



India's Outreach to the Nordics: An Appraisal of Prime Minister Modi's Visit

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sweden on 16-17 April 2018 was not only the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Sweden in 30 years but was also an attempt to reach out to the wider Nordic region with the first India-Nordic summit, which saw India interacting with the prime ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden on a single platform.

During his visit, Prime Minister Modi met with King Carl XVI Gustaf and Prime Minister Stefan Lofven, attended a roundtable meeting with CEOs and interacted with the Diaspora. In his interaction with Prime Minister Lofven, issues like innovation, defence and security, trade, smart cities and NSG membership dominated the agenda of discussion. Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Lofven also co-hosted the first India-Nordic Summit, '*India-Nordic Summit: Shared Values, Mutual Prosperity*'. During the Summit, the leaders focused their discussions on key issues related to global security, economic growth, innovation and climate change.

India-Sweden Relations: An Overview

Diplomatic ties between India and Sweden were established in 1949 and high-level contacts between the two countries go back to 1957 when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Sweden. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Sweden for attending the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Sweden in March 1986 and January 1988. King Gustaf has visited India twice (1993 and 2005). However, the two countries experienced strains in their relations because of the Bofors scandal and with India conducting nuclear tests in 1998, which was strongly condemned by the Nordic states, especially Sweden. Since then, India-Sweden relations have acquired depth, understanding and mutual respect for individual positions on the international issues.

Indian ties with Sweden were strengthened after the then President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, visited Sweden in 2015. During his visit, six Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in important areas, including sustainable urban development micro, small and medium enterprises

visa exemption for diplomatic passports; polar and ocean research; ageing and health, and pharmaceutical products and 15 agreements between educational institutions, were signed. This visit was followed by the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven's visit to India in 2016 for the 'Make in India Week' in Mumbai. The Joint Statement issued after the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and the Swedish Prime Minister, identified defence, infrastructure, urban development, education, science and technology, environment, health and space as key sectors for strengthening bilateral partnership. The two prime ministers endorsed the creation of an India-Sweden Business Leaders Round Table, comprising top business leaders from both countries, to facilitate two-way trade and investments.

Prime Minister's Visit

Prime Minister Modi's visit takes forward the pace set in 2015 during the visit of President Pranab Mukherjee and the 2016 visit of Swedish Prime Minister Lofven to India. The importance that Sweden attaches to India was evident when Prime Minister Lofven said in a statement, "India has emerged as a global power. No important global conversation is complete without the voice of India." Prime Minister Modi stressed on innovation, investment, start-ups, manufacturing, renewable energy, urban transport and waste management as areas the country would focus on to improve quality of life.

The highlight of Prime Minister Modi's visit was signing of the Joint Innovation Partnership pact and adoption of the Joint Action Plan. The Joint Innovation Partnership and Action Plan were aimed to take forward a wide range of initiatives in various fields. The following were identified as the key areas of cooperation:

Innovation

Innovation was the keyword during the Prime Minister's visit to Sweden. This was evident when the Prime Minister said, "*I believe that the most important topic in our talks today was how Sweden can have a win-win partnership with India on the opportunities arising out of India's development. As a result, we have agreed on an innovation partnership and a joint action plan*".² He added that innovation, investment, start-ups, manufacturing etc. were the key aspects of cooperation between India and Sweden. Both countries agreed on Joint Innovation Partnership pact for a Sustainable Future, within which Sweden would provide up to 50 million Swedish Kronor (over \$59 million)³ for innovation cooperation with India. The joint Declaration on Sweden-India Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future said, "*The innovation partnership represents a step-change in India-Sweden science and innovation collaboration, underpinning our mutual commitment to drive prosperity and address global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development through innovation*".⁴ The partnership is based on the principles of co-funding, co-development and co-creation, towards mutual benefits, making full use of the complementary strengths. The partnership will deepen relations between the countries, building upon the Joint Statement between our Prime Ministers issued in Mumbai 2016 and the Joint Action Plan agreed in Stockholm in 2018. Areas for collaboration included Smart cities and transportation including e-mobility; Smart industry, digitalisation, start-ups and IPR issues; New materials and advanced manufacturing; Space and aeronautics; Circular and bio-based economy including biomaterials; and Health and life sciences including biomedical devices.

