



Chapter 6 - India and the World

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is primarily responsible for managing India's foreign relations. The MEA pursues an outcome-oriented foreign policy to safeguard India's strategic autonomy, security, and territorial integrity. This is achieved through active participation in multilateral fora, advocating for reformed multilateralism, and strengthening bilateral ties with like-minded partners. The focus remained on building upon outcomes from India's G20 Presidency, especially in areas like regional connectivity, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPIs), and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

Global Engagements

- In a year marked by economic, climatic, and geopolitical challenges, India maintained high-level diplomatic engagements to address global issues, including climate change, poverty, and counterterrorism. Under the "Neighbourhood First" policy, India strengthened regional ties and expanded global partnerships, notably signing a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Free Trade Association.

Neighbourhood First Policy

India's "Neighbourhood First" policy prioritises connectivity and cooperation with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The policy focuses on respect, dialogue, peace, and prosperity.

- **Afghanistan:** India supports Afghanistan through infrastructure projects, education (ICCR scholarships), humanitarian aid, and trade via Chabahar port.
 - Since 2022, India has supplied vital aid in partnership with UNODC and maintains a technical team in Kabul.
- **Bangladesh:** India and Bangladesh share deep historical and cultural ties. In FY 2023-24, bilateral trade reached \$14.01 million.
 - Major joint projects include the Akhaura-Agartala rail link, Khulna-Mongla Port rail line, and Maitree Power Plant.
- **Bhutan:** India and Bhutan maintain close relations based on mutual trust. Cooperation spans hydropower, fintech, health, space, and education. High-level exchanges continued, including MoUs on energy, digital connectivity, and youth engagement. Notably, India extended a ₹1,500 crore concessional loan for Bhutan's Gyalsung National Service Programme. The Indian PM was honoured with Bhutan's highest civilian award, the Order of the Druk Gyalpo.
- **Maldives:** Maldives, a maritime neighbour of India, shares deep ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and commercial ties with India. Both nations play vital roles in ensuring security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
 - Consequently, Maldives holds a special place in India's *Neighbourhood First* policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
 - In October 2024, the President of Maldives visited India, marking key milestones: the virtual inauguration of a new runway at Hanimaadhoo International Airport, handover of 700 social housing units financed by EXIM Bank of India, and the launch of the RuPay card in Maldives.

- **Myanmar:** India shares a 1,700 km land border and a maritime boundary with Myanmar. Historic spiritual, cultural, and ethnic links bind the two nations. As India's only ASEAN neighbour, Myanmar is critical to the *Neighbourhood First* and *Act East* policies. In 2023, bilateral trade stood at USD 1.76 billion, with exports worth USD 807 million. Connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTP) and India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) highway are priorities.
 - In September 2024, under Operation Sadbhav, India sent 53 tonnes of flood relief worth USD 1 million.
- **Nepal:** India and Nepal share age-old civilisational and cultural ties, with Nepal being a priority under India's *Neighbourhood First* policy. Relations focus on connectivity, trade, energy, digital cooperation, and cultural exchange.
 - Key agreements included High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs), long-term power trade, the Muna Satellite launch service, and renewable energy cooperation between NTPC Ltd. and Nepal Electricity Authority.
- **Pakistan:** India seeks normal relations with Pakistan, contingent on a terror-free environment. India remains firm on national security while pursuing humanitarian issues like the exchange of prisoners and pilgrimages.
 - In January 2024, both countries exchanged lists of nuclear facilities under a bilateral agreement.
- **Sri Lanka:** India and Sri Lanka share over 2,500 years of cultural, religious, and linguistic connections.
 - Sri Lanka is vital to India's *Neighbourhood First* policy and SAGAR. In February 2024, India's Prime Minister and the President of Sri Lanka jointly inaugurated the UPI payment system in Sri Lanka.

United States of America

- India and the US enjoy a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, based on shared democratic values and converging interests.
- The two nations maintain strong cooperation through platforms like the 2+2 dialogue, G20, QUAD, and I2U2.
- In January 2024, the Indian Navy joined the US-led Exercise Sea Dragon 24 and other key defence engagements like Exercise Tiger Triumph 24 and the 7th Army Executive Steering Group meeting.
- High-level meetings included the Prime Minister's visit to the US for the 4th QUAD Leaders' Summit in September 2024.
 - The summit produced the Quad Wilmington Declaration and launched the "Quad Cancer Moonshot." Bilateral agreements covered clean energy, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), and a joint fact sheet on the US-India partnership.

