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ISRO Successfully Demonstrates Space Docking with SpaDeX Mission, Advancing India's Space Station and Lunar Ambitions.

ISRO executes satellite docking, places India in elite space club

SpaDeX mission gained control of two satellites as a single object; space agency to follow up manoeuvre with undocking and power transfer checks in coming days; India joins the ranks of the U.S., Russia and China to achieve the historic feat

Hemanth C.S.
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully executed a satellite docking experiment in the early hours of Thursday, "making India the fourth country" after the U.S., Russia and China to achieve this historic feat.

The two satellites – SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target) – launched by the PSLV C60 on December 30 successfully docked as officials from the Mission Operations Complex (MOX) at the ISRO Telemetry, Tracking, and Command Network (ISTRAC) oversaw the complex procedure.

"Docking Success Spacecraft docking successfully completed! A historic moment. Let's walk through the SpaDeX docking process: Manoeuvre from 15m to 3m hold point completed. Docking initiated with precision, leading to successful spacecraft capture. Retraction completed smoothly, followed by rigidisation for stability. Docking successfully completed. India became the 4th country to achieve successful Space Docking. Congratulations to the entire team! Congratulations to India!," ISRO said on X.

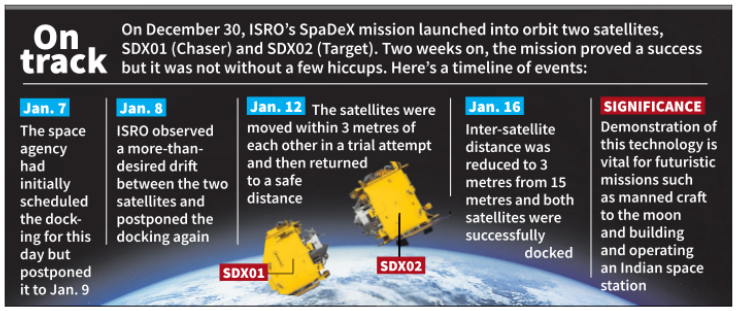
Post-docking, the agency took control of the two satellites as a single object. "Undocking and power transfer checks to follow in coming days," it added.

The SpaDeX mission is an important project designed to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for spacecraft manoeuvres. The demonstration of this technology is essential for futuristic missions such as sending an Indian astronaut to the moon, sample return from the moon, and building and operating an Indian space station.

The other objectives of the mission include demonstration of the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, which is essential for future applications such as in-space robotics, composite spacecraft control and payload operations after undocking.

According to ISRO, after the docking and undocking events, the spacecraft will be separated and used for application missions.

"After successful docking and rigidization, electrical power transfer between the two satellites will be demonstrated before undocking and separation of the two satellites to start the operation of their respective payloads for the expected mission life of up to two years," ISRO said.



The SpaDeX docking was scheduled on January 7 but was postponed. "The docking process requires further validation through ground simulations based on an abort scenario identified today (January 6)," ISRO had cited as reason.

On January 8, 2025, hours before it was scheduled to carry out the SpaDeX docking experiment, ISRO said that the docking experiment had to be postponed again as the drift between the satellites was more than what they had expected. It later arrested the drift between the spacecraft.

ISRO launched the SpaDeX mission on December 30 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. A few minutes after liftoff, the two satellites (Target and Chaser) weighing about 220 kg each were launched into a 475-km circular orbit as intended.

GATES IN THE SKY
» PAGE 8

Analysis of the news:

What is Space Docking?

- Space docking is the process of bringing two fast-moving spacecraft into the same orbit, maneuvering them close to each other, and finally joining them together.
- This capability is essential for missions requiring the assembly of large structures like space stations, refueling in orbit, or carrying crew and supplies to orbiting platforms.

- India's successful docking demonstration makes it the fourth country globally, after the US, Russia, and China, to achieve this feat, marking a significant step in ISRO's technological evolution.

