

INDIA-SWEDEN STRATEGIC COMPASS

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY ISDP'S STOCKHOLM
CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIAN AND INDO-PACIFIC AFFAIRS

January-February 2024 • Vol.3 • No.1

SPECIAL FEATURE

“A Historic Day”: Sweden formally joins NATO

Sweden has officially become the 32nd member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after it completed its accession process in Washington. Both Sweden and Finland had applied for NATO membership two years ago post Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. While Finland successfully became NATO's 31st member in April 2023, Sweden's application faced delays, with all alliance members, except Turkey and Hungary, giving their approval. On January 23, Turkish legislators ratified Sweden's NATO membership bid. Then, on February 26, Hungary's parliament voted in favor of Sweden's bid to join NATO, marking the conclusion of nearly two years of intensive negotiations between the NATO countries and Sweden.

A week prior to the vote, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of Sweden held discussions with his Hungarian counterpart, Viktor Orban, focusing on defense and security cooperation. The meeting resulted in a reconciliation, marked by an agreement that facilitated Hungary's procurement of four new Gripen fighter jets from Sweden. Kristersson, in a press conference, emphasized, “We are joining NATO to defend our freedom, democracy, and values in collaboration with others.” The inclusion of Finland and Sweden, which ended their decades of neutrality and non-aligned status, represents the most substantial expansion of the alliance since it incorporated members from Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Sources: BBC, March 7; *The Guardian*, February 26; NATO, August 3, 2023

President Macron Visits India and Sweden


France's President Emmanuel Macron participated as a special guest at the Republic Day celebrations in New

Delhi. His visit follows PM Modi's participation as a guest of honor on the French National Day on July 14, 2023. The French delegation comprised senior government officials, industry leaders, and the ministers of culture, armed forces, European and foreign affairs. PM Modi stated that President Macron's presence is strengthening India-France ties as well as adding a new chapter to the shared history of friendship and collaboration. On his arrival, Macron first visited the capital of the Indian state of Rajasthan in western India, and toured historic sites including the iconic Jantar Mantar, an 18th-century observatory in Jaipur, as well as interacted with artisans, stakeholders of Indo-French cultural projects, and students.

The two leaders also held bilateral talks for bolstering ties in several sectors such as economic, defense, space, and cyber security. President Macron and PM Modi also discussed the current international events and long-term global challenges, such as biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change, and reaffirmed their commitment to a common vision for the Indo-Pacific. The trip would also boost the ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) talks between India and the European Union (EU).

In the India-France Joint Statement, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to bilateral cooperation and





international partnership within the framework of Horizon 2047 Roadmap, signed during the July 2023 Summit. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the trilateral cooperation with Australia along with exploring new cooperation platforms in the region.

The visit resulted in several outcomes, including the Roadmap for India-France Defense Industrial Partnership and Memorandum of Agreement between TATA Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) and Airbus to set up an assembly line for H125 helicopters in India. There were also important announcements such as declaring 2026 as “India-France Year of Innovation” and operationalizing the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) at Eiffel Tower.

President Macron complemented his agenda of international visits with a trip to Sweden to reaffirm the ties between the two countries, as well as to deal with issues of mutual interest, such as partnerships in the digital area, sustainability, and European defense, among others. Macron’s visit, at the invitation of the Swedish Monarch King Carl XVI Gustaf, was also marked by meetings with different sections of society and politics. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and President Macron signed a renewed strategic innovation partnership declaration between Sweden and France, which includes new areas such as nuclear energy, forestry, and security. Several other agreements were signed on the occasion, too, such as France joining the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). Macron’s visit came after a 24-year period without a visit by a French president to Sweden,

On January 30, the French president gave a speech and participated in a round-table discussion on security policy at the Swedish Defense University. Macron also took part in the “Studentafton” (“student evening”) at Lund University, and discussed concerns related to democracy and Europe’s future during the current turbulence in geopolitics. He was interviewed by the Professor of Economic History and former Deputy Vice-Chancellor Sylvia Schwaag.

