gzytkvr5>

### Bangladesh Permits India's Permanent Access to Chattogram, Mongla Ports for Improved Trade and Connectivity

Bangladesh has made a significant decision by granting India permission to use Chattogram and Mongla ports to transit and trans-shipment cargo vessels. By allowing India to use the ports of Chattogram and Mongla for cargo vessel transit and trans-shipment, Bangladesh has made a crucial strategic move. Earlier, transporting goods between India and its North Eastern states has been encountered serious time and cost problems. Officials from both nations, however, recently disclosed that the new choice to provide India access to the ports of Chattogram and Mongla will overcome these issues and lead to shorter travel distances and lower costs.

Source: Bangladesh permits India's permanent access to Chattogram, Mongla ports, Mint 01 May 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/bangladesh-permits-indias-permanent-access-to-chattogram-mongla-ports-for-improved-trade-and-connectivity-11682911454706.html>

### Is China trying to Recruit Nepal's Gorkhas into its army?

According to media reports, Beijing's Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) is seeking to enlist the renowned Gorkhas of Nepal. Beijing's long-held ambitions to do so may now be realised. Not a single Nepalese Gorkha/ Gurkha will be joining the Indian Army in 2023. The Nepalese Communist government has decided to prohibit the recruitment of about 1,300 Gorkhas who enlist in the Indian Army every year.

The predicament has been the lately launched four-year-service Agnipath (Fire Warriors) scheme of the Indian Army. According to a media report, “China had funded a Nepali Rs 12.7 lakh study to understand the age-old tradition of young boys joining the Indian Army. Experts state that this was a first-of-its-kind study by China.”

Source: China ‘Keen’ To Recruit Gurkha Soldiers Into PLA; Will It Become 3rd Country After UK & India To Hire The Fearless Men? The Eurasian Times. 01 May. 2023 <https://eurasianimes.com/china-keen-to-recruit-gurkha-soldiers-into-pla-will-it-become/> Explained: Is China trying to recruit Nepal’s famed Gorkhas into its army?, First Post, 05 May, 2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/explained-is-china-trying-to-recruit-nepals-famed-gorkhas-into-its-army-12551502.html>

### **Kaladan Waterway India’s Strategic Stamp in Myanmar**

As part of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport project (KMTP), a cargo ship was flagged off on a trial run from Kolkata port to a facility in Sittwe in Myanmar on Thursday, May 04, 2023. Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Shri Shantanu Thakur flagged off MV-ITT LION (V-273) from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata as the inaugural shipment to operationalise the Sittwe Port in Rakhine State of Myanmar. In accordance with a framework agreement between India and Myanmar, Sittwe Port has been constructed to facilitate the building and operation of a multimodal transit transport facility on the Kaladan River that will link the Sittwe port in Myanmar with the Indian state of Mizoram. When KMTP is fully operating, it will offer an alternative route from the eastern coast of India to the northern states via the Sittwe port.

Source: Shri Shantanu Thakur flags off MV-ITT LION (V-273) from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata as the inaugural shipment to operationalise the Sittwe Port in Rakhine State of Myanmar, PIB Release, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, 04 May, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1921928>

### **India-Financed Sittwe Port Opens in Myanmar**

On May 10, 2023, the strategic Sittwe Port in Myanmar was jointly inaugurated by Indian Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal and Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister for Transport & Communications of Myanmar, Admiral Tin Aung. At the event, they received the first Indian cargo ship which was flagged off from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata.

The port, which was constructed with Indian aid, will be crucial for connectivity and will cut the cost and duration of shipping products between Kolkata, Agartala, and Aizwal by 50%. "The operationalisation of Sittwe Port would enhance bilateral and regional trade as well as contribute to the local economy of Rakhine State of Myanmar. The greater connectivity provided by the Port will lead to employment opportunities and enhanced growth prospects in the region," mentioned in a press release issued by the Ministry of Port, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India.

Source: India-financed Sittwe Port opens in Myanmar, countering China's connectivity projects, 11 May 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-financed-sittwe-port-myanmar-chinas-connectivity-projects-2377650-2023-05-11>,

### **Nepal Access to Seven Chinese Ports for Third-Country Trade**

Seven years after signing the Trade and Transit Agreement with China, which grants Nepal access to seven Chinese ports for third-country trade, not a single shipment has moved. In April 2016, to end



the India's monopoly for third-country trade the then-Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli paid an official visit to China, where the two sides signed an agreement granting Nepal access to four Chinese seaports in Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang, and Zhanjiang, as well as three land ports in Lanzhou, Lhasa, and Shigatse for third-country imports. But they have failed to move beyond the signing of the agreement. Even Nepal and China have yet to finalise the standard operating procedure (SOP) for implementing the transit agreement.

Source: 7 years since transit deal with China, no shipment has moved, Kathmandu Post, 22 April 2023, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2023/04/22/7-years-since-transit-deal-with-china-no-shipment-has-moved> The Print, <https://theprint.in/world/nepal-seven-years-since-transit-deal-with-china-no-shipment-has-moved/1534364/>

### **India & Maldives Agree to Deepen Defence-Security Ties**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commenced official visit to the Maldives on 1 May 2023, at the invitation of his Maldivian counterpart Mariya Ahmed Didi. The visiting Defence Minister held bilateral discussions with the president of the Maldives, Ibrahim Solih, the foreign minister, Abdulla Shahid, and the defence minister, Mariya Didi. They discussed a range of regional and global security issues and agreed to deepen their cooperation in defence and security. Moreover, on May 03, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Maldivian counterpart laid the foundation stone for the Coast Guard 'Ekatha Harbour' at Sifavaru in Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) atoll, and attended a formal ceremony to hand over an Offshore Patrol Vessel, along with an assault landing craft.