Significance of the Achievement

- **This accomplishment is critical for future space missions**:
  - **Space Station Development:** India's Bharatiya Antariksh Station, planned by 2035, will rely on docking to assemble its modular components in orbit.
  - **Lunar Missions:** Chandrayaan-4, India's planned lunar sample-return mission, will require docking capabilities to transfer collected samples back to Earth.
  - **Human Spaceflight:** Future manned missions, including those to the Moon by 2040, will depend on docking technology for crew and equipment transfers.
- **Details of the Docking Experiment**
  - **ISRO used two 220-kg satellites, SDX01 ("Chaser") and SDX02 ("Target"), for the experiment. The process involved:**
    1. Sequentially bringing the satellites closer, holding positions at key distances (5 km, 500 m, 3 m, etc.).
    2. Successfully joining and locking the satellites in orbit.
    3. Demonstrating combined control and functionality of the satellites as a composite unit.
  - Future steps include sharing electrical power between the satellites and demonstrating "undocking," where the satellites separate and drift apart.

Challenges Overcome During the Mission

- The docking faced delays due to unexpected drifts and inaccuracies during initial attempts.
- ISRO refined simulations and conducted additional maneuvers to achieve the precise alignment needed for successful docking.
- This iterative process highlights ISRO's growing expertise in handling complex space operations.

Key Technologies and Innovations

- **Sensors:** Advanced sensors like Laser Range Finder and Proximity and Docking Sensor were used for precise measurements.
- **Navigation:** A new processor based on satellite navigation determined the relative positions and velocities of the spacecraft.

- **Simplified Mechanism:** The androgynous docking system used only two motors, compared to the 24 used in international standards, demonstrating innovation and efficiency.

Future Implications

- **This mission is a precursor to India's broader space ambitions:**
  - **Space Station:** The Bharatiya Antariksh Station will use this technology for modular assembly.
  - **Lunar Exploration:** Docking will be central to sample-return missions and potential human expeditions to the Moon.
  - **Autonomy:** Developing autonomous docking systems will reduce dependency on navigation data, enhancing efficiency for future missions.

Conclusion

- The SpaDeX docking mission underscores India's growing technological prowess in space exploration.
- It is a critical step toward ISRO's ambitious goals of establishing a space station, conducting lunar sample-return missions, and enabling human exploration of the Moon, marking India's ascent as a significant player in global space endeavors.

The Union Cabinet approved the construction of a third launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, with an outlay of ₹3,984.86 crore.

Sriharikota to get third launch pad

Union Cabinet gives nod for the construction; planned with a ₹3,984.86-crore outlay and a four-year timeline, the third launch pad will serve as a 'standby' for the first two launch pads, and support newer launch vehicles developed by the ISRO

Fresh boost: The previous launch pad at Sriharikota has been operational for almost two decades. PTI

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the construction of a third launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota, Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday.

The launch pad will have an outlay of ₹3,984.86 crore, and is targeted to be completed by early 2029.

The launch pad comes as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) seeks to launch its Next Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLVs) starting in 2031.

ISRO said in a statement that it would also support Indian-manned spaceflight missions, with its chairman V. Narayanan envisaging a 2026 target for the first such mission.

"The third launch pad is designed to have configuration that is as universal and adaptable as possible that can support not only NGLV but also the Launch Vehicle Mark 3 vehicles with semicryogenic stage as well as scaled up configurations of NGLV," a Cabinet statement said.

The previous launch pad has been operational for almost two decades, and this new pad will boost ISRO's launch capabilities and capacities in Sriharikota.

"The expeditious establishment of a third launch pad to cater to a heavier class of Next Generation Launch Vehicles and as a standby for SLP is highly essential so as to meet the evolving space transportation requirements for another 25-30 years," the Cabinet note underlined.

Approval of Third Launch Pad

- The Union Cabinet has approved the construction of a third launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota.
- The project aims to strengthen India's space infrastructure, with an allocated outlay of ₹3,984.86 crore.

Planned Timeline

- The construction of the launch pad is expected to be completed by early 2029, ensuring readiness for future space missions and advancements in space technology.

Facilitating Next-Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLVs)

- The third launch pad will support the launch of Next-Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLVs), which ISRO plans to operationalize by 2031.

- This development aligns with ISRO's vision to cater to the growing demands of advanced and heavier-class launch vehicles.

Support for Human Spaceflight Missions

- The new launch pad will also play a key role in India's manned spaceflight program, with the first mission targeted for 2026, as stated by ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan.

