

**The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE**
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Recently, President Droupadi Murmu promulgated the **Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026**, exercising powers under **Article 123** of the Indian Constitution. The ordinance amends Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956, increasing the sanctioned number of puisne judges from **33 to 37**. Including the Chief Justice of India (CJI), the total sanctioned judicial strength of the apex court now stands at **38**. This executive intervention comes against the backdrop of a mounting judicial crisis, with pendency in the Supreme Court hovering at an unprecedented **93,000+ cases**.

### Core Constitutional and Statutory Framework

#### A. Power to Change Judge Strength

- **Article 124(1):** The Constitution originally stipulated a Supreme Court comprising the CJI and "not more than seven other judges." However, it explicitly granted **Parliament** the authority to prescribe a larger number by law.

## Ordinance increases number of SC judges to 37

President Droupadi Murmu has promulgated an ordinance, which will be taken up by Parliament when it convenes; the move is a step towards tiding over crisis of pendency of cases plaguing the court; current backlog of cases stands at over 93,000, which is threatening to reach six figures rapidly even as the court goes into summer recess in June

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**P**resident Droupadi Murmu has promulgated an ordinance increasing the number of judges in the Supreme Court to 37 – excluding the Chief Justice of India.

The May 16 Gazette notification says "Parliament is not in session and the President is satisfied that the circumstances exist which render it necessary for her to take immediate action [issue of ordinance]".

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026, has been promulgated in accordance with the powers of the President under Article 123 of the

Constitution. The ordinance will be placed in both Houses of Parliament when it convenes. It will cease to operate if six weeks expire without any resolution passed on it after the reassembly of Parliament or if resolutions are passed in both Houses of Parliament disapproving the ordinance.

The President can withdraw the ordinance at any time.

#### Strength crisis

The ordinance has amended Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 to replace the word "thirty-three" with "thirty-seven".

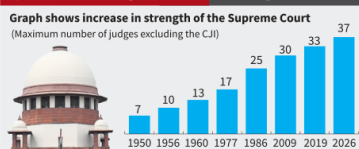
The promulgation has happened nearly two weeks after the Union Ca-

#### Judicial numbers

The top court currently has a backlog of over **93,000 cases**, which is threatening to reach six figures even as the court is going into summer recess, or "partial working days", in June

The Framers of the Constitution had originally in Article 124(1) envisaged a Supreme Court consisting of the CJI and 'not more than seven judges' until 'Parliament by law prescribes a larger number'

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 as originally enacted, provided for the maximum number of judges (excluding the CJI) to be 10



binet approved the proposal to increase the number of Supreme Court judges. With the ordinance in place, the total sanctioned judicial strength in the Su-

preme Court, including the Chief Justice of India, will rise from 34 to 38.

The move is seen as a step towards tiding over the continuing crisis of

pendency plaguing the court for years now, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the facility of e-filing of cases caught on.

The current backlog is over 93,000 cases.

The backlog is threatening to reach six figures even as the court is going into summer recess, or "partial working days", in June.

#### Six-year hiatus

The government's approval for more judges in the Supreme Court had come after a six-year hiatus. Parliament had last amended Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 in 2019, raising the sanctioned strength from 30 to 33, excluding

the Chief Justice of India.

At present, there are two judicial vacancies in the top court. These are of the previous Chief Justice of India, Justice B.R. Gavai, who retired in November 2025, and Justice Rajesh Bindal, who completed office in April 2026.

Three more judges are scheduled to retire in 2026. Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Pankaj Mithal will end their tenure in June, and Justice Sanjay Karol in August.

The Framers of the Constitution had originally in Article 124(1) envisaged a Supreme Court consisting of the Chief Justice of India and "not more than seven judges" until "Parliament by law prescribes a larger number".

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act 1956, as originally enacted, provided for the maximum number of judges (excluding the CJI) to be 10.

This number was increased to 13 by the Supreme Court (Number of Judges), Amendment Act, 1960, and to 17 by another amendment to the law.

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Act, 1986, augmented the strength of the Supreme Court judges from 17 to 25, excluding the CJI. Subsequently, a fresh amendment in 2009 further augmented the strength of top court judges from 25 to 30.

This was followed by the previous amendment in 2019.

- **The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956:** This is the parent legislation used by Parliament to periodically scale up judicial capacity. The strength has evolved progressively over the decades:

Year	Sanctioned Strength (Excluding CJI)	Total Strength (Including CJI)
1950 (Original)	7	8
1956	10	11
1960	13	14
1977	17	18
1986	25	26

## Daily News Analysis

Year	Sanctioned Strength (Excluding CJI)	Total Strength (Including CJI)
2009	30	31
2019	33	34
2026 (Present)	37	38

### B. The Ordinance Route (Article 123)

- **Justification:** Since Parliament is not currently in session and immediate action was deemed necessary to address the pendency crisis ahead of the court's upcoming summer recess/partial working days, the executive invoked Article 123.
- **Sustenance:** The ordinance must be approved by both Houses of Parliament within **six weeks of its reassembly**, failing which it will cease to operate.

### Drivers Behind the Move (Why Now?)

- **The Pendency Avalanche:** The backlog of cases has climbed to over 93,000, severely challenging the constitutional promise of "speedy justice" (implicit under Article 21).
- **Frequent Structural Vacancies:** The court's active working strength frequently falls short of its sanctioned limits due to scheduled retirements. In 2026 alone, multiple retirements are scheduled, including recent exits and upcoming retirements of key judges through June and August, exacerbating the shortfall.
- **E-Filing and Increased Litigation:** The post-COVID-19 digital transformation (such as e-filing) has lowered the barrier to entry for litigants, resulting in a rapid influx of fresh filings that outweigh the current disposal rate.
- **Regular Constitution Benches:** CJI Surya Kant's requests for expansion cited the operational need to consistently form 5-judge or 9-judge Constitution Benches to settle critical questions of law without freezing regular appellate court work.

### Significance of the Decision

- **Enhanced Disposal Rate:** More judges mean the creation of additional benches, potentially accelerating the disposal of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) and routine appeals.
- **Structural Division of Work:** It allows the Supreme Court to strike a finer balance between its two core roles: acting as a **Constitutional Court** (interpreting complex constitutional laws) and a **Final Court of Appeal**.
- **Strengthening Judicial Infrastructure:** It acknowledges the pressing physical and human resource constraints plaguing the top tier of the Indian judiciary.

