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# Going Strong

India has taken several innovative steps during the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen its diplomatic ties with the rest of the world by forming more stable, progressive and proactive relationships with its diplomatic partners

BY AKSHAT JAIN

**A**midst the COVID-19 pandemic, India has been reaffirming its commitment to strengthen its diplomatic relations. In a series of high-level diplomatic engagements, the 15th India-EU summit was successfully held on

July 15, 2020, with the core objectives of promoting effective multilateralism, fighting the COVID-19 pandemic through international cooperation, facilitating trading and investment, Clean Energy and Climate Partnership, Research and Development in 5G and artificial intelligence, Global peace and security, promoting people-to-people



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (C) along with External Affairs minister (right) Dr S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval (far right) attend 15th India-EU Virtual Summit on July 15



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravin Kumar Jugnauth virtually inaugurate the new Supreme Court Building of Mauritius

exchanges and EU-India Strategic Partnership: a Roadmap to 2025.

India has also emerged as a stable and reliable partner for its neighbours through regional partnerships. The government, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the helm has showcased its commitment towards maintaining mutually beneficial regional relationships under its 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policy.

### INDIA-EU SYNERGY

The European Union is a collective and strong association that was formed in Europe and has 27 member states

with an idea to promote inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination throughout the region. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU has had a major impact on the multi-national assemblage that has resulted in a restructuring of its global partnerships. With India emerging as one of the most promising investment destinations in Asia, offering both stability and immense growth potential, the India-EU summit offered a perfect opportunity for strengthening the country's existing relations with the European Union.

**“WE HAVE EXPANDED THE INDIA-EU ENGAGEMENT INTO MANY NEW SECTORS AND HAVE AGREED THAT WE MUST CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO MAKE IT MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND BENEFICIAL, BASED ON MUTUAL TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India

## Continental bond

### Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's opening remarks at the 15th India-EU virtual summit

- We are committed to form a more deeper and extensive bond between India and the EU.
- India and the EU must adopt towards a long-term strategic partnership.
- India and EU are natural partners. Our partnership is also useful for peace and stability in the world. This reality has become even more evident in today's global situation.
- India and the EU share universal values such as democracy, pluralism, inclusivity, respect for international institutions, multilateralism, freedom and transparency
- The India-EU partnership can play an important role in economic revival and, building a human centric and humanity centric globalisation model.

PM Modi led the Indian delegation for the EU Summit while the President of the European Council, Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, represented the European side. The leaders decided to work together for the larger benefit of the people by promoting the shared values of democracy, freedom, rule of law, and respect for human rights, aiming at delivering concrete benefits for the people in India and the EU.

With multilateralism becoming a favourable facet of diplomatic engagements, the two sides decided to implement a rules-based order with the UN and WTO at its centre.

In view of the financial havoc wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the summit focused on measures to help nations recover their economic stability and also deliberated on how to encourage investment in healthcare. A discussion was also held for adopting a robust strategy to combat climate change and environmental degradation across the world and to incorporate more sustainable practices.

The two sides also discussed holistic development and human-centric digitalisation to develop inclusive economies and societies. As countries around the world are looking to revive economies, discussions

The use of maritime ports will reduce the time of shipping to Bangladesh and bring prosperity that will significantly raise the revenue generated for both nations



PM Modi interacting with President of the European Council, Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen during the 15th India-EU summit

“AS WE COME OUT OF THIS PANDEMIC, LET US BE CLEAR ON ONE FACT. THE WORLD WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN. THAT MEANS NEW THINKING, FRESH IDEAS, MORE IMAGINATION AND GREATER OPENNESS. WE NEED TO GO BEYOND ORTHODOXIES, WHETHER OF TRADE, POLITICS OR SECURITY.

Dr S Jaishankar  
External Affairs Minister  
(At the AINTT roundtable conference)



focused on opening new business opportunities were held. In the light of the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMP), established at the 13th India-EU summit in Brussels, Belgium (2016), the two sides welcomed active people-to-people exchanges including those among students, researchers, professionals, business persons and tourists.