Universal and Adaptable Design

- The third launch pad is being designed with universal and adaptable configurations to support:
- NGLVs equipped with semi-cryogenic stages.
- Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3) and its enhanced configurations.
- Future advancements in launch vehicle technology.

Enhancing ISRO's Launch Capabilities

- With the second launch pad in operation for nearly two decades, the addition of the third launch pad will act as a standby and expand India's launch capacity, meeting the needs of evolving space transportation requirements.

Catering to Future Needs

- This facility is designed to address India's space transportation demands for the next 25-30 years, supporting both heavier-class vehicles and advanced mission profiles.

Strategic Importance

- The establishment of the third launch pad underscores India's commitment to enhancing its space exploration capabilities, enabling greater frequency and diversity in launch missions while strengthening its position in the global space sector.

Conclusion

- The approval for the third launch pad at SDSC Sriharikota marks a crucial step in enhancing ISRO's space infrastructure. This new facility will support Next-Generation Launch Vehicles, manned space missions, and future technological advancements, strengthening India's position in global space exploration. The project ensures ISRO's readiness to meet evolving space transportation needs for the next 25-30 years.

Page 04 : GS 2 : Indian Polity

The Eighth Pay Commission has been approved by the Union government to address the long-standing demands of employees and trade unions for wage and pension revisions.

Approval of Eighth Pay Commission

- The Union government has approved the establishment of the Eighth Pay Commission, fulfilling the long-standing demand of Central trade unions and employees' organizations.

Beneficiaries

- The recommendations of the Pay Commission will benefit approximately 50 lakh employees and 65 lakh pensioners, including serving and retired defense personnel.
- Delhi alone houses around 4 lakh Union government employees.

Composition and Appointment

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the formation of the commission ahead of the Seventh Pay Commission's term ending in 2026.
- The Chairperson and two members will be appointed soon, with the chair traditionally being a retired Supreme Court judge (e.g., Justice A.K. Mathur headed the Seventh Pay Commission).

Impact of Recommendations

- The recommendations will serve as the basis for wage settlements in public sector undertakings and similar pay revisions in States.
- The Seventh Pay Commission's implementation in 2016 cost the exchequer ₹1 lakh crore in the fiscal year 2016-17.

Economic and Social Benefits

- The decision is expected to boost consumption and economic

Centre announces constitution of Eighth Pay Commission

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI


Ashwini Vaishnaw

Days ahead of the Delhi Assembly election, the Union government approved the establishment of the Eighth Pay Commission here on Thursday, accepting a demand of the Central trade unions and employees' organisations.

The outcome of the new Pay Commission will benefit about 50 lakh employees and 65 lakh pensioners of the Union government, including serving and retired defence personnel. Delhi itself houses about four lakh employees of the Union government.

Talking to reporters after a Cabinet meeting, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken the decision to constitute the Eighth Pay Commission. He said the Chairperson and two members of the commission would be appointed soon.

Usually, a retired Supreme Court judge heads the Pay Commission. The Seventh Pay Commission was headed by Justice A.K. Mathur (retd). It started functioning in 2014 and submitted its report in 2016. The new scale as recommended by the Seventh Pay Commission was implemented in November 2016, and the expenses to the exchequer for implementing it were about ₹1 lakh crore in 2016-17.

Once accepted, the Pay Commission's recommendations will be the basis for wage settlement in public sector undertakings, and similar pay revision exercises in States.

"This will provide a significant boost to consumption and economic growth, along with improved quality of life for government employees," a source in the government said.

Mr. Vaishnaw said that though the term of the Seventh Pay Commission ended only in 2026, the Prime Minister had approved the Eighth Pay Commission well ahead of time.

Trade unions said they welcomed the move, and that they would wait for the terms of reference and the constitution of the panel.

Member of the Joint Consultative Machinery between the Centre and its employees, and general secretary of the All India Defence Employees Federation C. Srikumar said that employees had been demanding for over a year that the Centre constitute the Eighth Pay Commission.

"Any Pay Commission takes minimum two years time to submit its report. Recently, Central trade unions, in their meeting with the Finance Minister, too had raised this demand," Mr. Srikumar said, adding that there should be clarity on the concepts of "living wage" and "living pension".