### Associated Challenges and Structural Concerns

While increasing numbers is a positive stop-gap measure, legal experts and previous Law Commissions argue that numerical expansion alone cannot solve structural backlog.

- **The Appointment Bottleneck:** Raising the sanctioned limit is meaningless unless the **Supreme Court Collegium** swiftly recommends names, and the Executive clears them without undue delays. Historically, vacancies persist despite expansions.
- **The Problem of SLPs:** The Supreme Court of India acts heavily as a court of error correction due to the indiscriminate admission of Special Leave Petitions (Article 136). This dilutes its primary focus as a Constitutional Arbiter.
- **Ignoring Structural Reforms (The 229th Law Commission Report):** The Law Commission of India had previously recommended structurally splitting the court into:
  1. A **Constitutional Bench** operating out of New Delhi.
  2. **Regional Cassation Benches** (in cities like Chennai/Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai) to handle routine civil, criminal, and tax appeals from High Courts.

Note: This proposal was previously rejected by the Supreme Court Full Court, which insisted on maintaining the central integrity of the seat in Delhi.

### Conclusion

The promulgation of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026, reflects a pragmatic and urgent executive intervention to prevent the apex court's pendency from crossing the critical six-figure threshold. However, treating judicial pendency simply as a numbers game offers a temporary fix to a systemic disease. To ensure meaningful judicial efficiency, this expansion must be backed by a rapid, friction-free appointment process through the Collegium, stricter guidelines on admitting routine appeals, and serious deliberation on structural reforms like setting up regional benches. Ultimate success will depend not on how many seats exist on paper, but on how quickly and efficiently those seats are filled and utilized to deliver timely justice.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** With reference to the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026, consider the following statements:

- 1.The ordinance was promulgated under Article 123 of the Constitution.
- 2.The ordinance increases the sanctioned strength of puisne judges from 33 to 37.
- 3.Article 124(1) itself fixes the permanent strength of the Supreme Court at 38 judges.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: a)

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:** "Judicial pendency in India is not merely a numerical problem but a structural crisis." Discuss in the context of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026. (150 Words)

**Page 01 · GS II : International Relations**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oslo, Norway, marks a historic milestone as the **first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the country in 43 years**. Against a backdrop of widening global fractures, the visit serves a dual purpose: deepening bilateral ties with Norway—a global energy powerhouse—and convening the **3rd India-Nordic Summit** alongside the leaders of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. This diplomatic outreach underscores India's growing footprint in Northern Europe, seeking to balance critical energy security, trade expansion, and complex geopolitical dialogues amid active global conflicts.

**Key Highlights of the Visit**

**A. Bilateral Focus with Norway**

- **Government-to-Government (G2G) Agreements:** India and Norway are set to ink three pivotal MoUs focusing on **health cooperation, digital public infrastructure (DPI), and space ties**.
- **Commercial Energy Pacts:** At least 18 Business-to-Business (B2B) MoUs are expected, primarily in the energy sector. This follows a landmark 15-year Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supply agreement with the Norwegian energy major Equinor.
- **Sovereign Wealth Investments:** India is actively pitching for greater capital injection from the **Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global** (the world's largest sovereign wealth fund) into India's infrastructure and green energy transitions.

**B. Diplomatic Recognition from Sweden**

- En route to Norway, PM Modi held extensive talks with Swedish PM Ulf Kristersson spanning defence, technology, and trade.
- The Prime Minister was conferred with Sweden's prestigious '**Royal Order of the Polar Star**' (**Commander Grand Cross**), signifying a deep-seated upgrade in India-Sweden strategic ties.

**Strategic & Geopolitical Significance for India**

**A. Energy Security and the Arctic Frontier**

**Trade, energy, and global conflicts at top of agenda during PM's Norway visit**

**Suhasini Haider**  
OSLO

Trade and energy supplies will top the agenda as Prime Minister Narendra Modi lands here on Monday for the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 43 years to Norway, one of the world's major oil and gas exporters.

Mr. Modi is scheduled to hold talks with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, and both leaders will address a business summit as both countries seek new markets and new technological collaborations.

The visit will also include the 3rd Nordic-India summit, bringing together leaders of the five Nordic Countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Denmark on Tuesday. The summit had to be cancelled last year after the Pahalgam terrorist attack and the four-day India-Pakistan conflict. In addition, discussions on the conflicts in Ukraine, Iran, and Gaza are expected to come up in both bilateral and multilateral discussions.

India and Norway are expected to announce three government-to-government MoUs which will focus on health cooperation, digital infrastructure and space ties. At least 18 MoUs are expected between businesses during the visit, many of which will be in the field of energy. "We are discussing more and more what we can do together on energy, and we are expecting several business-to-business MoUs on the energy side," Norwegian Ambassador to India May-Elin Stener told *The Hindu*, citing a big consignment of LNG delivered to India last week, part of a 15-year deal with Norwegian energy major Equinor.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed in Gothenburg, Sweden. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson is present. PTI

**India upgrades bilateral ties with the Netherlands**

**Suhasini Haider**  
OSLO

India and the Netherlands upgraded bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership and signs 17 pacts and MoUs

during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country on Saturday and Sunday.

**FULL REPORT ON**  
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India hopes to discuss more investment from Norwegian pension funds, the world's wealthiest, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a briefing last week. According to Ministry of External Affairs figures, over 700 Nordic firms operate in India, and around 150 Indian firms have a presence in Nordic regions. India's bilateral trade in goods and services is well below potential, say experts, with about \$19 billion with Nordic countries, and both sides are seeking more collaborations.

The timing of Mr. Modi's visit to Norway and the Nordic Summit is significant, given that the leaders are converging for the first time since 2022, and the Russia-Ukraine war, Israel's attack on Gaza after the October 7 attacks and the U.S.-Israel war with Iran, all are having an impact on the global economy. "The world has changed a lot since (the last Nordic-India Summit).

So, all five Nordic countries are really looking forward to discussing geopolitical issues with the leader of the most populous country, and there will also be a lot of discussions on climate, on green future sustainability and how we can work closely together as democracies," Ambassador Stener said.