The pact also called for various activities to deepen cooperation. It included *Sweden-India Innovation Dialogue* with key innovation stakeholders from relevant ministries and agencies to provide overall strategic direction for innovation policy development. The dialogue will be supported and advised by an expert group. Second, *Sweden-India Partnership Development Activities* under which both countries would organise Partnership Development Activities (PDA) in the identified areas of collaboration, to enable information dissemination and promote networking of key research agencies, industry players, enterprises, R&D institutions and other funding agencies to identify common challenges and develop joint projects. The PDA will also be a forum for communicating and showcasing the wide range of existing Indo-Swedish innovation activities. Third, *Sweden-India Joint Industrial R&D Projects* in which they would commit to co-funding for support of bilateral innovation projects. Both countries would launch challenge-based joint industrial R&D and technological innovation projects to address challenges and opportunities identified by both sides. The projects will be funded on 'n+n model' that combines funding from government and businesses. Fourth, *Sweden-India Start-up Collaboration*, within which both countries would explore opportunities for start-up innovation collaboration, to accelerate the transition of research and technology development to commercial propositions. Fifth, *Research and Innovation Infrastructure and Testbeds* in which both countries would explore the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate mutual access to research and innovation infrastructure in both countries.⁵

Innovation was also emphasised in the Joint Action Plan where both countries decided to exchange knowledge and explore cooperation on smart cities, including transit-oriented urban development, air pollution control, waste management, waste-to-energy, waste-water treatment etc. Also, to exchange know-how and explore cooperation in the areas of electro-mobility as well as renewable fuels and explore cooperation in the area of railways, such as railway policy development, safety, training and operation and maintenance of railways. In the field of smart, sustainable and renewable energy, India and Sweden decided to engage in mutual collaboration on the development of smart grid technologies such as smart metering, demand response, power quality management through research, capacity building, policy cooperation and learning market design prerequisites including business models. Expand research, innovation and business cooperation on new innovative energy technologies through the India-Sweden Innovations' Accelerator, focusing on technologies to utilise renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Defence Cooperation

Defence cooperation between the two countries is based on a MoU signed in 2009, under which an India-Sweden Joint Working Group was established. The MoU sets out several areas for cooperation between the defence authorities for the purpose of mutual benefit. During his visit, Prime Minister Modi stressed on defence and security ties as the key pillar of India's relations with Sweden, adding that, "*Sweden has been a partner for India in the field of defence and I hope that in future also, Sweden will help India in defence manufacturing. We have decided to strengthen our cooperation in the security sector, particularly in cyber security.*"⁶ The leaders agreed on strengthening their defence and security ties as well as finalising a bilateral agreement on exchange and mutual protection of classified information for cooperation in defence. In the Joint Action Plan, India and Sweden, through relevant ministries, agencies and actors would aim to

“Enhance Indo-Swedish dialogue on defence cooperation; proceed with India-Sweden defence seminars in India and Sweden in 2018-19 and explore, together with the ISBLRT, opportunities for investment in Defence Production Corridors in India,” as well as “Encourage industry partners to develop supply chains for small and medium sized enterprises (SME) with major Defence & Aerospace Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs)”.⁷

Trade and Investment

Mutual economic interests have been the primary driver of India-Sweden relations. The impetus was provided during the visit of the President of India to Sweden in 2015, when both sides agreed to reach the trade target of US \$5 billion by 2018. The bilateral trade fell to US \$1.87 billion in 2016-17, as compared to about US \$2.16 billion in 2015-16, due to the economic reforms, like demonetisation, initiated by the Government of India. However, the bilateral trade stabilised to US\$ 2.2 billion in 2017-18.

