

28th April

India Strengthens Trade Ties with Croatia and Netherlands to Diversify Global Partnerships

Overview

- India is intensifying its efforts to **diversify trade partnerships** amidst global trade uncertainties by strengthening economic ties with **Croatia** and the **Netherlands**.
- These engagements aim to **explore new markets**, **expand investment opportunities**, and **enhance bilateral cooperation**.

Key Highlights

Engagement with Croatia

- **Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal** met **Zdenko Lucic**, Croatia's State Secretary for Foreign Trade and Development, on **April 22, 2025**, in **Zagreb**.
- Discussions focused on **strengthening bilateral trade ties**, **exploring investment opportunities**, and fostering greater **economic collaboration**.
- The meeting was marked by **fruitful discussions**, as reported by the **Indian Embassy in Croatia**.
- Croatia has gained strategic importance following the **re-election of President Zoran Milanovic**, creating a stable political climate for trade engagement.
- Secretary Barthwal also met **key industry leaders** in Croatia to tap into **emerging market opportunities**.

Engagement with the Netherlands

- Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal and Ambassador **K. Tuhin** met **Michiel Sweers**, Director General of Foreign Economic Relations, in **The Hague**.
- The discussions focused on strengthening ties through the **Joint Trade & Investment Committee (JTIC)** and expanding **strategic economic cooperation**.
- Special emphasis was placed on **enhancing bilateral trade and investment flows** between India and the Netherlands.

Significance of the Netherlands in India's Trade

- The **Netherlands** is India's **11th largest merchandise trading partner** globally and the **largest within the European Union** during **FY 2023-24**.
- In FY 2023-24, the total **merchandise trade** between India and the Netherlands stood at **USD 27.333 billion (INR 226,360 crores)**.
- The Netherlands accounted for **2.45% of India's total merchandise trade**, highlighting its crucial role in India's external trade portfolio.
- India enjoys a **significant trade surplus** with the Netherlands, amounting to **USD 17.40 billion (INR 144,160 crores)** during FY 2023-24.

Current Trade Dynamics (FY 2024-25)

- For FY 2024-25 (April to November), the Netherlands emerged as India's **9th largest merchandise trading partner**, with total trade valued at **USD 19.62 billion (INR 164,407 crores)**.
- India maintains a strong **trade surplus** of **USD 12.971 billion (INR 108,545 crores)** with the Netherlands during this period.
- The Netherlands is now India's **largest export destination in Europe** and **third largest globally**, after the **USA** and the **UAE**, with exports worth **USD 22.367 billion (INR 185,260 crores)** in FY 2023-24.

International Workers' Memorial Day 2025: Safeguarding Workers' Rights in the Age of AI and Digitalisation

Overview

- **International Workers' Memorial Day** is observed annually on **April 28** to honor workers who have lost their lives or suffered injuries at the workplace.
- The 2025 theme, "**Fight For Our Lives, Safe Jobs Now**," emphasizes the urgent need for safer, fairer, and healthier working environments, especially amidst rapid technological change.

Key Highlights



The Growing Challenge: Digitalisation and AI in the Workplace

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **digital technologies** are transforming work at an unprecedented speed but are increasingly linked to unsafe working conditions.
- **Algorithmic management** is leading to **constant surveillance**, **impossible productivity targets**, and **dangerous workloads**, severely affecting workers' health and rights.
- **427 million workers worldwide** are under intensified pressure due to AI-driven management systems.
- **80% of large employers** now use AI tools to monitor individual worker productivity, often resulting in **burnout**, **injuries**, and **mental health issues**.

Real-World Cases of Exploitation

- In the **Philippines**, the tragic death of **19-year-old delivery rider Jasper Dalman** exposed the deadly consequences of algorithmic exploitation, leading to union victories for rider rights.
- In **Turkey**, TikTok content moderators working for Telus were **fired** after organizing against **inhumane AI workloads**.

- In the **United States**, nurses on digital platforms face **AI-controlled shift apps** that **bypass worker protection laws**, endangering both nurses and patients.

The ITUC's Call to Action

- The **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)** demands full **union involvement** in the design and deployment of AI in workplaces.
- It advocates for **transparent, human-centered technology** that prioritizes **safety, fairness, and dignity** for workers.
- The ITUC is urging for a **binding International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention** on platform work to protect all workers in the digital economy.

Historical Context

- **International Workers' Memorial Day** was first initiated by **trade unions in 1989** to commemorate workers who died or were injured due to unsafe working conditions.
- The day has since been recognized globally, with strong backing from the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, reinforcing the principle that every worker deserves a **safe and healthy workplace**.

