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India-Cyprus Strategic Partnership: Friends of IMEC Group Launched

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WHY IN NEWS:

Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides held bilateral talks with **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** at **Hyderabad House, New Delhi**, on **May 22, 2026**. The two leaders elevated bilateral relations to a **Strategic Partnership** and constituted a **“Friends of IMEC”** group of pro-corridor nations to revive momentum on the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**. The visit is significant as Cyprus currently holds the **rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January-June 2026)**. A joint **task force on infrastructure and shipping** was also set up.

ABOUT CYPRUS

Cyprus is an **island nation in the eastern Mediterranean Sea** and the **third-largest island** in the Mediterranean after Sicily and Sardinia. It sits at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, giving it outsized geo-strategic value relative to its size.

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Capital	Nicosia — the last divided capital in the world
Currency	Euro (adopted 2008)
EU Membership	May 1, 2004
Population	~1.2 million
Composition	Greek Cypriot majority (south) + Turkish Cypriot minority (north)
Nearest neighbours	Turkey (north), Syria/Lebanon (east), Egypt/Israel (south), Greece (west)
President (2026)	Nikos Christodoulides (elected February 2023)

THE CYPRUS QUESTION: A DIVIDED ISLAND

Cyprus gained **independence from the United Kingdom in 1960**, with Britain retaining two **Sovereign Base Areas (Akrotiri and Dhekelia)**. The unitary republic, with a power-sharing Greek-Turkish constitution, collapsed within years amid inter-communal violence.

1974 Turkish Invasion and Partition

In **July 1974**, following a Greek-Cypriot nationalist coup backed by the Athens junta seeking *enosis* (union with Greece), **Turkey invaded northern Cyprus**. The island has remained **de facto partitioned** ever since:

- **Republic of Cyprus** — internationally recognised; controls the southern two-thirds; EU member.
- **Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)** — self-declared in **1983**; recognised **only by Turkey**.
- A UN **buffer zone known as the “Green Line”** runs through Nicosia, patrolled by the UN **Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)**, established in **1964**.

India recognises only the Republic of Cyprus and does not maintain any relations with the TRNC — a position consistent with UNSC Resolution 541 (1983) declaring the TRNC declaration legally invalid.

IMEC: INDIA-MIDDLE EAST-EUROPE ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

IMEC was **announced on the sidelines of the G20 New Delhi Summit on September 9, 2023**, through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by **India, United States, UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Italy and the European Union**.

Architecture of IMEC

SEGMENT	ROUTE
Eastern Corridor	India → UAE (shipping link across the Arabian Sea)
Northern Corridor	UAE → Saudi Arabia → Jordan → Israel → Greece (Piraeus) → European Union

The corridor envisages an integrated **rail-ship-rail multimodal network, sub-sea data and electricity cables, a green hydrogen pipeline, and clean energy infrastructure**. It is widely viewed as a strategic counterweight to China’s **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.

Why Cyprus Matters to IMEC

The northern leg of IMEC currently terminates at the **Greek port of Piraeus**, where Chinese state-owned **COSCO Shipping** holds a majority stake — a structural **vulnerability**. Cyprus offers:

- An **alternative Eastern Mediterranean anchor** independent of Chinese-controlled port assets.
- **Limassol port** as a feasible trans-shipment node for IMEC cargo.
- Reduced dependence on a single Greek node, diversifying the Mediterranean entry into the EU.

IMEC momentum **slowed sharply after the October 2023 Gaza war** disrupted the Israel-Jordan land segment. The “Friends of IMEC” grouping is aimed at sustaining political and technical work on the corridor through bilateral and mini-lateral channels until the regional environment improves.

INDIA-CYPRUS BILATERAL RELATIONS

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Diplomatic relations	Established 1962
Annual bilateral trade	~ \$200 million (2024)
Cumulative FDI from Cyprus	~ \$15 billion — Cyprus among top 10 FDI sources for India
DTAA revision	India-Cyprus Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement revised November 2016 — reduced Cyprus’s conduit role
Indian diaspora	~10,000

Cypriot investments into India have historically concentrated in **real estate, financial services and infrastructure**. The 2016 DTAA revision aligned with India’s broader treaty overhaul (Mauritius and Singapore in the same cycle) to plug capital-gains arbitrage, but Cyprus continues to be a meaningful institutional investor.

