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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# India-Nordic Summit: From Sambandh to Strategy

INDIAN EXPRESS

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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# India-Nordic Summit: From Sambandh to Strategy

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Can a five-nation grouping become a strategic platform when each member's interests cut differently on Russia, China, and the Arctic?"*

## EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

The Indian Express argues that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Oslo on May 19, 2026 for the third India-Nordic Summit is an opportunity to convert the warm but diffuse bilateral sambandh with Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland into a concrete strategic framework. The op-ed calls for deliverables on green transition, the blue economy, Arctic cooperation, defence and space technology, and for India to leverage Norway's USD 1.7 trillion Government Pension Fund Global as a long-term investor in Indian infrastructure and the green transition.

## FROM STOCKHOLM TO OSLO

The India-Nordic Summit format began in Stockholm in 2018, when Prime Minister Modi met the five Nordic prime ministers in the first dedicated summit between India and the Nordic-5. The second iteration was held in Copenhagen in 2022. The third Summit, scheduled for Oslo on May 19, 2026, comes against a transformed strategic backdrop. The India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), which includes Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein, has been in force since October 2025, with a headline USD 100 billion investment commitment over 15 years and a target of one million direct jobs. The agreement is the first major Indian trade treaty to embed binding investment obligations. The Oslo Summit is the first political stocktake of this new architecture.

## A CONVERGENCE OF STRENGTHS

The case for a deeper India-Nordic strategic partnership rests on **complementarity**. India brings scale, demographic dividend, a fast-growing market and an increasingly capable services and technology base. The Nordic-5 bring per-capita wealth, technological edge in narrowly defined frontier domains, and sovereign-investor patience that few other partners can match.

Sweden's Innovation Partnership with India, anchored in green industrial transition, electric mobility and smart cities, is already a template. Finland's leadership in 5G and 6G technologies through Nokia complements India's domestic telecommunications stack – the indigenous 4G/5G core deployed by BSNL has Finnish technology in its supply chain. Denmark's expertise in green shipping and offshore wind aligns directly with India's National Maritime **Decarbonisation** roadmap and the offshore wind targets in the National Wind Energy Mission. Iceland's geothermal expertise, demonstrated in Reykjavik's 90 per cent renewable energy mix, has potential application in Indian volcanic and tectonic zones.

Norway is the strategic anchor. Beyond hydrocarbons, Norwegian shipping and maritime classification standards underwrite a third of global tonnage. And the Government Pension Fund Global (GPF) – the world's largest sovereign wealth fund with assets exceeding USD 1.7 trillion – holds Indian equities and bonds and is a credible long-term partner for the green transition.

## THE ARCTIC DIMENSION

India became an observer at the Arctic Council in 2013 and adopted its first Arctic Policy in 2022, identifying scientific, climate, economic and strategic interests in the polar region. The Polar Code adopted by the International Maritime Organization in 2017 governs ship operations in polar waters. As the Northern Sea Route opens further with ice retreat, India's interest in Arctic shipping, fisheries and seabed science aligns naturally with Nordic littorals – particularly Norway, which administers Svalbard, where India operates the Himadri research station.

But Arctic cooperation faces a structural complication. The Arctic Council itself has been functionally paralysed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Norway holds the chairship and has worked to keep technical cooperation alive, but India must navigate this fracture without alienating either bloc.

## ASYMMETRIC INTERESTS

A clear-eyed assessment must acknowledge that the Nordic-5 is not a monolith. Norway and Iceland remain outside the European Union; Sweden, Denmark and Finland are inside. Finland and Sweden joined NATO in 2023 and 2024 respectively in response to Russian aggression; Iceland was a founding member; Denmark is a long-standing NATO ally. Their views on Russia, Ukraine, and on the level of **decoupling** required from China

differ in degree if not direction. India's strategic autonomy – its continued purchase of Russian oil, its participation in BRICS, its careful management of the China relationship – runs at an angle to several Nordic positions.

The Summit's value lies precisely in managing this divergence productively rather than papering it over.

## WHAT OSLO SHOULD DELIVER

Four deliverables would convert sambandh into strategy. A dedicated India-Nordic Green Transition Fund, anchored by GPFG, with co-investment from Indian sovereign vehicles, focused on renewables and grid infrastructure. A formal India-Nordic Arctic Science Cooperation Programme, leveraging Himadri, IndARC and Norwegian Polar Institute facilities. A defence and space technology track building on India's Make-in-India ambitions and Nordic precision manufacturing. And an explicit **blue economy** compact under TEPA's investment chapter, covering offshore wind, deep-sea mining standards and sustainable fisheries.

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### GS Paper 2 – India's foreign policy, regional and minilateral groupings

#### Key arguments:

- The India-Nordic Summit (Stockholm 2018, Copenhagen 2022, Oslo 2026) is a minilateral platform with complementary strengths across green transition, technology and the Arctic.
- The India-EFTA TEPA, in force since October 2025, provides a binding investment architecture (USD 100 billion over 15 years) that grounds bilateral economics.
- Norway's Government Pension Fund Global (over USD 1.7 trillion) is a credible long-term green investor.
- India's Arctic Policy 2022 and observer status at the Arctic Council since 2013 align with Nordic littorals.
- Asymmetries on Russia, China and the EU exist; minilateral diplomacy must manage divergence productively.

#### Counterarguments:

- The Nordic-5 is too small a market relative to the United States, the European Union or ASEAN to merit a dedicated summit-level format.
- Arctic Council paralysis since 2022 limits the immediate utility of polar cooperation.
- TEPA's investment commitments are aspirational; binding enforcement remains untested.

**Keywords:** India-Nordic Summit, Oslo 2026, India-EFTA TEPA (in force since October 2025), Government Pension Fund Global (GPF), Arctic Council, Arctic Policy 2022, Polar Code 2017, Himadri research station, blue economy, NATO accession Sweden-Finland (2023-24).

*The Indian Express's view is that the India-Nordic Summit will succeed not by producing a long joint communique but by delivering one or two concrete instruments – a Green Transition Fund, an Arctic Science Programme – that survive the next political cycle. Sambandh is a starting point; strategy is a discipline of follow-through. Oslo is India's opportunity to demonstrate that minilateral diplomacy can produce more than warm photographs, and that a five-nation grouping spread across the Arctic Circle can still be made to fit a single Indian strategic frame.*

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## Bharat Choudhary

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