Russia

- India-Russia relations are long-standing and time-tested, spanning defence, security, trade, science, and technology, and elevated to a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership."
- In July 2024, the Prime Minister visited Russia and co-chaired the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit. He was conferred Russia's highest state honour, "The Order of St. Andrew the Apostle," becoming the first Indian leader to receive it.
- In October 2024, he attended the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, where leaders welcomed 13 new partner countries and adopted the "Kazan Declaration."

Europe and the European Union

- India-EU relations are based on shared values like democracy, rule of law, and multilateralism, covering trade, climate change, digital cooperation, and agriculture.
- In January 2024, the French President visited India as the Chief Guest for Republic Day. Key outcomes included the India-France Defence Industrial Partnership roadmap, Defence Space Partnership, and agreements on helicopter assembly, health cooperation, UPI operationalisation in France, and the India-France Year of Innovation (2026).
- India was elected ISA President (2024-26), with France as co-President.

- The Greek Prime Minister visited India in February 2024, reaffirming the Strategic Partnership.
- In March 2024, India signed a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement with EFTA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland), securing \$100 billion investment and 1 million jobs over 15 years.
- India also signed a visa waiver agreement with Moldova in May 2024.
- In July 2024, the Prime Minister visited Austria, meeting its leadership, CEOs, Indologists, and Nobel Laureates, and addressing the Indian diaspora.
- In August 2024, he visited Poland and Ukraine, marking the first such visit in 45 years to Poland and the first to Ukraine since 1992.
- New Indian missions were opened in Albania and Spain.
- In October 2024, the German Chancellor visited India for the 7th Intergovernmental Consultations, focusing on security, talent mobility, economic cooperation, and green development.
- The Spanish President also visited, and both leaders inaugurated the C295 aircraft assembly plant in Vadodara, signed MoUs on transport, customs cooperation, and investment facilitation.

Australia

- India and Australia, as Comprehensive Strategic Partners, have expanded ties across trade, defence, energy, education, and sports.
- In November 2024, India inaugurated its fourth Consulate General in Brisbane, strengthening people-to-people and institutional linkages.

West Asia

- West Asia remains vital to India's energy security, trade, and diaspora engagement.
- In December 2023, the Sultan of Oman visited India.
- In January 2024, India and Saudi Arabia finalised the Haj quota at 1,75,025 pilgrims.
- In February 2024, the Prime Minister visited the UAE, signing landmark pacts on investment, energy, digital payments (UPI-AANI), credit card interlinking (RuPay-JAYWAN), and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.
 - He also inaugurated the BAPS Hindu Mandir, symbolising deep cultural ties.

Africa

- India and Africa share a longstanding partnership based on mutual respect, historical ties, and shared aspirations. This relationship spans education, digital transformation, healthcare, and economic development.
- India focuses on capacity building and local empowerment, co-creating solutions for challenges like climate change, sustainable growth, and economic inclusion. India supported the African Union's G20 membership and has extended over 200 lines of credit for projects in water, energy, agriculture, and healthcare. Bilateral trade reached nearly USD 100 billion in FY 2023-24.
- In October 2024, the President of India made a historic visit to Algeria, Mauritania, and Malawi.

Indian Ocean Region

- India deepened ties with island nations and took over as Vice-Chair of IORA for 2023-25.
- Key projects included inaugurating infrastructure in Mauritius and expanding digital and healthcare initiatives like the Janaushadhi Scheme.
- In March 2024, India's President attended Mauritius National Day.
- In August 2024, the President visited Fiji and Timor-Leste — both firsts for an Indian Head of State.

Republic of Korea

- India and the Republic of Korea (ROK) established diplomatic ties in 1973, after consular relations in 1962.
- The partnership was upgraded to a "Special Strategic Partnership" in 2015 during the Prime Minister's visit to Seoul.

- The 10th India-ROK Joint Commission Meeting took place in March 2024.

Latin America and the Caribbean

India deepened ties with Latin America, a region rich in resources and market potential.