Focus will also be on India's response to U.S. sanctions waivers on Russian oil, which lapsed on Saturday.

Mr. Modi held also wide-ranging talks with his Swedish counterpart Ulf Kristersson on Sunday, focusing on trade, technology, defence, and other key sectors. Mr. Modi, who arrived on Sunday, was also awarded the 'Royal Order of the Polar Star, Degree Commander Grand Cross' in recognition of his exceptional contribution to India-Sweden relationship and his visionary leadership. (With PTI inputs)

Norway is one of the world's most vital oil and gas exporters. As traditional energy supply chains face volatility due to Middle Eastern tensions and Western sanctions on Russia, securing a diversified, long-term energy pipeline (like the 15-year LNG deal with Equinor) is critical for India. Furthermore, cooperation with Norway strengthens India's engagement with the **Arctic Council**, where India holds Observer status and maintains its Himadri research station.

## B. Deepening the India-TEPA / EFTA Alignment

The Nordic countries are key components of the broader European trade network. The emphasis on boosting the current modest trade of \$19 billion aligns with India's broader push to operationalize economic partnerships like the **India-EFTA (European Free Trade Association) Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement**, ensuring seamless market access for over 700 Nordic firms in India and 150 Indian entities in the Nordic region.

## C. The Strategic "Green Strategic Partnership"

Nordic nations are global leaders in clean technology, circular economies, and climate mitigation. Collaborating on green hydrogen, offshore wind energy, and sustainable maritime shipping helps India edge closer to its Net Zero 2070 targets.

## Complex Diplomatic Balancing Acts (UPSC Mains Perspective)

The summit requires India to navigate several highly delicate geopolitical tightropes:

- **The Russia-Ukraine Equation:** The Nordic countries (especially newly inducted NATO members Finland and Sweden) view Russia as a direct, existential security threat. India will have to skillfully articulate its strategic autonomy and independent stance on the Ukraine conflict while addressing the expiry of U.S. sanctions waivers on Russian oil.
- **The West-Asia Conundrum:** With discussions slated on Gaza and the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict, India must balance its deep strategic ties with Israel against its energy interests in Iran and its principled stance on Middle Eastern stability.
- **Overcoming Regional Tensions:** The revival of this summit—which was cancelled the previous year due to a sharp escalation in India-Pakistan border conflicts following the Pahalgam incident—demonstrates India's resolve to decouple its broader global diplomacy from immediate neighborhood security frictions.

## Overview of the Nordic Countries and India's Footprint

Country	Key Area of Synergy with India	Recent Developments
Norway	Blue Economy, LNG/Energy, Sovereign Wealth Funds	15-year LNG supply deal with Equinor; MoUs on Space & DPI
Sweden	Defence (Gripen aviation/Saab), Innovation, Urban Mobility	Conferred the 'Royal Order of the Polar Star' to PM Modi
Denmark	Green Strategic Partnership, Wind Energy, Water Management	Active joint action plan on wind power and waste-to-energy
Finland	5G/6G Telecom Technology, Quantum Computing, Education	Enhanced collaboration in high-tech research and digital manufacturing

Country	Key Area of Synergy with India	Recent Developments
Iceland	Geothermal Energy, Food Processing, Tourism	Collaboration on utilizing volcanic/geothermal tech for clean energy

**Conclusion**

PM Modi's Nordic outreach highlights a pragmatic shift in India's foreign policy, moving beyond traditional European power centers (like France and Germany) to cultivate specialized partnerships with smaller, technologically advanced democracies. While geopolitical differences regarding Russia and global conflicts will inevitably persist, the overarching convergence on the **Green Transition, Digital Public Infrastructure, and Energy Diversification** provides a resilient foundation. For India, leveraging Nordic capital and technology will be instrumental in fueling its sustainable development goals, while offering the Nordic bloc a massive, stable democratic market in the Indo-Pacific.

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:**Examine the strategic significance of Norway for India's energy security and Arctic policy.(150 Words)

**Page 04: International Relations / Prelims Exam**

During a high-profile diplomatic visit to The Hague, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the newly elected Dutch Prime Minister, Rob Jetten, elevated the bilateral relationship between India and the Netherlands to a **Strategic Partnership**. Marking a significant milestone, the two nations signed 17 agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) across high-tech manufacturing, renewable energy, and traditional domains. However, alongside substantial economic and technological synergy, the visit also highlighted the unavoidable friction points in contemporary global diplomacy, with India pushing back against Dutch remarks concerning domestic governance, press freedoms, and human rights.

**India, Netherlands upgrade bilateral ties, sign 17 pacts**

Deals inked cover areas of water, agriculture, health, renewable energy, critical minerals and a semiconductor project; govt. pushes back on Dutch concerns over press freedom, minority rights

**Subhasini Haidar**  
OSLO

India and the Netherlands upgraded bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country on Saturday and Sunday. The two sides signed 17 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in areas of "WAH" (water, agriculture, and health), renewable energy, critical minerals, and a semiconductor fabrication project between TATA Electronics and Dutch company ASML.

Recently elected Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten said he had raised "sensitive topics" with Mr. Modi, including a legal custody and abduction case involving a Dutch-born child, Insiya. Besides, a number of Dutch media outlets reported that Mr. Jetten spoke about concerns over "press freedoms and minority rights in India", which the External Affairs Ministry later pushed back on.

**'New momentum'**  
Mr. Modi said the meetings had added a "new momentum" to the India-Netherlands ties. "From elevating our relationship to a Strategic Partnership to expanding cooperation in water resources, semiconductors, innovation, defence, sustainability and mobility, we have charted an ambitious road map for the future," he said in a social media post after leaving the Netherlands. Mr. Modi flew to Sweden on Sunday for a half-day stop as part of his five-nation week-long visit, which will bring him to Oslo on Monday for bilateral talks and the Nordic-India Summit.



**Diplomatic visit:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Dutch counterpart Rob Jetten at a meeting in The Hague on Saturday. ANI

"The strategic partnership we are entering into today between India and the Netherlands also offers us opportunities to discuss sensitive topics more frequently," said Prime Minister Jetten during press statement at his official residence, the Catshuis, where he met with Mr. Modi, Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* reported.