Shaping Minds Since 2007

Observances and Significance

- Events like **candlelight vigils, educational programs, and solidarity speeches** are held worldwide to honor the memory of lost workers and strengthen commitments to workplace safety.
- The **color purple** is traditionally worn on this day to show **solidarity** and **respect** for workers' rights and sacrifices.
- **International Workers' Memorial Day 2025** serves as a powerful reminder:
Technology must work for humanity, not against it. Workers' safety and dignity must remain at the heart of progress.

29th April

India-UK Free Trade Agreement Inches Towards Finalization

High-Level Diplomatic Push

- **Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal** met with **UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds** in London on **April 28, 2025**, as part of a high-stakes effort to finalize the **India–UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
- Goyal described the meeting as “**productive**”, reaffirming India’s commitment to deepening bilateral trade and economic ties.
- This is part of Goyal’s **5-day European tour** covering **London, Oslo, and Brussels** aimed at boosting trade relations across the continent.



FTA Negotiation Timeline and Context

- The **India–UK FTA talks officially began in January 2022** with an ambitious target to conclude the deal within nine months.
- Talks faced multiple delays due to **political instability in the UK, elections in both nations**, and unresolved negotiation issues.
- The **talks were relaunched in February 2025** with a structured **three-track approach**: FTA, **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)**, and a **Social Security Agreement**.

Current Progress and Urgency

- According to senior officials, negotiations are **in the final stages**, with only a few critical issues left.
- The talks gained urgency after the **US proposed country-specific reciprocal tariffs**, currently paused till **July 9, 2025**, prompting India to speed up its FTA finalizations.
- The UK also expressed a strong desire to **boost access for UK businesses**, reduce tariffs, and simplify trade procedures.

Key Pending Issues

- **India seeks a Social Security Agreement** to protect Indian professionals working in the UK from dual contributions.
- The UK is pushing for **greater market access in India's financial services sector**.
- London is also demanding **lower tariffs on British whiskey and automobiles**, a matter of political sensitivity in India.
- India has raised serious concerns about the UK's proposed **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism**, set to roll out in **2027**.

Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)

- The BIT has been one of the **most challenging components** of the overall package due to disputes over **investor-state dispute resolution mechanisms**.
- Earlier this month, **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman** visited London to give momentum to the BIT talks.
- India's **Union Budget 2025-26** also announced plans to **revamp the BIT model** to make it **more investor-friendly**, signaling flexibility on New Delhi's part.

Strategic and Economic Implications

- The FTA is expected to significantly boost the **£41 billion/year India–UK trade relationship**.
- It will help Indian businesses gain **preferential market access** in the UK, especially in **pharmaceuticals, textiles, IT services, and agriculture**.
- For the UK, the deal is seen as **vital post-Brexit** to secure non-EU trade partnerships and grow exports in emerging markets.

Broader European Engagement

- Goyal's visit is part of India's larger **Europe-focused trade diplomacy**:
 - **Oslo**: Review of the **Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)** signed with EFTA countries (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein).
 - **Brussels**: Meetings related to ongoing **India–EU FTA negotiations** with the 27-member European Union.
- The visit demonstrates India's **multi-vector trade strategy**, balancing ties with the UK, EU, and EFTA.

Conclusion

This recent diplomatic engagement between India and the UK underscores a **renewed momentum in concluding a comprehensive trade pact**. If finalized, the India–UK FTA will not only reshape bilateral commerce but also contribute to India's **strategic ambition** of becoming a **global trade powerhouse** amidst evolving international trade dynamics.

India Signs Rs 64,000 Crore Rafale-M Deal with France

Agreement Overview and Key Highlights

- India signed a **historic Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)** with France on **April 28, 2025**, worth **Rs 64,000 crore**.
- The deal involves procurement of **26 Rafale-Marine combat aircraft** for the Indian Navy to strengthen maritime air power.
- It was finalized following the **Cabinet Committee on Security's** approval, chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**.
- **Deliveries** of the aircraft are scheduled to start by **mid-2028** and finish by **2030**.
- The contract includes a **complete support package**: training, simulators, performance-based logistics, and weapons.

Aircraft Details and Deployment

- The acquisition includes **22 single-seat Rafale-M jets** designed for aircraft carrier operations.
- **Four twin-seat Rafale-M trainers** will also be delivered, though these are not carrier-operable.
- The Rafale-M jets will be deployed aboard **INS Vikrant** and **INS Vikramaditya**.
- These jets will complement and eventually help replace the aging **Russian-origin MiG-29K fleet**.
- India becomes the **first country outside France** to operate the **Rafale Marine**.