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-backed trade union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) said in a statement that the decision proved the government's commitment towards working people. The BMS hoped the panel would be constituted at the earliest.

growth while improving the quality of life for government employees.

- It reflects the government's commitment to enhancing employee welfare.

Trade Union Reactions

- Trade unions welcomed the move and emphasized the need for clear terms of reference, particularly on "living wage" and "living pension" concepts.
- The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-backed Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) appreciated the decision and urged for the early constitution of the panel.

Timeline for Recommendations

- As per precedence, a Pay Commission usually takes about two years to submit its report, making this early approval significant for timely implementation.

Significance

- The establishment of the Eighth Pay Commission underscores the government's proactive approach to addressing employee demands and ensuring their financial well-being, further contributing to economic growth.

Conclusion

- The approval of the Eighth Pay Commission highlights the government's commitment to employee welfare and economic growth. Its timely formation will address wage and pension demands, benefiting millions of employees and pensioners while boosting consumption and overall economic activity.

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Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna administered the oath of office to the new Supreme Court judge Justice Krishnan Vinod Chandran on Thursday.

- Justice Chandran was formerly the Chief Justice of the Patna High Court. His appointment has raised the judicial strength of the Supreme Court to 33, one short of the full sanctioned strength.
- The Supreme Court Collegium had recommended Justice Chandran to the Union government for appointment as a top court judge on January 7.

Justice K. Vinod Chandran sworn in as SC judge; top court close to full strength

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna administered the oath of office to the new Supreme Court judge Justice Krishnan Vinod Chandran on Thursday.

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Justice K. Vinod Chandran

Collegium resolution

In its resolution, the collegium headed by Chief Justice Khanna had noted that there was currently no judge with the Kerala High Court as the parent court on the Bench of the Supreme Court.

At the time of his recommendation, Justice Chandran was the senior-most among High Court judges hailing from Kerala. He had stood 13 in the combined all-India seniority of High Court judges.

Justice Chandran was appointed a judge of the Kerala High Court in November 2011 and elevated as the Patna High Court Chief Justice on March 24, 2023.

Justice Chandran is the second Supreme Court judge successfully recommended by the Khanna Collegium after Justice Manmohan in December 2024. His tenure in the top court would last till April 24, 2028.

Judicial vacancies

With pendency nearing 83,000, the Supreme Court Collegium has repeatedly emphasised the need to have its full sanctioned strength of judges.

A November 2023 collegium resolution had pointed out that the top court cannot afford even one judicial vacancy taking into account the "ever-mounting pendency of cases". The same sense of urgency was conveyed in a January 2024 resolution of the collegium, which said that the "workload of judges has increased considerably and it has become necessary to ensure that the court has full working judge-strength at all times".

How are Supreme Court Judges Appointed?

- Composition and Strength of the Supreme Court:
- Originally, the Supreme Court had eight judges (one chief justice and seven others).
- The Parliament has increased the number of judges over time.
- The current strength of the Supreme Court is 34 judges (one chief justice and 33 others).

Qualifications for Appointment as a Judge:

- According to Article 124(3) of the Constitution, a person can be appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court if he or she:
  - A person must be a citizen of India.
  - Must have served as a judge of a High Court for at least five years or two such courts in succession.
  - Alternatively, must have been an advocate of a High Court for at least ten years or two or more such courts in succession.
  - Must be a distinguished jurist in the opinion of the president.

Appointment:

- The Judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President under clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution.
- The President consults with judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts to make informed appointments.

Oath of Office:

- Every appointed judge must make and subscribe to an oath before the President or an appointed person.
- The oath includes commitments to uphold the Constitution, sovereignty and integrity of India, and perform duties without fear or favor.

Tenure and Resignation:

- There is no prescribed minimum age limit for a judge's appointment.
- A judge of the Supreme Court serves until they reach the age of 65 years.
- However, a judge may resign before reaching the age of 65 years by tendering their resignation to the President.

Salaries and Allowances:

- Salaries, allowances, privileges, leave, and pension of Supreme Court judges are determined by Parliament.
- The Salaries, Pension, and Allowances of the Supreme Court Judges are charged upon the Consolidated Fund of India.