- Highlights included high-level visits from Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Jamaica, and the signing of an MoU with Cuba on digital cooperation.
- India held the first India-Brazil 2+2 dialogue in March 2024 and provided development aid to Honduras.

United Nations

- India remained active at the UN, advocating multilateralism and UNSC reforms, and addressing global issues like climate change and terrorism.
- India participated in key events including Human Rights 75 and the Global Refugee Forum in 2023.
- The Prime Minister addressed the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2024 and the UN 'Summit of the Future' in September, holding bilateral meetings with global leaders.

Peacekeeping

- India continued as the largest cumulative contributor to UN peacekeeping, with 7,676 personnel deployed across 10 missions, and pledged further support at the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial.

Counter-Terrorism

- India actively engages in bilateral and multilateral efforts to combat terrorism. Through the QUAD Counter-Terrorism Working Group, India shared information on threats, regional coordination, and countering emerging technologies used by terror groups.
- With the US, India conducted the 14th Special Forces exercise *Vajra Prahar* in Meghalaya (November 2023) to enhance joint mission planning and tactics, and held the 20th Counter-Terrorism Joint Working Group meeting in March 2024, reaffirming their commitment to counter-terrorism and regional security cooperation, including in QUAD and other forums.
- India also participated in:
 - The 5th India-Kazakhstan Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism (April 2024, Astana), focusing on regional terror threats, including state-sponsored and cross-border terrorism in South Asia.
 - **Cyber Diplomacy:** In August 2024, India held its first Track 1 Cyber Policy Dialogue with ASEAN, followed by dialogues with Singapore and Italy.

Humanitarian Aid and Assistance

India continues to respond promptly to global crises:

- **Operation Ajay (Oct 2023):** Evacuation from Israel.
- Emergency aid to Gaza, Nepal (earthquake relief, Nov 2023), Papua New Guinea (volcano and landslide relief), and Zambia (cholera outbreak).
- **Operation Indravati (Mar 2024):** Evacuation from Haiti.
- Flood relief to Kenya (May 2024), medical supplies to Cuba, and repatriation of Indian nationals from Kuwait (fire incident, June 2024).
- Rescue of crew from MT Prestige Falcon (July 2024) and evacuation of nationals from Bangladesh and Cambodia.
- Medical and disaster relief aid to Haiti, El Salvador, Syria, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Chad, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.
- **Operation Sadbhav:** Assistance to Typhoon Yagi-affected nations.

Overseas Indian Affairs

- **Diaspora Engagement:** The Chalo India campaign, launched in March 2024, encourages diaspora members to bring five non-Indian friends to visit India.
- **Passport Services:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) provided a record 1.64 crore passport services in 2023, improving delivery through streamlined processes, digitalization, and trained staff to ensure timely and accessible service.
- **Safe and Legal Migration:** India launched **Project PRAYAS** in 2023, with IOM support, to coordinate better migration policies across central and state governments.
 - In 2024, *eMigrate 2.0* and its mobile app were launched to enhance safe and transparent worker mobility, featuring multilingual helplines, paperless documentation (DigiLocker integration), and expanded access via Common Service Centres.
- **e-Governance Initiatives:** MEA's **e-Migrate** platform (launched in 2015) enables paperless recruitment by Foreign Employers and Recruiting Agents and offers a migrant database accessible to relevant stakeholders.
 - It is integrated with the Passport Seva Project, Bureau of Immigration, and other agencies. The **eSEWA** portal provides online consular services, while grievances are managed through the **MADAD** portal.
- **Consular, Passport & Visa (CPV) Services:** The CPV Division ensures efficient and transparent service delivery through digital platforms.
 - In 2023, over 95% of consular grievances were resolved successfully via MADAD.
- **e-Visa Scheme:** Restored to 166 countries by 2023, the e-Visa now accounts for over 50% of total visas issued.
- **OCI Card Scheme:** The OCI card initiative connects Persons of Indian Origin with their roots.
 - In 2023-24, eligibility was extended to the Surinamese diaspora in Reunion Island. Since 2005, about 47 lakh OCI cards have been issued.
- **Consular Assistance Management:** As part of "good governance" initiatives, the **MADAD** platform efficiently manages and monitors consular grievances and services.
 - In 2023, about 5,500 grievances were registered, with nearly 5,200 resolved. Indian Missions abroad regularly organise Open Houses and Consular Camps for wider service reach.