Indigenous Production and Job Creation

- The deal involves **technology transfer** for integrating **indigenous weapons** onto the Rafale-M jets in India.
- A **new production facility** for fuselage manufacturing will be set up under the **Make in India** initiative.
- Extensive **Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO)** infrastructure for engines, sensors, and weapons will be developed.
- This move is expected to **generate thousands of direct and indirect jobs**.
- A large number of **MSMEs** (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) will benefit from setting up, production, and maintenance work.

Strategic Indo-French Defense Partnership

- The deal strengthens the **long-standing defense partnership** between India and France.
- It underscores a shift towards **co-production and co-development** of critical military technology.

- India's **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** goal is heavily reinforced through this agreement.
- Joint training exercises, operational support, and technology sharing will deepen military ties.
- The agreement follows France's **expressed solidarity with India** after the Pahalgam terror attack.

Selection Process and Competitive Edge

- The Rafale-M was selected after a **competitive evaluation** against Boeing's **F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet**.
- **Operational logistics advantage** was a decisive factor, as India already operates **36 Rafale fighters** for the Air Force.
- The Rafale-M offered **seamless maintenance, training, and support integration** with the existing IAF fleet.
- Commonality reduces **costs for spare parts, infrastructure, and training** across both Navy and Air Force.
- Rafale-M also demonstrated **proven maritime operational capability**, unlike its competitors.

Enhancing India's Maritime and Joint Force Capabilities

- Rafale-M induction is a critical step toward **sea control and maritime dominance**.
- It provides **interoperability** between the Indian Navy and Air Force, boosting joint operations.
- The common training and logistical infrastructure will **optimize costs** and **increase efficiency**.
- Combat lessons from the **French Navy's use of Rafale Marine** will be shared with India.

- The platform will serve until India's indigenous **Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF)** becomes operational.

Historical Context and Dassault Aviation's Legacy

- Dassault Aviation's relationship with India dates back to the 1950s, starting with the **Toofany fighter**.
- Over **10,000 aircraft** have been delivered by Dassault globally across **90 countries**.
- Dassault continues its engagement with India through **Make in India** and **Skill India** initiatives.
- The 2016 Rafale deal for the IAF laid the groundwork for **broader defense cooperation**.
- Dassault Aviation's CEO, **Éric Trappier**, expressed commitment to India's **sovereign capability-building**.

Broader Impact and Future Outlook

- The Rafale-M deal sets a **new benchmark** for India's future **aircraft carrier operations**.
- It supports India's **self-reliance goals** and **global defense aspirations**.
- Strengthening the naval fleet will **safeguard India's maritime interests** in the Indian Ocean region.
- The project will enhance India's stature as a **responsible global defense partner**.
- It establishes a solid foundation for **future collaborations** with France in **space, aviation, and defense sectors**.

Conclusion

The Rs 64,000 crore Rafale-Marine deal is not just a major military acquisition — it is a symbol of India's rise as a self-reliant, globally respected defense power, forging stronger strategic alliances for a secure future.

30th April

India's Strategic Response Post-Pahalgam Terror Attack: Armed Forces Given Full Operational Freedom

Overview of the Pahalgam Terror Attack

- **Brutal Civilian Massacre in Kashmir:** On **April 22, 2025**, terrorists opened fire on tourists in **Pahalgam**, Jammu & Kashmir, killing **at least 26 civilians**, making it one of the deadliest civilian attacks in recent years.
- **Nationwide Outrage:** The attack has evoked **widespread condemnation and grief** across India, prompting demands for immediate and strong retaliation.
- **Pattern of Cross-Border Terrorism:** Government sources indicated that the **attack bears clear links to Pakistan-backed terror groups**, continuing a trend of **state-sponsored terrorism** across the border.

High-Level Strategic Meeting Led by PM Modi

- **Security Review by Top Leadership:** On **April 29, 2025**, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** chaired a high-level security meeting to assess the fallout of the Pahalgam terror attack and deliberate India's counter-strategy.
- **Key Attendees:**
Present at the meeting were:
 - **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh**
 - **NSA Ajit Doval**
 - **CDS Gen. Anil Chauhan**
 - **Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi**

- Navy Chief Adm. Dinesh K. Tripathi
- Air Force Chief ACM Amar Preet Singh
- **Empowering the Armed Forces:** PM Modi declared “**full operational freedom**” to the Indian armed forces to determine the **mode, timing, and targets** of India’s response.
- **Reaffirmation of National Resolve:** The Prime Minister asserted India’s **unwavering commitment to crush terrorism**, vowing to pursue the perpetrators and their sponsors “**to the ends of the earth.**”
- **Confidence in Defence Forces:** Modi expressed **complete faith in the professionalism and preparedness** of the Indian military to deliver an appropriate and effective response.