**'Lack of understanding'**  
Mr. Jetten also reportedly said that "the Netherlands and the European Union are worried about press freedom and minority rights, among them the Muslim community and smaller communities". At an External Affairs Ministry briefing on Sunday, two Dutch journalists sought the Ministry's response to the comments and also asked why the Prime Minister had not joined the press conference.

"This question comes because of the lack of understanding," retorted Ministry Secretary (West) Sibi

George in a lengthy response about India's diversity in culture, language, food, and religion to a question from Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*. "Today we are 1.4 billion people, diverse, living in peace and harmony. And a democratically elected government where peaceful transition of power happens," he said. However, he added that he had not seen the statement by Mr. Jetten that the journalists had referred to, but was giving the "factual position". "You need to have more understanding of India to appreciate what India is," he told another journalist from NRC.

The spokesperson also told *The Hindu* that the Dutch PM "didn't raise anything like that in the bilateral meetings or any other engagement with PM". Mr. George acknowledged Mr. Jetten raised the case of Insiya, allegedly abducted by her father (an Indian) in 2016, as her mother protested during Mr. Modi's visit, seeking India's help to trace and extradite the child and bring the father to justice. "A case is in the court, it is *sub judice*, so I would not like to comment on this at this stage, but it was raised [by the Dutch PM]," he said.

**Structural Pillars of the New Strategic Partnership**

The upgraded partnership transitions the bilateral relationship from a trade-heavy engagement to a deep tech, resilient supply chain alliance. The core outcomes can be classified into four primary vectors:

**A. The "WAH" Agenda (Water, Agriculture, Health)**

- Water Management:** Scaling up the existing Strategic Partnership on Water into large-scale delta management, flood control, and river rejuvenation projects leveraging Dutch engineering.

- **Agriculture:** Setting up new Centers of Excellence for smart farming, cold-chain logistics, and food safety protocols.
- **Health:** Promoting collaborative genomic research, digital health infrastructure, and pandemic preparedness.

## B. Deep-Tech & Semiconductor Ecosystem (The TATA-ASML Deal)

- The crown jewel of the 17 pacts is the agreement between **TATA Electronics** and the Dutch tech behemoth **ASML** (the global leader in photolithography equipment).
- ASML will supply its cutting-edge lithography solutions and help develop local talent to fast-track and stabilize operations at Tata's upcoming **300 mm commercial semiconductor fabrication facility in Dholera, Gujarat**.

## C. Critical Minerals and Energy Resiliency

- The pacts carve out a framework for securing supply chains of **critical minerals** necessary for India's clean energy goals.
- Concurrently, joint investment plans were laid down for green hydrogen production, biofuels, and green shipping corridors.

## Geopolitical Significance for India

### A. The Gateway to Europe

The Netherlands is historically and logistically India's commercial gateway to continental Europe. It ranks as one of India's top trading partners in the EU and a massive source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Elevating this relationship establishes a firm anchor for India as it negotiates the broader **India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.

### B. De-risking Global Supply Chains

By securing partnerships in critical tech (ASML) and critical minerals, India reduces its strategic vulnerabilities in the electronics and hardware sectors, advancing its Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) and Make in India objectives.

- **The Clash of Values (Normative vs. Sovereign Diplomacy):** Prime Minister Jetten raised western concerns regarding press freedoms and minority rights (specifically referencing the Muslim community).
- **India's Pushback Strategy:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) deployed a strong counter-narrative. By characterizing European concerns as a "lack of understanding," India asserted its status as a robust, organic democracy holding a peaceful coexistence of 1.4 billion diverse people. India firmly rejects western metrics of internal evaluation, favoring direct bilateral communication over public commentary.
- **Transnational Legal Tangles:** The invocation of individual cases, like the child custody dispute of Insiya, signals that European partners increasingly face domestic pressure to tie geopolitical engagement with the legal protection of their citizens abroad. India handled this via standard diplomatic protocol, designating the matter as sub judice.

## Way Forward

To maximize the utility of the newly formed Strategic Partnership, both nations must actively decouple transactional economic achievements from ideological differences. For India, the timely execution of the TATA-ASML partnership is vital to establishing its footprint on the global semiconductor map. For the Netherlands, India represents an irreplaceable, stable demographic market. Sustaining this momentum requires regular interactions via the newly established Roadmap for Strategic Partnership, ensuring that friction points are managed through institutional backchannels rather than spilled onto media briefings.

**Conclusion**

The upgrade of India-Netherlands relations into a Strategic Partnership underscores the maturity of modern Indian foreign policy. It highlights India's capacity to separate hard-nosed economic and technology acquisition—such as pioneering semiconductor ties with ASML—from unavoidable friction over internal political matters. As India continues its diplomatic journey across Northern Europe, this model of pragmatic, issue-based alignment will serve as a foundational blueprint for navigating complex bilateral engagements with Western democracies.

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:** The India–Netherlands Strategic Partnership reflects the growing importance of issue-based diplomacy in contemporary international relations. Discuss. (150 Words)

**Page : 06: GS I : Art and Culture / Prelims Exam**

In a major milestone for India's cultural diplomacy, the Netherlands formally repatriated the historic Chola-era **Anaimangalam copper plates** (popularly known as the **Leiden copper plates**) to India. The artifact, which had been in the custody of Leiden University for nearly two centuries, was handed over during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral visit to The Hague. Historians and archaeologists view this repatriation as a watershed moment that not only restores an invaluable record of Tamil heritage but also sets a strong precedent for reclaiming other high-value Indian antiquities currently housed in Western museums.

**Return of Chola-era copper plates should spark efforts for further repatriations, say Indian archaeologists**

**T.S. Subramanian**  
CHENNAI

The return of the Chola-era Anaimangalam copper plates charter from the Netherlands this week marks a watershed event in the history of the repatriation of India's invaluable bronzes, stone sculptures, and carved temple pilasters, according to historians and archaeologists.

The artefacts, which have been in the possession of Leiden University for almost two centuries and are popularly known as the Leiden copper plates, were presented in a ceremony at the Hague on Saturday, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Dutch counterpart, Rob Jetten.

"This is the first time that the Chola-period copper plates are being brought back to India," said V. Vedachalam, an archaeologist who specialises in the Pandya, the Pallava and the Chola copper plate charters, welcoming the development.