Sources: Sources: France in India, January 24; The Hindu, January 26; India’s Ministry of External Affairs, January 26; AP, January 26; DW, January 25; HT, January 27; @SwedishPM January 30; Élysée January 30; Lund University January 31; Euractiv, January 31; Government Offices of Sweden, January 31.

Sweden Presents Statement of Foreign Policy 2024

In the 2024 Statement of Foreign Policy presented by Minister for Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström, Sweden’s foreign policy priorities are articulated with a nuanced approach. The focus lies on strengthening regional ties, particularly with Nordic and Baltic neighbors, acknowledging the shared political and economic significance. Sweden’s current presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers and coordination efforts within Nordic (N5) and Nordic-Baltic (NB8) formats – Sweden chairs the informal N5 and NB8 foreign and security policy cooperation formats in 2024 – underscore Sweden’s commitment to fostering regional integration and sustainability by 2030.

A paramount concern is the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with a commitment to supporting the nation politically, militarily, and financially. The statement highlights Sweden’s substantial contributions, totaling around SEK 30 billion, and the approval of multiple military support packages. The government is actively pushing for tougher sanctions against Russia and emphasizes the need for accountability for Russia’s actions, not only in Ukraine but also in Belarus, where human rights violations are noted.

The statement recognizes the evolving security landscape in Europe, with Russia identified as a persistent threat. Sweden’s advocacy for stricter sanctions against Russia aligns with its efforts to restrict Russia’s strategic scope. The EU’s role in supporting Ukraine, including the historic agreement on financial aid totaling EUR 50 billion, is highlighted.

Geopolitical developments are also addressed, with Sweden welcoming EU enlargement decisions, particularly the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. The statement advocates for a gradual integration approach based on merit, emphasizing the importance of reforms, especially in the areas of rule of law and democracy.

Sweden’s commitment to the EU is underscored as a community of values and a crucial foreign policy platform. The statement emphasizes the EU’s role in responding to Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, as well as the bloc’s consolidation as a foreign, security, and defense

policy actor. The importance of a strong and united EU in addressing global issues is highlighted, with a reference to the EU's geopolitical influence through business, trade, and innovation.

The statement also addresses Sweden's readiness to join NATO, emphasizing the collective responsibility and contribution to regional security. Sweden's defense spending exceeding two percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and its continued engagement in arms control,

disarmament, and non-proliferation stand as premise for a proactive role within the Alliance.

Global issues such as climate change, gender equality, and protection of human rights feature prominently. Sweden's commitment to development assistance is outlined, with a focus on modernization through a new reform agenda. The importance of market economies, investment, trade, and education in lifting people out of poverty is stressed.

Sources: Government Offices of Sweden; Sweden Abroad, January 4.

INDIA-GLOBAL

India's Space Achievements Continue

In 2023, India established its credentials as a top competitor in space, launching both the Chandrayaan 3 and Aditya-L1 (the latter launched on September 2, 2023) space missions for lunar and solar research and exploration. In 2024, India is looking to make further progress, as the year is set to feature key tests for India's human spaceflight program, Gaganyaan, and a potential joint crewed mission with NASA. On January 6, the Indian Space



Research Organization (ISRO) announced that the solar observatory Aditya-L1 has been successfully placed in an orbit from where it will study the sun for five years. This marks an impressive beginning for the Indian space agency in 2024.

Sources: Spacenews, January 1; Business Today, January 6; NASA,

“Vibrant Gujarat” 2024: A Summit for Expansive Global Partnerships

The Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 was held on January 10-12 in Gandhinagar. The summit was

organized by the Government of Gujarat, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and iNDEXTb. The theme of this year's summit was “Gateway to the Future,” and it brought together industry experts, policymakers, investors, and global leaders to discuss international cooperation, sustainable development, and economic growth. The summit attracted 34 partner countries and delegates from more than 140 countries.