S.No.		2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
1.	Export	686.15	733.45	740.47	683.64	708.93	771.50
2.	Import	1,681.43	1,679.42	1,748.40	1,484.85	1,161.12	1,464.47
3.	Total Trade	2,367.58	2,412.86	2,488.87	2,168.49	1,870.05	2,235.97

Source: Department of Commerce, India. Figures are in million US dollars

Swedish investments and other economic activities in India are on the rise. Sweden has a long history of investments in India. As per data, there are over 170 Swedish joint ventures and wholly owned subsidiaries in India that have invested \$1.4 billion since 2000⁸. Over the last decade, Indian investment in Sweden has also increased. There are over 70 Indian companies including IT companies currently present in Sweden. According to estimates the cumulative Indian investment in Sweden is currently in the range of US\$ 700-800 million.⁹

To further economic relations between the two countries, an India-Sweden Business Leaders Roundtable (ISBLRT) was created in February 2016 during the visit of the Swedish Prime Minister to India, with CII and Sweden-India Business Council as its coordinating agencies. Also, Sweden has been one of the most enthusiastic partners in India’s flagship programme, “Make in India”. This was evident when Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated the Sweden Country Pavilion at the Make in India Week in 2016¹⁰ and Sweden hosted Make in India: Sweden 2017.

Trade and investment was also at the centre of talks during the Prime Minister’s visit. To encourage trade and facilitate investment in both directions, the Joint Action Plan called for Sweden’s investment in India through ‘Invest India’ and Indian investment in Sweden through ‘Business Sweden’ and encouraged the ISBLRT to further strengthen India-Sweden business cooperation. The Prime Minister, during his roundtable meeting with the CEOs of top Swedish

firms, invited them to invest in India and its flagship programmes, and said stronger bilateral business relations would augur well for the people of the two countries.

International Issues

India and Sweden reiterated their commitment to dialogue and cooperation on key international issues of mutual concern, including climate change, Agenda 2030, international peace and security, human rights, gender equality, humanitarian issues, and international trade. Both leaders underlined the urgency to step up global efforts to combat climate change, and emphasised their continued commitment to the Paris Agreement. Prime Minister Modi thanked Prime Minister Lofven for Sweden's support to India's candidature for non-permanent membership of United Nations Security Council (2021-22) and for Sweden's support to India's permanent membership of a reformed and expanded United Nations Security Council. Prime Minister Lofven welcomed India's recent accession to the international export control regimes, including the Australia Group, Wassenaar Arrangement, Missile Technology Control Regime, and The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, and expressed support for India's membership of the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). Both Prime Ministers called for greater unity and stronger international partnership to counter terrorism, disrupt terrorist networks and financing, and to prevent violent extremism. In this regard, both countries called for an early finalisation of the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).¹¹ Counter-terrorism also found mention in the India-Nordic Summit, co-hosted by Sweden and India, where the Prime Ministers of the Nordic countries condemned terrorism and extremism of all kinds and promised to partner with India in addressing issues on global security.

Others

Apart from the above mentioned areas of cooperation, the Joint Action Plan also emphasised the following three areas: First, **Women's Skills Development and Empowerment**: To encourage joint efforts towards women's empowerment by skilling employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women through projects such as "Kraftsamla"- a project undertaken by Swedish and Indian actors in Pune, Maharashtra which provides skills training for women in jobs suitable for industry such as forklift drivers, warehouse managers, assembly operators and more. Second, **Space and Science**: To encourage the space agencies and other space entities to enhance space cooperation under the MoU, particularly in Earth observation, planetary exploration and satellite ground station activities, through inter alia an Indo-Swedish space seminar and a visit by an Indian delegation to Swedish space establishments. Also, to explore possible collaboration between the European Spallation Source (ESS) hosted by Sweden and Indian partners. Third, **Healthcare**: To enhance collaboration in the field of health, such as health research, pharmacovigilance and anti-microbial resistance, under the Memorandum of Understanding in the field of healthcare and public health.