Post-retirement Restrictions:

- After retirement, a judge of the Supreme Court is prohibited from practicing law in any court in India or pleading before any government authority.
- As per Article 128 of Indian Constitution, any retired judge of the Supreme Court of India can be called back to sit and act as a Supreme Court judge by the Chief Justice of India with the prior permission of the President of India.

Removal:

- A judge of the Supreme Court can only be removed from office by an order of the President.
- The removal process requires an address by each House of Parliament, supported by a special majority i.e., a majority of the total membership of that House and a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting.
- The grounds for removal are proven misbehaviour or incapacity.
- Parliament has the authority to regulate the procedure for presenting the address and investigating and proving the misbehaviour or incapacity of a judge.
- Once appointed, judges can serve until the age of 65 and cannot be removed during their tenure except for proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

Collegium System for Judicial Appointments:

- Judges of the higher judiciary are appointed through the collegium system.
- The collegium, consisting of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, decides on appointments, elevations, and transfers of Judges.
- The term "collegium" is not mentioned in the Indian Constitution but has been established through judicial pronouncements.

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A phased ceasefire deal was brokered in Doha, Qatar, aiming to address the Gaza conflict.

Analysis of the news:

- **Phased Ceasefire and Exchange of Detainees**
  - In the first 42-day phase, Hamas will release 33 hostages, while Israel will free 900-1,650 Palestinian detainees, including those detained post-October 7, 2023.
  - This phase sets the groundwork for eventual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, including critical areas like the Netzarim and Philadelphi Corridors, contingent on subsequent negotiations.
  - The phased structure aims to build trust while addressing humanitarian concerns.
- **Geopolitical and Domestic Shifts Enabling the Deal**
  - Key changes in Israel's political landscape, such as Gideon Sa'ar joining Netanyahu's coalition, diluted the influence of far-right figures.
  - International pressure, particularly from the U.S. under Biden and President-elect Trump, further propelled the ceasefire.
  - Netanyahu's strategic considerations for leveraging U.S. relations during Trump's second term also influenced his decision to accept the agreement.

- **Key Terms and Implications**

- **Withdrawal from the Philadelphi Corridor:**
  - Israel's commitment to vacate this critical buffer zone by the end of phase one addresses long-standing Egyptian and Hamas demands.
  - However, Israeli officials remain cautious, leaving room for renegotiation based on security concerns.

- **Prisoner Exchange Dynamics:**
  - Israel's history of high-stakes prisoner swaps resurfaces, with at least 250 life-sentenced detainees set for release. This concession risks political backlash, challenging Israel's 2014 law limiting such exchanges.

Implications for Hamas and Israel

- **Hamas:**
  - The ceasefire offers Hamas breathing space to regroup, rebuild its resources, and maintain its influence in Gaza. Its evolving tactics and local command strength highlight resilience, despite leadership losses.
  - Hamas appears to be positioning itself for a permanent role in Gaza's governance, emulating Hezbollah's integration into Lebanon's post-war framework.
- **Israel:**
  - Despite military successes against Hamas and Hezbollah, Israel's core objective of eradicating Hamas from Gaza remains unmet. While the deal secures the release of hostages, Netanyahu risks domestic criticism for perceived concessions, potentially weakening his far-right support.

Conclusion: A Complex Road Ahead

- The ceasefire reflects a temporary pause in violence and opens pathways for broader negotiations, including reconstruction and governance in Gaza.
- However, unresolved security and political challenges highlight the fragility of this agreement, leaving the region's long-term stability uncertain.

About Gaza Strip

- **Location:** It is a Palestinian enclave on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.
  - It shares a border with Israel and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.
  - The Gaza Strip along with the West Bank makes up the State of Palestine. Both these territories are separated by Israel.
- **Administration:** Since winning a majority in 2006, the Gaza Strip has been ruled by Hamas, which is considered a politico-military organisation.
- **Occupied:** Israel controls the air space over Gaza and its shoreline. It has imposed restrictions on the movement of goods into the Gaza Strip. Egypt also controls one of Gaza's borders and has at times restricted movement.
- **Conflict:** Gaza Strip is described as the 'world's largest open-air prison' due to the strict movement restrictions placed by Israel on its nearly 2 million residents.