The summit was inaugurated by PM Modi, who highlighted in his speech the investment opportunities India offers for investors. This year's summit resulted in the highest number of investments during its 20-year history, and the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed for 41,299 projects. One of the key takeaways from the summit was the focus on new-age technologies such as semiconductor manufacturing, green hydrogen, and renewable energy.

Sources: Hindustan Times, January 10; Outlook, January 12; The Economic Times, January 12; India Today, January 17; India News Network, January 10.

A New Era for Indian Aviation and Defense Research

PM Modi inaugurated Boeing's largest aerospace engineering facility outside the U.S. on January 19 in Bengaluru, India. He highlighted that India's domestic civil aviation market will give new energy to the global



India’s 75th Republic Day: Heralding a New, Strong Future

On January 26, India celebrated its 75th Republic Day, marking the anniversary of the Constitution of India coming into force. This year has attracted much global attention especially in view of India’s recent milestones in technology, development, and social empowerment, such as increased investments in infrastructure, safer tap water, better access to healthcare, strengthened agriculture sector, growing employment, connectivity, economic growth, decreased poverty, increase in entrepreneurs, and women’s empowerment.

aviation market. The Boeing India Engineering and Technology Center (BIETC) is considered a giant leap for Indian aviation. It will be a cornerstone for developing next-generation services and products in the global aerospace and defense industry.

In addition, PM Modi launched a Boeing “Sukanya” program that aims to support more girl children in India’s growing aviation sector. The program provides opportunities for girls and women to learn skills such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and training for jobs in the sector. In practice, the program looks to open STEM labs in 150 locations, aiming to expand interest in the area. The program also provides scholarships to women for pilot training.

Sources: @mygovindia, January 19; The Hindu, January 19; ANI, January 19.

DeskTime Launches Indian subsidiary

On January 5, the Latvian Draugiem Group company DeskTime launched a subsidiary in India, which is one of its biggest markets. The presence in India contributes to expanding the market share in the region, as well as ensuring its global growth and development. DeskTime is used as a productivity tool for employees to track as well as manage their working hours. DeskTime’s market in Latvia is only 4 percent of the total turnover, and it works with customers worldwide. The company sees immense potential in India, and its goal for 2024 is to grow its Indian customer base.

Sources: @labsoflatvia, January 5; Labs of Latvia, January 5.

The Republic Day parade showcased India’s cultural heritage, modernization, and military power. India’s development and long-standing democratic credentials (“Viksit Bharat,” literally developed India, and “Bharat – Loktantra ki Matraka,” or “India: the Mother of Democracy”) were the two central themes for the parade. This year’s celebrations were noteworthy because, for the first time, an all-women tri-service navy, air force, and army contingent marched in the parade. The military parade demonstrated India’s success in the projects of manufacturing indigenous military equipment, including drone jammers, vehicle-mounted mortars, BMP-II infantry combat vehicles, and missiles, among others. One of the major highlights of the ceremony was the presence of French President Emmanuel Macron as the guest of honor. The fly-past included three aircraft from the French Air and Space Force and Two Rafale fighter jets. The participation of a French armed forces contingent showcased the Indo-French reciprocal growth in ties.

Sources: The Hindu, January 26; India Today, January 26; BBC, January 26.



INDIA-SWEDEN

Sweden's Foreign Minister in New Delhi for Raisina Dialogue

At the end of February, Sweden's Foreign Minister, Tobias Billström, spoke at the Raisina Dialogue's panel discussion "As the Ice Melts: The New Arctic Chessboard." The event, hosted by the Observer Research Foundation and the Ministry of External Affairs of India, explores critical geopolitical and geo-economic issues across six thematic pillars, including technology regulations, environmental sustainability, warfare dynamics, multilateralism, the post-2030 agenda, and defending democracy. At the panel, Billström stated that despite the limited military risk in the Arctic region, the vast untapped raw material in the region could lead to heightened tensions.



Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also hosted the India-Nordic-Baltic 8 meeting on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue 2024. The Foreign Ministers of NB8 (regional co-operation format that includes

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden) underscored their countries' strategic collaboration commitments with India. The Swedish FM expressed his appreciation of Indian friendship and cooperation on values, trade, innovation, and sustainability. Such bonhomie complements India's active participation in the Arctic Council since 2013 as an observer, granted under the Swedish Presidency, which signifies their dedication to global cooperation.

Sources: @IndiainSweden, February 15; ORF, February 22, @RaisinaDialogue, February 22.

Billström in Bengaluru

Prior to attending the Raisina Dialogue, FM Billström visited the Indian city of Bengaluru – a key hub for Indo-Swedish innovation – in the southern state of Karnataka for a bilateral event. Billström actively engaged with the business community, delivering a keynote speech for the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), where he

highlighted the growing collaboration between Sweden and India, particularly in artificial intelligence, digitalization, and sustainability.

He was positively impressed by the innovative Unified Payments Interface (UPI), showcasing India's rapid transition from cash payments to QR codes. Billström also met with Karnataka's Governor, Thawar Chand Gehlot, to discuss further opportunities for deepening cooperation in space and emerging technologies.

He also visited the ISRO center, and expressed the desire to strengthen collaborations in this domain, citing Sweden's long-standing relationship with India in the space sector and Sweden's unique position as "mainland Europe's first satellite launch complex" (the recently launched "Spaceport Esrange," in Sweden's far north).

Sources: @TobiasBillstrom February 21; Deccan Herald, February 21; France 24, January 13, 2023.

Sweden's Saab Inaugurates New Manufacturing Facility in India

On March 4, 2024, Saab started the construction of its new Carl-Gustaf manufacturing facility in India after receiving approval for 100 percent foreign direct investment. The factory is located at Jhajjar in Haryana state. This is Saab's first facility outside Sweden for Carl-Gustaf and will be the first foreign fully owned defense production facility in India – a milestone for both India and Sweden. The inauguration ceremony included Håkan Jevrell, State Secretary for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade; Jan Thesleff, Sweden's Ambassador to India; Mats Palmberg, Chairman & Managing Director of Saab India; and Görgen Johansson, Head of Saab's Business Area Dynamics, among others. Sweden's State Secretary also called on Indian Defense Secretary Giridhar Aramane in New Delhi.

Sources: Defense Capital, March 4; Saab India, March 4; ANI, March 4.

Swedish Ambassador to India Boosts Industry Collaboration

Sweden has been continuously bolstering its industrial relations with India; and more than 30 Swedish companies are established in Tamil Nadu in automotive, electronics,

and IT sectors. With this in mind, the Ambassador of Sweden to India, Jan Thesleff, visited Chennai, where he met Swedish company officials. In addition, Thesleff met with the Tamil Nadu Government Minister for IT & Digital Services, P. Thiaga Rajan, to discuss the prospects of deepening collaboration in the fields of IT and enhancing opportunities for the gaming industry, which has been steadily growing in the past years. Thesleff also had fruitful discussions with the Minister for Industries in the state government, T. R. B. Rajaa, with the ambition to accelerate India-Sweden industry relations.

Sources: *Economic Times*, November 2; @SwedensAmbIndia, January 11 @SwedensAmbIndia, January 12; *Sweden-In-India*, January 12.

Swedish State Secretary for Infrastructure Visits India

Sweden continued to make progress in bilateral relations with India in late January, as the Swedish State Secretary for Infrastructure, Johan Davidson, visited India. Davidson, in a joint meeting with the Minister of State for Housing & Urban Affairs, Kaushal Kishore, discussed the prospects for collaboration in areas such as urban mobility, green transition, and water and solid waste treatment. The Swedish Ambassador to India, Jan Thesleff, also attended the meeting, highlighting the significance of the strengthened relations between Sweden and India.

In addition to the fruitful meeting, Davidson also attended “Wings India 2024” in Hyderabad on January 18, where he addressed the participants, discussing the prospects for continuous global partnerships and the future of the aviation industry.