Interaction with Diaspora

Sweden has a substantial Indian Diaspora. As per latest statistics, there are about 25,720 members of the Diaspora in Sweden.¹² Most of them are skilled professionals in IT companies, professors, research scholars in universities and other institutes. During his interaction with the Indian Diaspora at the Stockholm University, Prime Minister Modi said that after four years of efforts,

the world today sees India as a dependable partner. The Prime Minister highlighted several achievements of the Indian government which are helping elimination of poverty, increased health care and strengthening of ease of doing business. He added that in the last 4 years his government had made every effort to build a developed India so as to build a 'New India' by the year 2022 when India will complete 75 years of Independence. Highlighting the importance of non-resident Indians in the development story of the nation, he invited the Diaspora to invest in India, saying "Don't limit yourselves to just emotional connect with India. There are great opportunities in the emerging New India for those who want to innovate, trade and invest in India."¹³

India-Nordic Summit

India and Sweden co-hosted the first 'India-Nordic Summit: Shared Values, Mutual Prosperity'¹⁴ on 17 April 2018. The summit was attended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven, Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipila, Iceland Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir, and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg. During the Summit, the prime ministers pledged to deepen cooperation between India and the Nordic countries and focused their discussions on key issues related to global security, economic growth, innovation and climate change. They acknowledged that innovation and digital transformation drive growth in an interconnected world. The Summit emphasised India's strong commitment to innovation and digital initiatives as the key to prosperity and sustainable development, with flagship programmes such as Make in India, Start-up India, Digital India and Clean India. Nordic solutions in clean technologies, maritime solutions, food processing, health and life-sciences and agriculture were discussed. The Summit welcomed the Nordic Sustainable Cities Project aimed at supporting the Smart Cities Program of the Government of India.

The Prime Ministers noted that the unique strengths of India and the Nordic countries offer immense opportunities for trade and investment diversification and mutually beneficial collaboration. During the talks, the importance of the rules-based multilateral trading system as well as open and inclusive international trade for prosperity and growth was underlined. They reaffirmed their full commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as well as the implementation of the Paris Agreement. They agreed to continue efforts to develop cleaner energy systems, renewable energy and fuels, increased energy efficiency and technologies for cleaner energy production.

Reform of the United Nations Security Council also found mention in the joint statement with the countries reaffirming the need for reform, including its expansion in both permanent and non-permanent seats to make it more representative, accountable, effective and responsive to the realities of the 21st century. Although these countries have individually expressed their support for India's quest for a permanent seat in the UNSC, a collective push was provided by the Nordic countries during the Summit where they agreed that India is a strong candidate for a permanent seat in a reformed Security Council expanded with both permanent and non-permanent members. Also, the Nordic countries welcomed India's application for membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and reaffirmed their commitment to work constructively "with the

aim of reaching a positive outcome at the earliest opportunity". The leaders also acknowledged that terrorism and violent extremism were major challenges for the international community. They discussed global security, including cyber security, based on their shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and their commitment to uphold the rules-based international system.

A much needed push was provided on the sidelines of the India-Nordics Summit when Prime Minister Modi held bilateral talks with the heads of governments of each Nordic country. A series of bilateral pacts were inked during the meetings, so as to strengthen and deepen the partnership. The Prime Minister met with his Danish counterpart Lars Lokke Rasmussen and agreed to enhance and renew the cooperation between India and Denmark. The two countries signed MoUs in the fields of: *first*, Sustainable and Smart Urban Development between the Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs of India and the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs of Denmark. *Second* on cooperation in the fields of Animal Husbandry and Dairying between Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India and the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark. *Third* on Food Safety Cooperation between the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. *Fourth* on Cooperation in Agricultural Research and Education between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Science.¹⁵

In his meeting with Prime Minister of Finland, Juha Sipila, Prime Minister Modi discussed ways to increase cooperation in trade and investment, renewable energy, space, waste management, start-up creation and education. Around 100 Finnish companies have operations in India and investments in areas of textiles, road transport, information security, nuclear and radiation safety, trade etc.¹⁶ In his meeting with the Prime Minister of Iceland, Katrin Jakobsdottir, Prime Minister urged her to choose India as an investment destination for Icelandic companies in blue economy and geothermal energy. A MoU on the Establishment of the ICCR Chair for Hindi Language between Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the University of Iceland¹⁷ was also signed between the two countries. The Prime Minister, during his meeting with Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister of Norway, discussed areas of cooperation in trade and investment, shipping and port-development, blue economy, renewable energy, health, IT and green transport solutions.¹⁸ During the meeting, Prime Minister Modi invited Norway's pension fund to invest in new sectors in India citing the complementarity of the economies of the two countries. Norway has the largest future/pension funds to the tune of US\$ 1 trillion managed by Government Pension Fund Global (GPF). It had invested \$11.7 billion in India at the end of 2017, an increase of \$2.5 billion from 2016.¹⁹ He also underlined Indian openness to foreign investment and also invited Norwegian companies to invest in India.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit reflects the evolving Indian foreign policy and the role Nordic countries can play in it. The visit to Sweden and the outreach to wider Nordic region showcase the potential in the relations that can be achieved. With India emerging as an economic