Strategic and Diplomatic Repercussions

- **Historical Precedents of Retaliation:**
 - **2016 Uri Attack → Surgical Strikes**
 - **2019 Pulwama Attack → Balakot Airstrikes**
These past responses highlight the **Modi government's established policy of robust retaliation.**
- **Diplomatic Fallout: Indus Waters Treaty Suspended:** As part of pressure tactics, India has **put the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan on hold**, a significant step with serious diplomatic ramifications.
- **Wider Security Mobilisation:** Earlier on April 29, **Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan** held a separate high-level security meeting with the chiefs of **paramilitary forces and intelligence agencies**, indicating a **nationwide security revamp** is underway.

Broader Impact and Public Sentiment

- **Tourism in Shock:** The attack, targeting **unarmed tourists from various Indian states**, has dealt a blow to **Kashmir’s tourism sector**, which had been recovering steadily.

- **Public Demands for Justice:** Citizens and political voices across the country are demanding **swift and harsh retaliatory measures** against both the terrorists and their cross-border enablers.
- **Heightened Military Preparedness Along LoC:** Reports indicate **increased military alertness** and crackdown on militants near the **Line of Control (LoC)**, signalling possible preparatory steps for retaliation.
- **International Watch on India's Next Move:** Given India's history of **pre-emptive strikes** and the gravity of the civilian toll, the **global community is closely observing** New Delhi's response trajectory.

Maharashtra Tops CareEdge Composite Ranking for Large States, Southern & Western States Dominate

Key Highlights of the 2025 State Rankings by CareEdge

- **Maharashtra Ranked as India's Top-Performing Large State:** As per the **CareEdge Ratings' Composite State Ranking for 2025**, Maharashtra leads among large States, driven by strong performance in **financial development, economic, fiscal and social pillars**.
- **Top Five Dominated by Western and Southern States:**
 - **Top 5:** Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, Tamil Nadu
 - These States consistently perform well across **economic growth, governance, environment and infrastructure**.
- **Bottom Three Large States: Bihar (17th), Jharkhand (16th), and Madhya Pradesh (15th)** ranked lowest among large States, indicating the need for greater development in fiscal and governance indicators.

Ranking Methodology and Framework

- **Seven Pillars of Assessment:**
Rankings are based on **50 indicators** under **seven critical pillars**:
 - **Economic**

- **Fiscal**
 - **Infrastructure**
 - **Financial Development**
 - **Social**
 - **Governance**
 - **Environment**
- **Objective:** The initiative aims to offer a **quantitative, inclusive, and long-term view** of States' growth potential and **investment attractiveness**, according to **CareEdge MD Mehul Pandya**.

Pillar-Wise Top Performers

Economic Rankings

- **Gujarat Leads Economic Pillar:** Gujarat tops with strong **per capita GSDP**, high **FDI-to-GSDP ratio**, and **Gross Fixed Capital Formation** for industries. **Karnataka and Maharashtra** follow due to their **industry and services GVA** contributions and FDI inflows.

Fiscal Rankings

- **Odisha Tops in Fiscal Management:** Odisha performs best in **debt control**, **revenue deficit**, and **liabilities management**, followed by **Gujarat and Maharashtra**.

Financial Development

- **Maharashtra Leads in Financial Development:** Driven by high **credit disbursement**, mutual fund and insurance penetration. **Telangana and Haryana** also show strong performance.
- **Southern States Excel:** States like **Telangana and Tamil Nadu** fare well in **bank credit and SHG loans**, while Haryana shows strength in **NBFC credit and Jan Dhan accounts**.

Infrastructure Rankings

- **Punjab and Haryana Lead Infrastructure Pillar:** With high **per capita power**, **railway density**, and **irrigation coverage**, they outperformed others. **Goa** led in **small states**.

Social Rankings

- **Kerala Tops Social Indicators, Despite Unemployment Concerns:** Strong in **literacy, health, and education**, but **lags in employment**. **Tamil Nadu** also ranked high in social metrics.

Governance Rankings

- **Andhra Pradesh Leads in Governance:** With top scores in **business environment**, **court trial completion**, and **judge strength**. Southern States dominate with **four of top six** governance spots.

Environment Rankings

- **Karnataka Tops for Environmental Performance:** Supported by **air quality and renewable energy metrics**. **Telangana and Andhra Pradesh** show progress in **forest cover and water access**.

Category B (Small, Hilly & NE States) Highlights

- **Goa Tops Small State Rankings:** Excels in **infrastructure, financial development, social, and fiscal pillars**, followed by **Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, and Assam**.
- **Environmental and Governance Strength in Category B:**
 - **Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand** lead in **governance and environment**.

Nagaland, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh are at the bottom of the group, suggesting policy gaps.