Sources: @SwedenInIndia, January 19, @IndiaInSweden, January 18.



Sweden Celebrates India's 75th Republic Day in Stockholm

A Bharatnatyam recital by Swedish and Indian artists marked the celebrations of India's 75th Republic Day in Stockholm. The attendees included members of the Swedish Parliament, diplomats, business leaders, and members of the Indian diaspora.

At the event, Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström made a speech emphasizing the solid ties and “unprecedented” levels of political engagement between Sweden and India in recent years. He highlighted the two partners’ role in undertaking global responsibilities with the presidency of the G20 (India) and of the European Union (Sweden) in 2023. The latter was an opportunity for Sweden to give impetus to the EU-India ties, such as via the EU-India Trade and Technology Council. In terms of numbers, Billström stated that since the new administration took office in 2022, 20 percent of the Swedish government has already visited India. The Swedish foreign minister also expressed hope that Sweden’s partnership with India would strengthen in 2024 and beyond, including with the finalization of the EU-India free trade agreement.

Source: @IndiainSweden, January 26; @IndiainSweden, February 2.

Young Indian Badminton Star Wins Swedish Open

India's Devika Sihag won the singles title at the Swedish Open International Series badminton tournament in Uppsala, held at IFU Arena, Uppsala. She trains at the Prakash Padukone Academy, which is named after the first Indian to win the Swedish Open in 1980. India's



ambassador to Sweden and Latvia, Tanmaya Lal, supported her by attending the semifinals during the tournament. A week before winning the Swedish Open, she had finished as runner-up at the Estonian International.

Source: @Tanmaya_Lal, January 21; Viktor Swedish Open, January 20.

INDIA-NORDIC

NB8 visit to India focuses on 'cooperation and trust'

In this year's Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, the foreign ministers of eight Nordic-Baltic countries participated together as representatives of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation, the NB8. This reflects how India is a partner of growing importance to the Nordic-Baltic region. Links between the Nordic and Baltic countries and India are expanding in a number of areas, such as trade and investment, green transition and innovation. The NB8's primary message was related to the need for global support for Ukraine and adherence to the international rules-based order. The ministers said that in a time of geopolitical shifts, the security of the Nordic-Baltic region and the Indo-Pacific was interlinked. "Today, it is more essential than ever to work together to uphold international law, and to build capacity to tackle both traditional and non-traditional security threats, be it in India's neighbourhood or in our own."

The ministers were Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Denmark, Margus Tsahkna, Minister of

Foreign Affairs, Estonia, Elina Valtonen, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Finland, Bjarni Benediktsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Iceland, Krišjānis Kariņš, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Latvia, Gabrielius Landsbergis, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lithuania, Espen Barth Eide, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway, and Tobias Billström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden.

Sources: *The Hindu*, February 24; *Government Offices of Sweden*, February 20.

India-Denmark Fuel Cooperation in Renewables

On January 8, Denmark launched Green Fuels Alliance India (GFAI) to advance sustainable energy in India and to achieve the shared global goal of carbon neutrality. The initiative is led by the Danish Embassy and Consulate General of Denmark. It is part of the India-Denmark Green Strategic Partnership (GSP), and is pivotal for advancing the green fuels sector, such as green hydrogen and fostering innovation and collaboration between Indian and Danish industries.

The initiative's main objective is to establish an ecosystem that encourages cooperation between businesses, government entities, research institutions, and financial stakeholders from the Indian and Danish sectors. Danish organizations, including Maersk, Topsoe, Umwelt Energy, Mash Makes, European Sustainable Solutions, Novozymes, Danfoss, and Brdr. Christensen and Hydrogen Denmark, as founding members, have committed to the initiative.

Sources: @fuelcellworks, January 9; @DenmarkinIndia, January 9; *The Economic Times*, January 8.