"We should make efforts to bring back the Velvikudi copper plates issued by



The Chola-era copper plates, which were handed back to India by the Netherlands, on Saturday, and, right, the tower of the Buddha vihara, called Chulamanivarman Vihara, near Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu, which was demolished by Jesuit priests in 1867. #1

the Pandya ruler Parantaka Nedunchadayan (regnal years 765-815 CE) from the British Museum, London, to Tamil Nadu," he added.

**'Enduring history'**  
Former Tamil Nadu Archaeology Minister Thangam Thenarasu, who is also a scholar of Chola history, said the Anaimangalam copper plate inscriptions were "enduring records of Tamil history, culture, and the grandeur of the Chola era".

The late R. Nagaswamy, who was the director of the Tamil Nadu State Department

of Archaeology, had described the artefacts in this way in a 2009 lecture: "One of the most important copper plates of Raja Raja Chola I (regnal years 985-1014 CE) is from Anaimangalam near Nagapattinam."

The plates recorded Raja Raja Chola I's gift of land at Anaimangalam village to a Buddha vihara, he had said. This vihara was built by the king Sri Mara Vijayotunga Varman of Java in the name of his father Sri Chudamani Varman, and so was called the Chulamanivarman Vihara.

Unfortunately, the tower



of the vihara itself was demolished by Jesuit priests in 1867, with the permission of the colonial government of Madras.

**Buddhist vihara**  
"The plates are an interesting example of how a Salviite king helped in building a Buddha vihara," Nagaswamy said, according to an article published in *The Hindu* on December 25, 2009.

While Raja Raja Chola I gave the order for building the Buddha vihara, it was his son Rajendra Chola I (regnal years 1014-1044 CE), who implemented the

command. This is mentioned in the larger Leiden plates, Dr. Vedachalam said.

The Chulamanivarman Vihara was also called the Raja Raja Cholan Perumpalli (or the big vihara), during the time of Rajendra Chola I.

"The Leiden copper plates... are a complete set of 21 large plates and three small plates. The large plates were committed to writing by Rajendra Chola I in five Sanskrit plates and 16 Tamil plates, honouring his father Raja Raja's oral commitment," says K. Kirubanidhi in the book titled *Epic saga of the Cholas: Their art, temples and heritage*, first published by *The Hindu* in August 2023.

"The small plates in Tamil, later given effect to by Kulottunga Chola I (regnal years 1070-1120 CE), talk about the additional grants made to the sangha associated with the vihara in Nagapattinam," Mr. Kirubanidhi wrote.

Dr. Vedachalam added that two emissaries from the Javanese kingdom appealed to Kulottunga Chola I to ensure the implemen-

tation of Raja Raja Chola I's order.

Kulottunga not only gave them that assurance but made a grant of 4,500 kalam (an unit of measurement) of paddy plus land to the Chulamanivarman Vihara. This was in addition to Raja Raja Chola I's grant of 8,943 kalam of paddy.

**Chola insignia**

The Leiden plates were strung together by a ring bearing the royal insignia of the Chola dynasty. These included a tiger, the royal emblem of the Cholas, the two fish of the Pandyas, the bow of the Cheras, two channaras, the royal parasol, lamps, and a swastika. The inclusion of the two fish and the bow signified that the Cholas had defeated the Pandyas and the Cheras.

The bigger Leiden plates carry the word "Anaimangalam" in Tamil on the royal emblem, and a short *stotra* in Sanskrit in praise of Rajendra Chola I, Dr. Vedachalam said. The small plates carry a brief *stoka* lauding Kulottunga Chola I.

**A. The Larger Charter (Rajendra Chola I)**

- **The Vow and Implementation:** The great Chola Emperor **Raja Raja Chola I (985–1014 CE)** orally committed a major revenue land grant at Anaimangalam village near Nagapattinam to a Buddhist monastery. After his death, his son **Rajendra Chola I (1014–1044 CE)** institutionalized and executed his father's command.

- **Composition:** It consists of 21 large plates held together by a massive ring. Five plates are inscribed in Sanskrit (detailing the Chola genealogy) and 16 plates are written in Tamil (detailing local administration and boundaries).

## B. The Smaller Charter (Kulottunga Chola I)

- Consisting of three small Tamil plates, this charter was issued later by **Kulottunga Chola I (1070–1120 CE)**.
- It documents additional grants of land and 4,500 kalam (a traditional unit of volume) of paddy to the same monastery, initiated after two diplomatic emissaries arrived from the Javanese kingdom to ensure the continuation of the original imperial endowments.

## Socio-Cultural & Political Dimensions of the Artifact

### A. Proof of Religious Pluralism and Secular Governance

The Leiden plates offer definitive evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of the Chola state. Although Raja Raja I and Rajendra I were devout **Saivites** (worshippers of Shiva) who constructed towering temples like the Brihadisvara Temple, they actively funded and protected non-Vedic institutions. The beneficiary of the plates was the **Chulamanivarma Vihara** (also known as the Raja Raja Cholan Perumpalli), a Buddhist monastery built by King Sri Mara Vijayotunga Varman of the **Srivijaya Kingdom (modern-day Java/Indonesia)**.

**Tragic Colonial Loss:** The Chulamanivarma Vihara stood as a symbol of transnational Buddhist heritage until 1867, when the tower was ordered to be demolished by Jesuit priests with the active permission of the colonial Madras government.

### B. The Imperial Chola Insignia

The copper plates are secured by a bronze ring bearing the complex, sovereign seal of the Chola dynasty. It depicts:

- A **Tiger** (The primary state emblem of the Cholas).
- **Two Fish** (The emblem of the Pandyas) and a **Bow** (The emblem of the Cheras), intentionally positioned below or alongside the tiger to indicate Chola suzerainty and military triumph over their regional rivals.
- The royal parasol, fly-whisks (chamaras), ceremonial lamps, and a swastika symbol, depicting divine right and prosperity.

