



India and the World

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India's increasingly strategic connection with the Nordics

Arriving from the Netherlands, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of Sweden and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in Gothenburg on May 17, before spending two days in Oslo for a Norway-India bilateral and the third India-Nordic Summit.

While the current conflict in the Middle East has immediate and tangible economic effects in India, the Nordic leg of Modi's visit to Europe was mostly forward-looking – Kristersson even highlighted Sweden and Europe as India's partners towards Viksit Bharat 2047 and beyond.

The evolution of India's partnership with Sweden is illustrative for the progression towards longer-term cooperation. The 2026–2030 Joint Action Plan between Sweden and India announced in Gothenburg is situated within a "Strategic Partnership" framework, which expands cooperation from innovation and trade into geopolitics and security, including regular defence and cyber dialogues, counterterrorism cooperation, exchange between the respective national security advisors, and defence innovation.

Economic cooperation is becoming more ambitious and measurable: instead of simply encouraging trade and investment, the two countries now aim to double bilateral economic exchange, create fast-track trade mechanisms, strengthen SME and start-up cooperation, and promote industrial co-production.

Technology cooperation is also deepening. While the previous Joint Action Plan from 2018 focused on smart grids, railways, and renewable energy, the 2026–2030 framework prioritises AI, 6G, quantum computing, digital infrastructure, critical minerals, space and geospatial initiatives, and AI cooperation through initiatives such as the Joint Innovation Partnership 2.0 and the Sweden–India Technology and Artificial Intelligence Corridor.

Moreover, climate cooperation is evolving from knowledge-sharing to implementation-focused industrial transition, including green steel, cleantech transfer, resilient water systems, and low-carbon supply chains. At the same time, people-to-people ties have expanded from women’s skills initiatives to broader talent mobility, academic exchange, and cultural diplomacy.

A similar gradual evolution towards more strategic cooperation can be seen in the India-Nordic Summit statements from 2018, 2022, and 2026. While there are continuities throughout the three statements regarding shared democratic values, multilateralism, UN reform, climate action, innovation, and people-to-people as well as Nordic support for India’s bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, there were notable changes as well.

The 2018 Stockholm Joint Statement primarily establishes the foundations of the India–Nordic partnership, focusing on broad commitments to deepen cooperation in innovation, trade, climate action, and sectoral areas such as clean technologies, maritime solutions, health, and agriculture. It emphasises relationship-building, support for Indian flagship initiatives, security cooperation (including counterterrorism and non-proliferation), and strong Nordic backing for India’s global role, including its Nuclear Suppliers Group membership.

By contrast, the 2022 Copenhagen Joint Statement is more operational and issue-specific, reflecting evolving global challenges. While it retains many of the same core areas, it shifts toward implementation and concrete policy alignment, particularly climate targets, biodiversity, blue economy, and industrial transition. It also introduces new themes such as Arctic climate cooperation, plastic pollution, and directly addresses contemporary crises, including the COVID-19 aftermath and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The 2026 Oslo Joint Statement is more comprehensive, institutionalised, and operational than the previous two. It demonstrates how the partnership has evolved into a strategic and multidimensional framework, with the formal elevation of ties to a “Trusted Green Technology and Innovation Strategic Partnership,” signaling a shift from broad intentions to long-term strategic alignment. Several themes illustrate this progression.

First, the number of geopolitical issues discussed is increasing. While the 2018 statement was quite vague and the 2022 summit focused mainly on Ukraine, the 2026 statement addressed a wider range of crises, including Ukraine, Gaza, Middle East instability, maritime security, terrorism, and freedom of navigation. Its stronger language on terrorism referenced cross-border terrorism, FATF cooperation, UNSC sanctions regimes, and attacks in India. Maritime security and the Indo-Pacific also became central themes, reflecting the growing importance of sea lanes, Arctic–Indo-Pacific linkages, and global supply chains.

Second, economic cooperation is more institutionalised. Whereas 2018 and 2022 stressed trade and investment broadly, the 2026 summit welcomed the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement and the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, signaling a shift toward legally grounded integration. The emphasis on resilient supply chains, critical minerals, connectivity corridors such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, and green industrial cooperation reflected a more geoeconomic approach shaped by global fragmentation and strategic competition.

Third, ambitions for technological cooperation have expanded from a focus on digitalisation and innovation in 2018 to include AI governance, open-source AI, 5G and 6G, startup ecosystems, space cooperation, and dual-use technologies by 2026. This reflected growing concern with technological sovereignty and democratic digital norms amid intensifying global competition.

Fourth, there is an increasing specification in climate cooperation. While 2018 broadly endorsed the Paris Agreement and renewable energy cooperation, and 2022 emphasised green transition and

decarbonisation, the 2026 agenda included climate finance, carbon capture, green hydrogen, critical minerals, circular economy initiatives, Mission LiFE, ship recycling, and low-emission maritime industries. Climate policy has thus evolved from general sustainability rhetoric into detailed sectoral cooperation tied to industrial policy and economic security.

While the threshold to deepening political and commercial cooperation between India and the Nordics has continuously been lowered, events surrounding Modi's visit show that there is still some way to go to narrow knowledge gaps on India in Europe. Deeper "India-literacy" in the Nordics and research-based policy dialogue with India must form an integral part as a more comprehensive partnership is to be implemented.

In this regard, we are pleased to find that both the Project for Nordic-India Relations and the Nordic-India Dialogue, are specifically mentioned in the statements and action plans coming out of the meetings in Gothenburg and Oslo.

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