The two sides also reaffirmed their commitment towards comprehensive connectivity partnership. A highlight of the summit was the adoption of

the 'India-EU Strategic Partnership: a Roadmap to 2025' to guide mutually-beneficial cooperation between India and the EU for the next five years. The Indian side also welcomed the ongoing European investments in the country and welcomed the planned upcoming investments of Euro 500 million in Pune and Bhopal Metro Rail projects. The two sides signed an agreement for the R&D of nuclear power application project in the form of the Euratom-India Agreement in addition to a joint declaration on Resource Efficiency and

India's trade and development partnerships with its immediate neighbours will provide the much needed boost to the Indian manufacturing, export and maritime sectors, while simultaneously allowing port cities to grow

## Regional ties

- India has been actively cooperating with countries in the South and Southeast Asian region to strengthen its ties under the 'Neighbourhood First' policy
- Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar addressed the sixth roundtable conference of ASEAN-India network of Think Tanks (AINTT) and urged leaders to contribute more towards the policy direction for future cooperation.
- India and Bhutan also opened up a new trade route on July 15, which passes through the Indian town of Jaigaon in West Bengal and connects to Alhay near Pasakha in Bhutan.
- India has also set up a port of call in Jogighopa, Assam that will be a major link in the trade-chain between India, Bhutan and Bangladesh
- India's developmental assistance to Sri Lanka has identified infrastructure, energy, connectivity, IT, agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and education as priority sectors for development.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar addresses the 6th Roundtable of the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT) with Vijay Thakur Singh, Secretary (East)

Circular Economy. The two sides also expressed their appreciation of the upcoming renewal of the India-EU Science and Technology Agreement for another five years.

### NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTIVITY

India has continued to focus on economic development within the country and in its immediate neighbourhood.

Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ministry of Shipping and Minister of State for Chemical & Fertilizers flagged-off the first trial run of a container ship from Kolkata to Agartala through Chattogram port in Bangladesh on July 16, as the neighbouring country allowed the use of its Chattogram and Mongla Ports for movement of goods to and from India through its territory. The opening up of this new trade route will enable the further development

of Indian trade and developmental partnerships with Bangladesh. The trial run of the ship was a great initiative to strengthen synergetic connectivity links in the neighbourhood.

The consignment first reached Chattogram port and was transported to Agartala via a fleet of Bangladeshi trucks. This move was an outcome of the signing and exchange of a Standard Operating Procedure by India and Bangladesh in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina, during the latter's visit to India in October 2019. The use of these ports will reduce the transportation time of Indian goods and result in enhanced financial benefit for both nations.

The development of this route also shines a favorable light on India's Sagarmala initiative, a National Perspective Plan (NPP) for the comprehensive development of India's 7,500 km coastline and maritime sector.





## With India offering both stability and immense growth potential, the India-EU summit offered a perfect opportunity for strengthening the country's existing relations with the Union

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar (C), Piyush Goyal, the Union Minister of Railways and Minister of Commerce & Industry and Harsh Vardhan Shringla (Foreign Secretary) virtually flag off 10 broad gauge diesel locomotives to Bangladesh

Another positive addition to India's cross-border trade with Bangladesh was the landmark achievement of establishing a fully-functioning freight-rail corridor between the two nations. An Indian cargo train with FMCG goods and other supplies arrived in Bangladesh on its maiden trip on July 25. The corridor will connect major terminals in India with Bangladesh, giving a much-awaited boost to trade and bilateral development.

India, with its strong bilateral ties throughout the countries in the Southeast Asian region, is ready to improve significantly on the economic front and boost foreign investments in sectors that positively impact long-standing manufacturing capabilities under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

As the world gradually emerges from the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, India has begun work on a plan to boost Indian exports. The plan focusses on reducing import dependence and becoming self-sufficient or 'atmanirbhar'. A systematic approach is being taken to build India's stake in global value chains and for the same, it's crucial to make our bilateral, economic and political relations with partner countries even stronger.



Akshat Jain is a writer, COLUMNIST, novelist, blogger, and a research scholar at IIT Delhi. He has authored books, NUMEROUS articles and white papers on different ideas and genres. His most recent book - My Illusion my Mistake has been dedicated to the forty families of Pulwama attack.