Source: India, Maldives hold talks to enhance defence cooperation, Mint, 03 May 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/defence-ministers-of-india-and-maldives-agree-to-strengthen-security-partnership-through-bilateral-talks-and-joint-exercises-11683108205024.html>

### **China & Pakistan Agree to Extend Belt and Road Initiative to Afghanistan**

On 06 May, 2023, During the 4th round of the Foreign Minister-level Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue in Islamabad, it was decided that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a component of the Belt and Road plan, will be expanded into Afghanistan. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and China's Qin Gang were agreed to cooperate in Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts, as well bringing the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to the country ruled by the Taliban. They decided that both the sides will "continue their humanitarian and economic assistance for the Afghan people and enhance development cooperation in Afghanistan".

Source: At Islamabad meeting, China & Pakistan agree to extend Belt and Road initiative to Afghanistan, 07 May, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-to-enter-afghanistan-8596584/>



## Key Speeches and Statements

### Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi During Global Buddha Summit

- The Global Buddhist Summit is being hosted at a time when India has completed 75 years of its independence and is celebrating the 'Amrit Mahotsav' of its independence. India also has huge goals for its future as well as new resolutions for global welfare in this 'Amrit Kaal'. Today, India has taken new initiatives on several issues in the world. And our biggest inspiration behind those initiatives is Lord Buddha.
- Today, it is very necessary that the world should come out of the definitions of materialism and selfishness and imbibe this feeling of 'भवतु सब्ब मंगलन्' (May all be well). Buddha should not only be made a symbol, but also a reflection, only then the resolution of 'भवतु सब्ब मंगलन्' will be fulfilled. Therefore, we have to remember the words of the Buddha: "मा निवत्त, अभि-क्कम"! i.e. Do not turn back. Move forward!

Source: PM's Inaugural address at the Global Buddhist Summit, Delhi, 20 April, 2023, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/pms-inaugural-address-at-the-global-buddhist-summit-delhi/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-inaugural-address-at-the-global-buddhist-summit-delhi/)

### External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at the SCO Foreign Minister Meet at Goa

- It is gratifying to note, that the further deepening of the bonds of friendship and cooperation in SCO and events like the SCO Millet Food Festival, Film Festival, Cultural showcase at Surajkund Mela, the SCO Tourism Mart, Conference on Shared Buddhist Heritage, were all successfully hosted by India. I am particularly delighted to note that Varanasi as the first SCO cultural and tourist capital for 2022-23 hosted several colourful events with active participation from Member States. As SCO Chair we have initiated an unprecedented engagement with SCO Observers and Dialogue Partners by inviting them to participate in more than 14 socio-cultural events.
- India has always stood for multilateral approaches to addressing global challenges and has always been a willing partner in sharing our expertise and experience. In this regard India's own achievement in the field of startups and innovation is a remarkable journey. Today, there are more than 70,000 startups in India of which more than a hundred are unicorns. We stand ready to share our experience with Member States.
- Taking our eyes off the menace would be detrimental to our security interests. We firmly believe that there can be no justification for terrorism and it must be stopped in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism.
- The channel of finances for terrorist activities must be seized and blocked without distinction. Members need not be reminded that combating terrorism is one of the original mandates of the SCO.

Source: Opening Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers, 05May2023, [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-statements.htm?dtl/36532/Opening\\_Remarks\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_at\\_the\\_SCO\\_Council\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Ministers\\_May\\_05\\_2023](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-statements.htm?dtl/36532/Opening_Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_SCO_Council_of_Foreign_Ministers_May_05_2023)

### **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh During Maldives Visit**

- India has emerged as a leading defence exporter in recent years. A defence manufacturing ecosystem has been created which has the advantage of abundant technical manpower. We produce world-class equipment to meet not only our own needs, but also for exports. India's commitment to supporting the Maldives will only get stronger with time.
- The India-Maldives relationship is truly special. Our relationship has withstood the test of time and we have always supported each-other in the hours of need.

Source: Raksha Mantri hands over a Fast Patrol Vessel & a Landing Craft Assault ship to Maldives on Day 2 of his visit, Press Information Bureau (PIB) Release, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 02 May 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1921358>

### **External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar at the Inaugural Session of 6th Indian Ocean Conference at Dhaka**

- For a nation like India, this means a land-connect to South East Asia. And a multi-modal one to the Gulf and beyond. Central Asia offers its own distinct challenges due to obstacles in between. Collectively, the more we work on facilitating smooth and effective connectivity, the better off we all are.
- Collectively, the more we work on facilitating smooth and effective connectivity, the better off we all are. And obviously, we need to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity while doing so. Let me therefore underline that from India's perspective, efficient and effective connectivity to ASEAN in particular will be a game-changer. We accord this the utmost priority.
- Nations of the Indian Ocean are among those who lead the rise of Asia and the re-emergence of Africa. They have the responsibility today of shaping the narrative, shaping it about values, practices and correctness. It is essential that their culture, history and traditions are presented to the world.

Source: Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Inaugural Session of 6th Indian Ocean Conference, 12 May, 2023, [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36547/Remarks\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_at\\_the\\_Inaugural\\_Session\\_of\\_6th\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_Conference](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36547/Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_Inaugural_Session_of_6th_Indian_Ocean_Conference)

## Statistics Corner



Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India, as on 12-05-23

**\*The CSIR team expresses its gratitude to all sources of information that helped compile the news and generate opinions on the subject.**