powerhouse with strong democratic credentials, a strong partnership with India is seen by Nordic countries as not only desirable but also essential.

In Sweden, Prime Minister Modi encouraged top Swedish firms to invest in India, underlining the importance of strong bilateral business relations between the two countries. With the Joint Action Plan and Joint Innovation Partnership, the two nations would initiate a multi-stakeholder Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future and enhance cooperation in a wide range of initiatives in key areas of renewable energy, women's skills development and empowerment, space and science, and health and life sciences.

In defence, India and Sweden decided to enhance cooperation on cyber security and are working towards finalising a bilateral agreement on exchange and mutual protection of classified information for cooperation in the defence area as well as encouraging private sector stakeholders to develop supply chains for small- and medium-sized enterprises with major defence and aerospace original equipment manufacturers. This expanding defence relation gives an opportunity to Sweden to showcase its Saab AB Gripen fighter jets for Indian Air Force ahead of a July 2018 deadline²⁰ for bids in India's procurement process of 110 locally-manufactured aircraft. Earlier, in a boost for the Make in India campaign, Saab Group in September 2017 had announced a tie-up with the Adani group for manufacturing single engine fighter aircraft in the country. It was agreed that the two groups would jointly manufacture the Gripen fighter aircraft in India, if chosen by the Indian Air Force.²¹

The India-Nordic summit indicates the recognition of India's emerging global standing by the Nordic countries. The summit joint statement not only underlines the areas in which the Nordic countries and India can cooperate but also the common values they share. The India-Nordic summit sent out clear signals for open and inclusive global trading systems with their emphasis on "the importance of rules-based multilateral trading systems as well as open and inclusive trade for prosperity and growth." Although they have individually lend support to India's bid for NSG, the Nordic countries collectively supported India's membership and agreed to work for India's NSG application "with the aim of reaching a positive outcome at the earliest opportunity." The support is significant because these states have been critical of India's nuclear programme. However, now there is recognition of India's credentials as a responsible nuclear actor despite not being a formal member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The individual and collective support from the Nordics for the Indian membership of NSG is based on the specific India-centric criteria wherein India has clearly defined its non-proliferation and disarmament policies, and its case has been strengthened since it has committed itself to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, which has opened its civilian nuclear infrastructure to IAEA inspections. Also, India has become member to other critical groups like the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Australia Group. Whether this support is linked to evolving criteria for the future members remain to be seen as Nordic countries are yet to declare their support for other countries applying for NSG membership.

The acknowledgement, during the summit, that innovation and digital transformation growth in an interconnected world is crucial for both India and the Nordic countries. These countries have achieved sustainable development and progress by advancing their innovative technologies and are in the position to help India realize its flagship programmes like Make in India, Start-up India, Digital India. Also, Nordic nations have been at the forefront of implementing policies to address climate change. These countries have excelled in renewable energy generation, developing environmental friendly technologies and can help India take forward its own initiatives, like Clean India.

India has substantial economic ties with Nordic countries. Annual India-Nordic trade is about US\$5.3 billion. The cumulative Nordic FDI into India has been US\$2.5 billion.²² The Prime Minister's visit to Sweden and India-Nordic Summit reaffirmed the commitment of both sides to work towards realising sustainable development goals and achieving inclusive growth. Moreover, the Nordic countries are pioneers in clean technologies, environmental solutions, food processing, health, agriculture infrastructure, skill development and innovation which are also the focus areas of India's development. These complementarities hold the potential to further boost trade and investment from both sides and signal the growing importance these countries grant each other.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

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