## Significance for Indian Heritage & Geopolitical Diplomacy

- **Boost to Cultural Repatriation:** Until recently, international repatriation focused heavily on stolen stone idols and individual bronze sculptures. Reclaiming an entire institutional state record (a 24-plate charter) expands the scope of what India can demand back under international heritage frameworks like the 1970 UNESCO Convention.
- **Leveraging Bilateral Upgrades:** The return of the plates was directly tied to the elevating of India-Netherlands relations to a **Strategic Partnership**. This shows that India is successfully integrating its cultural soft power into hard economic and technological diplomacy.
- **Reclaiming Maritime Geohistory:** The Cholas were India's premier maritime empire. Bringing back records that establish ties between Tamil Nadu and the Srivijaya Empire of Indonesia reinforces India's historical role as the anchor of Indo-Pacific trade and cultural exchange.

## Next Steps and Challenges in Antiquity Reclamation

Indian archaeologists argue that the Leiden breakthrough should serve as a springboard to target other critical historical documents held abroad under colonial-era extractions:

- **The Velvikkudi Copper Plates:** Issued by the Pandya ruler Parantaka Nedunchadaiyan (765–815 CE), this crucial document establishes early medieval land structures and lineages. It is currently held by the **British Museum in London**, making it a prime candidate for India's next repatriation push.
- **Legal Obstacles:** Many Western nations rely on strict domestic statutes of limitation or museum preservation acts (such as the British Museum Act 1963) that legally forbid institutions from de-accessioning artifacts. India needs to utilize sustained bilateral negotiations, similar to the diplomatic effort used with the Netherlands, rather than relying solely on legal battles.

### Conclusion

The return of the Leiden copper plates is a monumental victory for India's historical preservation. By bringing home these primary sources of Tamil statecraft and international cooperation, India bridges a centuries-old gap left by colonial displacement. Moving forward, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) must build upon this precedent, transforming artifact repatriation from sporadic diplomatic gestures into a systematized, institutionalized policy to recover India's stolen history from around the globe.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** The Chulamanivarma Vihara mentioned in the Leiden Copper Plates was associated with:

- A. The Khmer Kingdom of Cambodia
- B. The Srivijaya Kingdom of Java
- C. The Pagan Kingdom of Myanmar
- D. The Majapahit Empire of Indonesia

Ans: B)

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Examine the role of the Chola Empire in shaping India's maritime and cultural links with Southeast Asia. **(150 Words)**

**Page 08 GS I : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam**

India's export sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience at the beginning of the 2026–27 fiscal year. Despite prolonged disruptions in global supply chains and acute geopolitical frictions, merchandise exports for April 2026 grew by **14% year-on-year to reach \$43.6 billion**. This growth is a dual product of inflationary price realizations and an aggressive geographic diversification strategy championed by both the government and private industry. However, severe contractions in traditional trade corridors like West Asia and structural shifts driven by technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) emphasize that lasting external stability requires deeper reforms in cost, scale, and product quality.

**Core Drivers of India's Export Surge****A. Geographic Diversification ("New Pathway" Strategy)**

The cornerstone of current trade policy is reducing reliance on an overly concentrated basket of traditional destination markets.

- **Expanding Footprints:** At least 20 key export sectors successfully penetrated **17 or more new country destinations** over the past year.
- **The Niche Sector Push:** For instance, Indian handloom products expanded their market reach to **29 additional nations** compared to the 2024–25 baseline. While initial volume gains from these new pathways remain small, they build vital institutional pipelines for long-term trade.

**B. Resilience in Core Merchandise Sectors**

Growth was not localized but distributed across India's industrial heavyweights:

- **Key Growth Pillars:** Strong performances were logged by engineering goods, petroleum products, electronics manufacturing, drugs & pharmaceuticals, and organic/inorganic chemicals.
- **Healthy "Non-Oil" Matrix:** Stripping away volatile and price-inflated petroleum products reveals an inherently stable trade engine. **Non-oil exports grew by 9%**, reaching approximately \$40 billion in April 2026.
- **Narrowing the Trade Deficit:** Crucially, merchandise export growth outpaced import growth (which stood at 9.9%), offering a stabilizing effect on the Current Account Deficit (CAD).

**Emerging Structural Vulnerabilities & Headwinds****A. Geopolitical Shocks and Regional Contraction**

- **The West Asia Crisis:** The ongoing regional conflict has severely impacted India's most critical trade corridor. India's exports to West Asia **contracted sharply by 28%** in April, continuing a deep downward trend from March.

**Diversification gains**

India needs to improve export competitiveness in terms of cost, quality

India's export performance in April 2026 has been commendable, underscoring the attempts by the government and industry to diversify in times of crisis. Despite the various trade disruptions, merchandise exports grew nearly 14% in April 2026 to \$43.6 billion. Some of this, as even the Commerce Secretary has acknowledged, is due to the overall rise in prices. Another significant factor has been the increase in the number of markets served by Indian exporters. According to government data, at least 20 exporting sectors have added 17 or more new destinations in the last year. For example, handloom products are now exported to 29 more countries than in 2024-25. The additional exports thus generated are still small, but establishing these pathways is vital progress. The data also show that several of India's key export sectors – engineering goods, petroleum products, electronic goods, drugs and pharmaceuticals, and organic and inorganic chemicals – exported more in April 2026 than in the same month last year. This suggests resilience in these supply chains, and the establishment of new ones. Another test of the strength of India's export growth is to remove the effect of petroleum products and their inflated prices from the mix. Here, too, India has performed reasonably well. India's non-oil exports grew 9% in April 2026 to about \$40 billion. Notably, India's merchandise export growth also outpaced the growth of its imports at 9.9%.

That said, the impact of the West Asia crisis is clear. Exports to West Asia fell by 28% in April, following up on an even larger contraction in March. Imports from the region, too, fell about 32%. This is a vital trade link for India and gains in other regions are not yet enough to outweigh the losses here. Imports of the safe-haven asset gold jumped 82% in April, which is perhaps what prompted the Prime Minister to urge Indians to stop buying gold, and the government to hike the import duty. Another highlight of the data is the continued rise in the significance of the services sector. The share of services in total exports has risen to about 49% compared to 39% in 2014. Rather than a reason for complacency, this should make the government take note. Any loss of a competitive edge in IT services, especially, due to the rise of Artificial Intelligence, will be an increasingly costly loss to India. Overall, however, the government's push for diversification of export destinations – including through concerted activity to seal various trade deals – seems to be bearing fruit. Now, if only it could also improve export competitiveness in terms of cost, scale, and quality, India would really become a global contender.