Deepening India-Finland Cooperation

Finland's Minister of Trade and Development Cooperation, Ville Tavio, met with the Indian Ambassador to Finland, Raveesh Kumar, during the 14th India Business and Professionals Forum (IBPF). The IBPF is a platform for Indian professionals and entrepreneurs in Finland, providing networking opportunities. Minister Tavio highlighted the successful visit to the 2nd CII India-Nordic-Baltic Business Conclave in November 2023, and stressed that India is a key partner for Finland, given the importance of the Indian community's contribution to the Finnish economy.

Amb. Kumar, on the other hand, stressed the role of

the Indian business community and professionals in further deepening India-Finland business relations. Moreover, cooperation opportunities were emphasized in digitalization, education, mobility, and emerging technologies. The Forum's role and activities become all the more vital due to India-Finland trade reaching an all-time high, as well as the growing interest of Finnish companies in the Indian market. In particular, partnerships in sustainability and emerging technologies are set to define future India-Finland bilateral relations.

In the same month, Amb. Kumar and members of Finland-India Network of Researchers & Academics (FINERAC) also met with the Finnish Minister of Science and Culture, Sari Multala. Further cooperation in research and higher education was discussed, as were joint research projects and mobility.

Sources: @IndEmbFinEst, January 18; Embassy of India, Helsinki; @IndEmbFinEst, January 24.

Faroe Islands and India Explore New Frontiers

In a significant diplomatic meeting, the Prime Minister of the Faroe Islands, Aksel Vilhelmsen Johannesen engaged in discussions with the Indian Ambassador, Pooja_Kapur, in the the Faroe Islands on February 15. The focal point of the talks was the enhancement of bilateral relations between the two nations. PM Johannesen also seized the opportunity to express gratitude for the gracious hospitality extended to him during his visit to India in November 2023.

On that occasion, the PM expressed optimism about potential collaborations with India in export and import endeavors, emphasizing the Faroe Islands' expertise in deep-sea fishing. He highlighted the strategic position of the Faroe Islands and the abundance of specialized companies capable of constructing vessels, presenting additional opportunities for Arctic cooperation. The dialogue extended beyond fisheries, encompassing key sectors such as aquaculture, information technology, climate change, and tourism. As the Faroe Islands and India pave the way for enhanced cooperation, the stage is set for a promising future of collaborative ventures and shared endeavors.

Sources: @ The Government of the Faroe Islands, February 15; @Tinganes February 15.

Growing Norwegian Green Investments in India

Early this year, the board of directors of the Norwegian investment fund for developing countries, Norfund visited India. Norfund is a Norwegian Government-owned investment fund, which has been critical in advancing sustainable development goals in developing countries.

During the trip, a significant investment of US\$50 million was announced to SAEL, a renewable energy company in India that specializes in solar and waste-to-energy projects. The investment will help enhance the Indian company's solar and biomass projects, with the aim to leverage India's growing market potential and the Indian government's schemes in the renewable energy sector. The investment showcases the growing partnership between India and Norway in sustainable development and renewable energy.

Norwegian Ambassador to India May-Elin Stener highlighted that Norway has invested over US\$200 million in supporting India's renewable energy sector.

Sources: @DDIndiaLive, January 24; The Print, January 24; SAEL; Outlook, January 24.

INDIA-EU

Enhancing Connectivity between India and Europe at "Wings India 2024"

"Wings India 2024," Asia's largest civil aviation event was held on January 18-21 in Hyderabad with the central theme: "Connecting India with the World in Amritkal: Setting the Stage for India Civil Aviation @2047." It was inaugurated by Minister of Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya Scindia. The four-day event brought together major stakeholders of the civil aviation industry, and included exhibitions, media conferences, round tables, conferences, and panel discussions, among others. The event was also attended by the Swedish State Secretary for Infrastructure, Johan Davidsson.