An alliance of democracies with India at its core

The year 2024 was the super-election year around the world, and 2025 must be the year when the world's democracies regroup and find new ways to support each other. Nowhere is this truer than in the relationship between Europe and India, a partnership that, for too long, has been big on strategies, but small on delivery. For nearly 17 years, European Union (EU)-India relations were seen through the prism of on/off Free Trade Agreement negotiations. As a free trader, I believe that the benefits of the world's biggest democracy and its largest trading bloc coming together to buck protectionist headwinds would be an economic and geopolitical game-changer.

Look at the bigger picture

However, we cannot be naive to the hurdles ahead. If a big-bang trade deal eludes us in the short term, we should develop another track away from the negotiators and bureaucrats. Fixed firmly at the highest political levels, it would focus on bigger picture geostrategic issues such as economic security, defence cooperation and a common agenda for space, emerging technology, and critical industry sectors such as pharmaceuticals.

On the geopolitical level, Europe was undoubtedly frustrated with India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and continued close ties. These ties are historic. Conversely, India has broad rivalry with China, despite cooperation through the BRICS group and a substantial trading partnership. As a growing economy I can understand why India would not want to be sucked into power competition as the world divides into democratic and autocratic blocs. However, fundamentally, India is a democracy and its entanglement with Moscow and Beijing is unnatural. In the same vein, India's accusations of double standards from Europe are not without substance. We cannot demand that India severs all ties with Russia without also addressing our own economic dependence on China.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

served as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General from 2009-14 and was the Prime Minister of Denmark from 2001-09

Europe and India need a more practical relationship; together, Europe, India and the United States can be unstoppable

A restart in relations should, therefore, start with a common assessment that Russia and China – with their 'No Limits' partnership – are both a threat to the global democratic world which includes India, Europe and the United States. What happens in the Atlantic affects the Indo-Pacific and vice versa.

On this basis we should focus on a series of practical measures to break down barriers to trade and investment piecemeal while strengthening our joint security, including economic security. This will include reducing dependencies on China in areas such as critical raw materials and developing new supply chains, with Europe seeing India as a 'Trusted Partner'.

Defence and trade

In defence, India and the U.S. already enjoy strong defence cooperation, with India being America's 'Major Defence Partner' and a member of the 'Quad' – sometimes referred to as the 'Asia-Pacific NATO'. Europe should support the continued development of this security alliance to give India more security guarantees.

EU-India defence discussions have increased but should accelerate to a high political level as Europe looks to bring much-needed investment into our industries, which can also offer India better weapons than Russia. The EU's new dedicated Defence Commissioner should visit India at the earliest opportunity and develop more collaboration, in defence and in space where both the EU and India have ambitious plans.

India and the EU have in place a Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to mirror a similar council with the Biden administration. Whether the EU-U.S. TTC survives President Donald Trump is unclear, but the EU-India Council has not reached its potential, especially in coordinating a technology agenda. Here, we can also draw inspiration from India's ties with the U.S., where the U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET); iCET is promoting collaboration at the National Security Adviser level.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute illustrates the scale of the challenge. It tracks the top 64 emerging technologies. In 57 of them, China is winning the global race. The U.S. is hot on its heels. However, India is also emerging as a key centre of global research innovation, with many other European countries also still in the running. Individually, we are doing okay in this existential race, but by combining forces, the free world can jump ahead to lead the world in all emerging technology, from quantum computing to advanced biotech. We must not hand victory to China.

In perspective

Europe and India should focus on a far more practical relationship built on tangible connections, including stronger people-to-people ties. For Europe, the benefits are obvious: India will become the world's third largest economy in the next decade, at a time when European global GDP share continues to fall. But there is a wider prize: forming an alliance of democracies that has India at its core.

If Europe wants to anchor India in that alliance, we need to change our approach to the subcontinent. That does not mean brushing differences or difficulties under the table. India has many challenges to its democracy, but so does Europe. We should seek to address them together. Europe, India and the United States are individually powerful, but, together, we are unstoppable against the united autocrats.