Areas of Cooperation in the 2026 Joint Statement

- **Cyber security** — joint working group on threat-intelligence sharing.
- **Maritime security** — relevant to Cyprus’s vast **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** containing the **Aphrodite, Calypso and Glaucus offshore gas discoveries**.
- **Counter-terrorism** — intelligence cooperation; alignment on UN-listed entities.
- **Digital cooperation** — Cyprus seeking exposure to Indian **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** stack — Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker.
- **Higher education and skill mobility** — student exchange and degree recognition.
- **Shipping** — Cyprus operates **one of the largest ship registries in the EU**, ranked among the top maritime flag states globally.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA

Deepening the Smaller-EU Outreach

India has progressively engaged smaller EU member states — **Cyprus, Malta, Latvia, Estonia, Portugal** — recognising that EU decisions on trade, sanctions, and FTAs require consensus. Cyprus's **EU Council Presidency (January-June 2026)** is a window to push:

- **India-EU Free Trade Agreement** — negotiations resumed in **June 2022** after stalling in 2013; originally targeted for conclusion by 2024 and now expected by **end-2026**.
- **EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)** — Indian concerns on iron, steel, aluminium, cement, fertiliser exports.
- **Mobility and migration partnership** — student and skilled-worker pathways.

Eastern Mediterranean Architecture

Cyprus complements India's deepening relationship with **Greece**. PM Modi visited **Athens in August 2023**, the first by an Indian PM in 40 years, and bilateral trade with Greece stands at ~\$2 billion. Cyprus and Greece together provide India a coherent **Hellenic-Mediterranean wedge**, which is strategically useful given the **Turkey-Pakistan defence axis** — Turkey's drone and warship exports to Pakistan, and Ankara's vocal positions on Kashmir at the UN.

Counter to BRI in the Mediterranean

China has built influence through port concessions at Piraeus (Greece), Trieste (Italy), and infrastructure across the Western Balkans. A Cyprus anchor in IMEC complicates the BRI's Mediterranean play and gives the EU a tangible alternative.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — International Relations

- India's **bilateral relations with EU member states**; smaller-state outreach strategy.
- **Multilateral connectivity initiatives** — IMEC, BRI, INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor); comparative analysis.
- **India-EU strategic partnership and FTA negotiations**.
- **Indian diaspora and investment treaty architecture (DTAAs)**.
- **UN peacekeeping** — UNFICYP and India's policy on the Cyprus question.

Probable Mains Questions

- 1 “The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is more than a trade route — it is a geopolitical statement. Examine.” (GS-2, 15 marks)
- 2 “How does India’s engagement with smaller EU member states like Cyprus and Greece complement its broader EU strategy?” (GS-2, 10 marks)

Prelims Pointers

- **Cyprus capital:** Nicosia — last divided capital in the world.
- **Cyprus EU membership:** May 1, 2004; **Eurozone:** 2008.
- **Cyprus EU Council Presidency:** January-June 2026.
- **UNFICYP:** established **1964** — one of the **longest-running UN peacekeeping missions**.
- **IMEC:** announced **September 9, 2023**, G20 New Delhi Summit.
- **India-Cyprus diplomatic ties:** 1962; **DTAA revised:** November 2016.
- **India recognises only the Republic of Cyprus**, not the TRNC.

FACTS CORNER

Cyprus — island nation in the eastern Mediterranean; capital Nicosia — the last divided capital in the world.

EU member since May 1, 2004; adopted Euro in 2008.

Cyprus President (2026): Nikos Christodoulides (elected February 2023).

Cyprus EU Council Presidency: January-June 2026 (rotating presidency).

Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus: 1974; TRNC self-declared 1983, recognised only by Turkey.

UNFICYP (UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus): operational since 1964.

India-Cyprus diplomatic relations: established 1962.

India-Cyprus DTAA: revised November 2016 — reduced its conduit role.

IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor): announced at the G20 New Delhi Summit, September 9, 2023; signatories include India, US, UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Italy, and the EU.

IMEC has two corridors — Eastern (India-UAE) and Northern (UAE-Greece via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel).

India recognises only the Republic of Cyprus (not the TRNC).

Cyprus operates one of the largest ship registries in the EU.

Sources: [MEA](#), [PIB](#), [The Hindu](#)[← NEWER ARTICLE](#)[Current Affairs Today — May 22, 2026](#)[OLDER ARTICLE →](#)[International Day for Biological Diversity 2026: Acting...](#)

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