During the event, the EU Ambassador to India, Hervé Delphin, had discussions with Minister Scindia about enhancing India-EU cooperation in air tech industry, point-to-point connectivity, greener aviation fuels, aviation safety, and airport management. The exchange also included the possibility of adding an aviation chapter to



Key Takeaways from the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Gathering

The third EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum was held in Brussels on February 2, reaffirming the vitality of the EU’s collaboration with the region. In this context, the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, launched in 2021, is crucial given the substantial stakes involved in a region seen as the world’s current economic and political center of gravity. The Forum was thus an opportunity to take stock of the progress in implementing the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, further enhance cooperation, and deepen solidarity with India.

the upcoming EU-India Summit. They also talked about the need to develop further cooperation for maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) and technology interventions and for the production and transport of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) for a greener aviation market.

In addition, at the “Wings India 2024” press conference, Remi Maillard, President and Managing Director of Airbus India and South Asia, announced plans to increase its sourcing from India, doubling the current amount to US\$1.5 billion in the coming years, recognizing India’s extraordinary growth and significant role in global aviation. In 2023, at the Paris Airshow, the European aerospace major Airbus had made huge deals with the Indian carriers IndiGo and Air India.

Sources: @EUAmbIndia, January 18; @JM_Scindia, January 18; Economic Times, January 18; The Hindu, January 21; Deccan Chronicle, January 17.

Deepening India-EU Defense Cooperation

Furthering India-EU defense cooperation was discussed in January by the EU Ambassador to India, Hervé Delphin, and the Indian Chief of Defense Staff (CDS), General Anil Chauhan. Amb. Delphin highlighted the EU and India’s common agenda in the security and defense sectors, including maritime and cyber security. Deepening of defense cooperation was already discussed in December 2023 by the European Parliament Sub-Committee on Security and Defense (SEDE) and Indian defense officials, highlighting cooperation, especially in the Indo-Pacific.

Sources: Indian Defense News, January 24; @EUAmbIndia, January 23.

Attended by the representatives from all 27 EU member-states and a host of Indo-Pacific countries, totaling 70 delegations, this informal gathering signified a steadfast commitment to the partnership.

The Forum welcomed constructive partnerships between the EU and Indo-Pacific countries and organizations. It reaffirmed commitment to events such as the signing of numerous agreements and announcements on infrastructure investments for the Indo-Pacific made during the Global Gateway Forum held last year in Brussels; the decision of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to welcome the EU as a Dialogue Partner; the EU’s decision to join India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative (IPOI; launched in 2019 by PM Modi), as well as the strengthening of the EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership. The participants also acknowledged Japan’s and India’s efforts as hosts of G7 and G20 summits in 2023.

The participants discussed ways to deepen cooperation in three parallel roundtables on shared prosperity, economic resilience, and investments; green transition – partnering for a sustainable future; and geopolitical and security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Overall, the EU’s recent focus on building robust supply chains, particularly in ongoing negotiations with India, is a strategic move aligned with extending its FTA networks in the Indo-Pacific. Addressing geopolitical and security challenges, the EU’s implementation of the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the northwestern Indian Ocean, launched in 2022, will optimize the naval asset deployment to the region, including planning to increase

the number of joint naval exercises and port calls with Indo-Pacific partners. Moreover, the EU's efforts to enhance the safety and resilience of global port infrastructure, especially in South and Southeast Asia, holds significance for India's maritime and economic interests.

Sources: EEAS February 2; @IndiainBelgium February 3.

India Hosts 2nd CII India Europe Business & Sustainability Conclave

The second CII India Europe Business & Sustainability Conclave was held in New Delhi on February 20 and 21. The second edition took forward the agenda of "India – Europe partnership for better sustainable future" and built upon the takeaways of the first edition. The event's aims included exploring business priorities and discussing the opportunities and challenges for businesses in India and Europe. The event, which aims to address issues related to digital transformation, sustainability, and trade and investment. It included cross-sectoral stakeholders such as senior ministers, policy makers, and business leaders from Europe and India. Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias



Billström addressed a special session on digitalization.

Indian External Affairs Minister also addressed the Conclave, highlighting that Europe was a priority region for India. He talked about the six broad drivers of economy, namely production and consumption; connectivity and logistics; technology; demographics; values and comfort, and framework and promoting partnerships; and expressed hope of collaborating with European countries on these areas. He also emphasized on building multiple corridors of connectivity as a vital need to facilitate resilience.