GS Paper 02 : International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: "Examine the scope and significance of enhanced collaboration between Europe and India in addressing global challenges such as climate change, economic instability, and security threats. Suggest ways to strengthen this partnership." (**250 Words /15 marks)**

Context :

- The article emphasizes the need for stronger collaboration between Europe and India to address global challenges, focusing on trade, defense, technology, and geopolitical dynamics. It advocates forming a democratic alliance to counter the rising influence of autocratic powers like Russia and China.

Strengthening EU-India Relations for a Democratic Alliance

- The year 2024 marked a pivotal period globally, with super-election events shaping the world's democracies. As 2025 unfolds, it presents an opportunity for democracies to regroup and forge new ways to support one another.
- Among these partnerships, the relationship between Europe and India stands out. While historically strong in strategic intent, it has struggled with effective delivery, and now is the time for transformation.

Challenges in EU-India Relations

- For over 17 years, the focus of EU-India relations has been the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations. These prolonged discussions have overshadowed other critical areas of collaboration.
- A successful FTA between the world's largest democracy and its biggest trading bloc could serve as a cornerstone to counter rising protectionist trends and foster economic and geopolitical strength. However, the complexity of negotiations has delayed progress, necessitating a broader and more pragmatic approach to collaboration.

Moving Beyond Trade

- While an FTA remains crucial, it is equally important to pivot towards geostrategic issues that transcend trade. This involves high-level political dialogue focusing on:
  - Economic security through resilient supply chains.
  - Defense cooperation to address shared security challenges
  - Joint innovation in areas like space exploration, emerging technologies, and critical industries such as pharmaceuticals.

Geopolitical Dynamics and Shared Challenges

- Europe and India face intricate geopolitical dynamics. Europe has expressed frustration over India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its longstanding ties with Moscow.

- These ties are rooted in history, just as India navigates its complex rivalry with China. Despite cooperation within BRICS, India remains cautious about Beijing's growing influence, which aligns with its broader democratic values.
- India's engagement with both Russia and China reflects its strategic need to avoid being entangled in power blocs as the world polarizes into democratic and autocratic alliances. However, Europe's economic dependence on China also highlights double standards.
- A mutual understanding must be established, recognizing that the "No Limits" partnership between Russia and China poses a shared threat to the democratic world.

Building a Practical Framework

- To strengthen this partnership, a series of pragmatic steps must be implemented:
    - **Trade and Investment:** Break down barriers incrementally and foster investment in critical industries.
    - **Supply Chain Resilience:** Reduce dependence on China by creating alternative supply chains, with India positioned as a "Trusted Partner."
    - **Defense Collaboration:** Accelerate EU-India defense discussions to complement India's strong ties with the U.S., enhancing security guarantees.
    - **Technology Leadership:** Deepen cooperation in emerging technologies like quantum computing and biotech to counter China's global dominance.Strengthening Defense and Technology Collaboration
- India's defense cooperation with the U.S., as its "Major Defense Partner" and member of the Quad, serves as a model for Europe.
- EU-India defense collaboration should scale up, with Europe offering investments and advanced weapons to replace India's reliance on Russian arms.
- Space exploration is another promising area where both sides can pool resources and expertise for mutual benefit.
- In technology, the EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) mirrors similar frameworks with the U.S., yet it remains underutilized.
- Drawing inspiration from the U.S.-India iCET initiative, Europe and India can prioritize collaboration in critical and emerging technologies to address the existential challenge posed by China's dominance.

A Broader Vision for EU-India Ties

- Beyond economic and strategic ties, fostering stronger people-to-people connections can deepen mutual understanding.
- Educational and cultural exchanges will play a pivotal role in building a relationship based on trust and shared democratic values.

Conclusion

- In the next decade, India is poised to become the world's third-largest economy, presenting vast opportunities for Europe. More importantly, the strategic goal should be to form a robust alliance of democracies, with India as a central pillar. By addressing shared challenges, embracing mutual strengths, and promoting tangible collaboration, Europe, India, and the U.S. can build an unstoppable democratic coalition capable of countering autocratic powers and ensuring a secure, prosperous future.