

Far and Wide

Every week we share selection of six news from six continents that we believe will impact our world in the near or distant future

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India, Singapore Celebrate 60 Years of Strong Bilateral Ties

Welcome to the latest edition of Far and Wide, where we embark on a journey to explore intriguing stories and global developments.

On January 16, marking 60 years of diplomatic relations, President Droupadi Murmu and Singaporean President Tharman Shanmugaratnam unveiled a special joint logo in New Delhi to commemorate the milestone. The logo integrates elements representing both nations, including the colors of their flags, India's lotus and Singapore's orchid, and the number 60, symbolizing their enduring friendship and shared values.

Over the years, India and Singapore's partnership has grown across diverse sectors, including politics, defense, economics, culture, education, and people-to-people relations. This multifaceted cooperation now extends to advanced manufacturing, digitalization, healthcare, sustainability, and skills development.

Singapore stands as India's largest trading partner in ASEAN, and bilateral trade surged from USD 6.7 billion in FY 2004-05 to USD 35.6 billion in 2023-24, making Singapore India's 6th largest trade partner. In 2023-24, Singapore was also the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India, contributing USD 11.774 billion. The cumulative FDI from Singapore has reached USD 167.47 billion, accounting for 24% of India's total FDI.

The two countries have collaborated on skill development, with successful projects in six Indian states and more underway. Additionally, India and Singapore share cooperation in technology, particularly in space exploration with ISRO launching several Singaporean satellites.

Singapore plays a critical role in India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific strategy, with significant contributions to investments, technology, and skill development. To mark this anniversary, multiple events are planned to celebrate the close ties between the nations.

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Europe

India and EU Outline Plans to Strengthen Economic Ties

India and the European Union (EU) recently outlined a six-point plan to strengthen economic ties during a high-level meeting in Brussels on January 18-19, 2025. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maroš Šefčovič emphasized fostering a comprehensive economic partnership to leverage their combined markets, valued at over \$24 trillion, and benefiting their 2 billion population. The agenda focuses on addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers to promote fair trade, simplifying processes for businesses, especially small enterprises, farmers, and fishermen.

Both sides aim to enhance product quality through collaboration on best practices and harmonizing standards, aligning with India's "zero defect" and "zero effect" initiative. The partnership also seeks to develop advanced technologies and resilient supply chains, reducing reliance on non-market economies. Sustainable development remains a key priority, with cooperation on trade initiatives rooted in the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Additionally, India aims to leverage its technological expertise and youthful talent pool to foster mutual growth. This meeting marked the first in-person interaction between Goyal and Šefčovič, following a virtual meeting in December 2024. Both leaders reviewed progress under the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), addressed legacy issues, and set a roadmap for an expedited trade and investment agenda, including negotiations for a robust Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Source : Legal Economic Times

<https://legaleconomictimes.indiatimes.com/amp/news/law-policy/india-outlines-6-point-plan-to-boost-economic-ties-with-eu/117379333>

North America



Biden Administration Imposes AI Export Restrictions, Impacting India and China

In its final days, the Biden administration introduced a regulatory framework titled 'Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion', imposing restrictions on the export of AI hardware like GPUs. The framework categorizes countries into three tiers with varying levels of access to US technology.

Tier 1, comprising 18 close US allies (e.g., UK, Japan, Germany), faces minimal restrictions. Tier 2, which includes India and most other countries, faces caps on computing power imports, limited to around 50,000 advanced AI chips through 2027, potentially doubling with bilateral agreements. India, currently procuring 10,000 GPUs for its India AI Mission, might experience setbacks due to these restrictions. Tier 3, which includes nations like China, Russia, and North Korea, faces near-total prohibition on AI tech exports.

India and China also receive special provisions under the General Validated End User review. Indian companies approved under this can use AI exports for civilian and military purposes (excluding nuclear use), while Chinese firms are restricted to civilian use.

The rules, seen as an attempt to secure US leadership in AI, have drawn criticism, especially from Nvidia, which dominates the AI GPU market. Nvidia condemned the framework as overly restrictive and detrimental to US competitiveness, contrasting it with the Trump administration's earlier approach that prioritized innovation and global leadership. Enforcement of these rules now depends on the incoming Trump administration's stance.



Source: Indian Express

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/us-ai-export-rule-india-9780103/>

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South America

Brazil Joins India in Rejecting China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Brazil, under President Lula da Silva, has decided against joining China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), becoming the second BRICS nation after India to do so. Instead, Brazil seeks alternative avenues to collaborate with Chinese investors without formal accession to the BRI. Celso Amorim, the special presidential adviser for international affairs, emphasized the desire to elevate relations with China without committing to a binding agreement. He stated that Brazil aims to identify synergies between its infrastructure projects and available investment funds, independent of formal BRI membership.