Sources: CII International, February 16; Economic Times, February 20.

Chairman of the French Senate Visits India

The Chairman of the French Senate, Gérard Larcher, visited India on February 19 and 20, 2024, with the primary objective of fostering cooperation between the French Senate and the Parliament of India. Larcher and the five senators accompanying him discussed with India's Vice President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Jagdeep Dhankhar, about a potential ad hoc agreement to increase parliamentary understanding between the two nations. Larcher also met PM Modi, building on their previous encounter during Modi's visit to Paris on July 14, 2023. Furthermore, Larcher discussed with Jaishankar, to reinforce bilateral ties and gain insights into India's expanding geopolitical role. Beyond diplomatic discussions, the Chairman of the French Senate connected with business leaders representing French companies operating in India, with a particular focus on the aerospace and defense sectors.

Sources: France Embassy in India, February 19; Ambassade De France in India, February 20

Navalny's Death Prompts Diplomatic Actions

Sweden's Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom summoned Russia's ambassador over the death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Billstrom and emphasized the need for EU action against political oppression in Russia, proposing sanctions against government representatives involved in human rights violations. PM Kristersson has categorically declared that Russian authorities, particularly President Putin, should bear full responsibility for Navalny's death.

Moreover, top EU officials met with Navalny's widow, as both the U.S. and the EU consider potential measures against Russia following the Kremlin critic's death in a remote Arctic prison. The cause of death remains undisclosed. Russian President Vladimir Putin has not commented on the matter. Despite challenges, EU officials, led by Chief Diplomat Josep Borrell, plan to propose fresh sanctions on those directly responsible for Navalny's treatment. As a symbolic move, Brussels will rename its global human rights sanctions' blacklist after Navalny.

Sources: Government Offices of Sweden, February 19.



EDITOR'S NOTE

The year 2024 is a historic year in terms of elections being held throughout the world. About half of the world's population is expected to vote, with more than 60 countries holding elections. This includes India (likely in April/May) and the EU (June) going for parliamentary elections. The U.S. elections in November are eagerly awaited, too, not least because of the potential Joe Biden-Donald Trump contest.

Some consequential polls in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Taiwan, for example, have already indicated heartening trends for democracy. In Bangladesh, the controversial return of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is good news for India-Bangladesh ties, which have been on the rise despite China's clout. For Sweden, too, it would mean a consistent policy with Bangladesh, with which Sweden has "multifaceted and growing" ties.

In Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest democracy, former Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto's win, with a rebranded image, might likely lead to pragmatic policies amid an expansionist China and a fragile Indo-Pacific. PM Modi's post-election message highlights that the two sides will strengthen their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

However, it is in Taiwan that the democratic process has truly been boosted with the return of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), as Lai Ching-te secured a historic third consecutive win for his party. India, which has just signed a migration and mobility pact with Taiwan, has been positive about the ties with Taiwan taking a more strategic orientation, highlighted by India's representative to Taiwan praising Taiwan's democratic resilience. The EU, too, has offered its congratulations to the DPP. Sweden's 2024 foreign policy statement highlights a common European approach in terms of its China policy. Sweden has also called out China's "conduct" toward Taiwan as worrisome. However, for both India and Sweden, the lack of diplomatic ties with Taiwan is unlikely to change, as that would destabilize the Indo-Pacific as a whole.

Finally, with India's ruling party expected to win the upcoming national elections, India's ties with Sweden, as well as with the NB8 and the EU, are likely to continue on the upward trajectory in 2024 and beyond.

CONTACT DETAILS:

For inquiries about the newsletter or ISDP's Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) activities, please contact Dr Jagannath Panda at: jpanda@isdp.eu

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

CONTRIBUTORS: This newsletter was prepared by SCSA-IPA.

ABOUT ISDP

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.

www.isdp.eu