- **The Import Freeze:** Concurrently, imports from West Asia dropped by 32%. Because of this region's massive size, export gains made in newer markets are not yet large enough to fully offset these major losses.

## B. The Gold Import Surge and Safe-Haven Drainage

- Spurred by global uncertainty, Indian imports of gold—a classic safe-haven asset—**skyed by 82%** in April.
- This massive capital outflow for a non-productive asset impacts India's foreign exchange balance. It has forced executive interventions, including direct appeals from the Prime Minister to curb consumption and subsequent hikes in gold import duties.

## C. The Structural Shift Toward Services

- **The 49% Shift:** The service sector continues to reshape India's trade profile. Services now command a staggering **49% share of total exports**, up sharply from 39% in 2014.
- **The AI Threat Matrix:** This high concentration introduces a new point of vulnerability. With the rapid rise of Generative AI automating routine coding and business processes, any loss of competitive edge in India's IT/BPM sector could significantly harm overall export earnings.

## The Path to Global Contendership: Cost, Scale, and Quality

To transition from a resilient exporter into an undisputed global trade power, India must move past stop-gap market diversification and address foundational, supply-side bottlenecks:

- **Cost Competitiveness (Logistics & Power):** India's logistics costs remain high compared to the global average of 8% of GDP seen in developed economies. Fully implementing the **National Logistics Policy (NLP)** and expanding dedicated freight corridors are vital to lower final product pricing.
- **Scale (The Factory Deficit):** Indian manufacturing is historically dominated by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). While nimble, they lack the massive scale of East Asian mega-factories. Expanding and streamlining the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** schemes across more high-volume sectors is essential to capture larger global market shares.
- **Quality and Standards:** To consistently win space in highly regulated markets like the EU and US, Indian manufacturing must adopt zero-defect processes, moving past retaliatory non-tariff barriers by meeting strict global sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and technical standards.

## Conclusion

The trade data from April 2026 proves that India's strategy of diversifying export markets and securing new bilateral free trade agreements is delivering tangible results. However, high gold imports, regional shocks in West Asia, and technological changes in the IT sector show that external trade remains vulnerable. True structural stability will not come from price inflation or geographic expansion alone. It requires a concerted national effort to optimize manufacturing costs, scale up production capacities, and elevate product quality. Addressing these fundamentals will ensure India evolves from a nation that successfully navigates global crises into an indispensable hub of the global supply chain.

**GS Paper II: International Relations**

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question:** Analyze the strategic significance of the Arctic region for India's climate security, maritime connectivity, and energy interests. **(250 Words)**

**Context :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the **3rd India-Nordic Summit** in Oslo, Norway, marks a foundational shift in India's foreign policy calculus toward Northern Europe. While early engagements in Stockholm (2018) and Copenhagen (2022) focused heavily on functional cooperation—such as the blue economy, innovation, and digitization—the 2026 summit unfolds against a completely rewired global matrix. As emphasized by Ambassador Ajai Malhotra, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO, and accelerating polar ice melt have combined to transform the Arctic from an isolated scientific sanctuary into a critical arena of global resource competition and maritime deterrence.

*Oslo summit must mark India's northward turn*

**P** rime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oslo on May 18-19 for the third India-Nordic Summit comes as the logic of India's engagement with Northern Europe has fundamentally changed. When India first met the Nordics – Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – in Stockholm in 2018, and again in Copenhagen in 2022, the relationship was anchored largely in climate cooperation, innovation, digitalisation and the blue economy. Those priorities remain important, but a transformed geopolitical landscape is giving the partnership strategic depth and economic purpose.

The change underway reflects developments beyond bilateral ties. The war in Ukraine has transformed Europe's security order, while strains within the trans-Atlantic alliance have unsettled long-standing assumptions. Denmark, current chair of the Arctic Council, faces renewed pressure from the United States and strategic interest over Greenland.

**The spotlight on the Arctic**

The Arctic, once insulated from geopolitical rivalry, is emerging as a theatre of competition over shipping routes, energy resources, critical minerals and strategic infrastructure. Finland and Sweden's respective accessions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have rewired Nordic security architecture, leaving Russia as the Arctic Council's sole non-NATO member. The Russia-China partnership has acquired a polar dimension through cooperation on Arctic shipping and energy. These shifts shape the agenda Mr. Modi will encounter in Oslo.

India and the Nordics now matter more to each other than before, with converging interests in technology, supply chains, maritime security and green energy.

Norway's revised High North strategy balances scientific cooperation with rising security concerns. Denmark, through Greenland, occupies a pivotal position in emerging Arctic sea routes and critical mineral networks. Sweden and Finland contribute advanced defence technologies, innovation ecosystems and Arctic capabilities. Iceland offers geothermal expertise



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Changing Arctic geopolitics gives India-Nordic ties renewed strategic significance

directly relevant to India's Himalayan regions.

The Arctic, once defined by scientific cooperation, is increasingly shaped by deterrence, energy rivalry and military positioning. New technologies, from autonomous underwater vehicles to satellite-enabled seabed mapping, are reshaping Arctic security, even as vulnerabilities in undersea cables and critical infrastructure grow.

India joined the Arctic Council as an observer in 2013. Its Himadri research station, IndARC underwater observatory and Gruevabdet atmospheric laboratory, in Norway, give India a meaningful Arctic footprint. But science alone cannot safeguard Indian interests in a region increasingly shaped by geopolitics.

**As a stakeholder**

India is not an Arctic nation, but it is undeniably an Arctic stakeholder. The Arctic is warming more than three times faster than the global average. Ice loss in the Barents-Kara Sea has been linked to variability in India's summer monsoon, while rising polar melt threatens India's coastline, ports and island territories through sea-level rise.

The commercial and strategic stakes are equally important. Accelerating ice melt is opening Arctic waters to shipping, resource extraction and military deployment. The Northern Sea Route along Russia's Arctic coast is becoming more navigable, with implications for trade and maritime connectivity. Extending the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor to Murmansk and onward to the Nordics would create a maritime link connecting India, Japan, Russia and Northern Europe. India's Arctic engagement with the Nordics can proceed alongside its partnership with Russia; the two are not a zero-sum game.