This decision contrasts with China's intentions to highlight Brazil's participation in the BRI during President Xi Jinping's scheduled state visit to Brasília on November 20. Brazilian officials from the economy and foreign affairs ministries have expressed reservations, noting that formal involvement in the BRI may not yield immediate benefits and could complicate relations with potential future U.S. administrations. Recent discussions in Beijing left Brazilian representatives unconvinced by China's proposals.

India has consistently opposed the BRI, particularly objecting to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which India considers a violation of its sovereignty. China has faced criticism for BRI projects leading to debt dependency in smaller nations, exemplified by Sri Lanka's Hambantota port lease. Brazil's stance reflects a cautious approach to international partnerships, aiming to balance national interests without over-reliance on any single global power.

Source: National Herald

<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/international/brazil-becomes-second-brics-country-after-india-not-to-join-chinas-bri>



Asia



Odisha and Singapore Partner for Skill Development and Tech Innovation

India's goal of "Insurance for All" by 2047 will be supported through the launch of an InsureTech Hub, which aims to ensure that all citizens have access to appropriate insurance, boosting financial security and economic empowerment. This initiative will also provide training programs in FinTech and InsureTech, enhancing the skill set of professionals and students to encourage innovation in the digital economy. Additionally, venture capital funds and angel networks will be established to attract investment in Odisha's growing FinTech ecosystem, initiating the development of startups and technological advancements.

In a separate partnership, Odisha's skill development department has signed an MOU with ITEES of Singapore to expand the World Skill Center in Bhubaneswar. New courses will be introduced in fields such as hospitality, digital animation, AI applications, marine engineering, and renewable energy. A new World Centre for Information Technology will also focus on areas like cybersecurity, cloud computing, and data science.

Another key MOU will address the semiconductor sector, assessing skill requirements and available job opportunities. Singapore will design a curriculum based on its expertise in semiconductor technology. Odisha's Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi highlighted the immense potential for collaboration between Singapore and Odisha in these areas.



Source: Hindustan Times

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/odisha-singapore-sign-8-mous-in-semiconductors-green-hydrogen-and-fintech-101737128035672.html>

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Australia

Australian Finance Minister Highlights Quad's Commitment at Trump's Inauguration

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, in Washington, emphasized the Quad's "iron-clad commitment" to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, following the invitation extended to the foreign ministers of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. to attend President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration. FM Wong highlighted the Quad's unity, formed to address shared concerns about China's growing influence in the region.

Wong also noted the significance of her meetings with U.S. officials, including Senator Marco Rubio, who is expected to be confirmed as Secretary of State. She stressed the importance of the U.S. alliance to Australia's defence and economic prosperity. Discussions will focus on AUKUS, the defence technology partnership between Australia, the U.S., and Britain, which involves nuclear-powered submarines for Australia.

Wong shared that Australia is increasing its defence expenditure, with a strong focus on enhancing capabilities for deterrence to maintain regional peace. She reiterated Australia's commitment to AUKUS, aiming to speed up the U.S. production of Virginia-class submarines, with a significant financial contribution from Australia's side. This collaboration marks a critical aspect of Australia's defense strategy in the Indo-Pacific and strengthens its strategic ties with both the U.S. and the U.K.

Source : Hindustan Times

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/us-news/australia-foreign-minister-says-quad-in-washington-shows-iron-clad-commitment-101737344488835.html>

Africa

India's IOC Purchases 7 million Barrels of Middle Eastern and African Oil

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's leading refiner, has acquired 7 million barrels of crude oil from the Middle East and Africa. This strategic move aims to offset anticipated reductions in Russian oil supplies due to recent U.S. sanctions.

Among the acquisitions, IOC secured a 2-million-barrel cargo of Abu Dhabi's Murban crude from Totsa, a subsidiary of TotalEnergies. This purchase was made at a premium of approximately \$5 per barrel above Dubai quotes. Additionally, IOC obtained 1 million barrels each of Nigeria's Agbami and Akpo crude, and Gabon's Rabi Light from Shell, as well as 1 million barrels each of Agbami and Angola's Nemba crude from Chevron.

This procurement strategy reflects a broader trend among Indian refiners, who are increasingly turning to spot market purchases from the Middle East and Africa. This shift is in response to the disruptions in Russian oil supplies caused by U.S. sanctions, which have strained shipping availability and affected global supply chains.

The surge in demand from India and China has led to a significant increase in spot premiums for Middle Eastern crude, reaching their highest levels in over two years. This development underscores the growing influence of these two nations in the global oil market.



Source: Economic Times

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/indias-ioc-buys-7-million-barrels-of-middle-east-african-oil/articleshow/117319809.cms?from=mdr>