India must construct a small fleet of five Arctic-capable, ice-class tankers under its Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy by 2030-31. Delay in building such capacity risks locking India out of early-mover advantages in Arctic shipping and energy logistics. An India-Arctic Economic Forum could connect Indian industry with opportunities in manpower, shipping, energy and infrastructure. It could champion an "Arctic-Himalaya Climate Data

Corridor" with the Nordics for joint monitoring of climate linkages affecting monsoons and sea-level rise. India should appoint a Special Envoy for Arctic Affairs. Unlike the four other Asian observer states in the Arctic Council, it lacks one.

**Focus areas**

Nordic countries lead globally in offshore wind, hydrogen, electric mobility and green shipping, while India's clean-energy ambitions require technology, investment and trusted partnerships. Cooperation must move beyond buyer-seller arrangements towards co-development and production in offshore wind manufacturing, green hydrogen and grid-balancing technologies.

Norway's deep-sea mining ambitions, Sweden's rare earths and iron ore, and Denmark's Greenland link offer supply-chain diversification amid concerns over China's processing dominance. Nordic strengths in telecommunications, semiconductors, batteries, artificial intelligence and advanced materials complement India's scale, engineering talent and manufacturing ambitions, supporting more resilient supply chains.

Maritime cooperation deserves equal attention. India's economic future depends on secure sea lanes, resilient ports and efficient logistics, while Nordic countries lead globally in shipping technology, maritime digitisation, shipbuilding innovation and sustainable port infrastructure. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have exposed maritime vulnerabilities, making route and partnership diversification strategically valuable. Deeper India-Nordic maritime cooperation would advance the economic and geopolitical interests of both.

For the Nordics, a re-emerging India offers scale, growth and a trusted democratic partner in the Indo-Pacific; for India, the Nordics provide technology, capital and expertise, without hegemonic pressures. As the Arctic becomes more contested and consequential, the Oslo summit should mark the point at which episodic engagement gives way to sustained strategic partnership.

*The views expressed are personal*

## The Transformed Arctic Geopolitical Landscape

The Nordic security architecture has experienced its most dramatic realignment since the Cold War, directly affecting how external powers must interact with the region:

- **The NATO-ization of the High North:** With Finland and Sweden now formally part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, **Russia stands as the Arctic Council's sole non-NATO member.** This has created a deep structural fracture within polar governance.
- **The Sino-Russian Polar Alliance:** In response to Western isolation, Russia has significantly expanded its strategic and economic cooperation with China, adding an intense polar dimension that includes joint development of Arctic shipping corridors and energy exploitation.
- **Contested Strategic Spaces:** Once insulated from major power friction, the Arctic is now a highly active theater for advanced technological deployment. This involves underwater mapping, satellite surveillance of subsea communications cables, and competitive infrastructure building near crucial maritime chokepoints.

## The Indian Stakes: Why the Arctic Matters

India's status in the Arctic transcends academic interest; it is an active economic and ecological stakeholder.

### A. The Monsoon-Polar Linkage (Ecological Urgency)

The Arctic is warming **more than three times faster** than the global average. Crucially, scientific research links accelerated ice loss in the **Barents-Kara Sea** directly to unpredictability and extreme fluctuations in India's summer monsoon, which forms the backbone of its agricultural economy and food security. Furthermore, rising polar melt places India's expansive coastline, major megacities, and island territories under direct threat from rising sea levels.

### B. The Northern Sea Route (NSR) & Trade Logistics

The progressive retreat of polar ice is making the **Northern Sea Route (NSR)** along Russia's northern coast increasingly navigable. The NSR shortens maritime transit times between East Asia and Europe by roughly 40% compared to traditional routes via the Suez Canal. For India, integrating its existing **Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor** with Murmansk and onward to the Nordic ports presents a major opportunity to build a resilient, secondary supply chain that circumvents volatile chokepoints like the Malacca Strait or the Red Sea.

### Key Imperatives for India's "Northward Turn"

To effectively establish its footprint in this shifting landscape, India must transition from a purely scientific observer to an active strategic actor by focusing on four primary areas:

1. **Building Ice-Class Maritime Infrastructure:** India needs to move quickly under its Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy to build a dedicated domestic fleet of at least **five Arctic-capable, ice-class tankers by 2030–31.** Relying solely on foreign logistics risks locking Indian enterprises out of early-mover advantages in polar shipping.
2. **Appointing a Special Envoy for Arctic Affairs:** Unlike other major Asian observers on the Arctic Council (such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore), India lacks a dedicated high-level diplomatic representative for the region. Appointing a Special Envoy is essential to ensure consistent high-level engagement.

## Daily News Analysis

3. **Co-development of Clean Technologies:** Moving beyond simple buyer-seller contracts, India must partner with the Nordic nations—who lead globally in green hydrogen, offshore wind turbine manufacturing, and grid-stabilizing systems—to co-develop and manufacture these technologies locally under Make in India.
4. **Securing Critical Mineral Networks:** To reduce its heavy dependence on China for green-transition inputs, India should leverage Sweden's massive iron ore and rare earth deposits, alongside Denmark's administrative links to mineral-rich Greenland, to build reliable, diversified critical mineral supply chains.

### Strategic Autonomy in the High North

A major challenge for Indian diplomacy is navigating the growing divide between Western nations and Russia. However, India's polar engagement with the Nordic states and its long-standing strategic energy partnerships with Russia are **not a zero-sum game**. By utilizing a balanced, multi-aligned foreign policy framework, India can continue working closely with Russia on energy transit through Murmansk while simultaneously collaborating with the Nordic Five on green shipping, climate modeling, and deep-tech innovation.

### Conclusion

The 2026 Oslo Summit serves as a timely reminder that geography is no longer a barrier to geopolitical relevance. The ongoing changes in the Arctic directly affect India's weather patterns, maritime connectivity, and resource security. By building out its own ice-class maritime infrastructure, establishing an "Arctic-Himalaya Climate Data Corridor," and taking a proactive stance on polar governance, India can successfully execute its "Northward Turn." This transition will elevate its engagement with the Nordic bloc from a series of occasional meetings into a long-term, highly consequential strategic partnership.

