

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः  
ऋग्वेद -1.89.

Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions in the universe.

Vol. 31, June 2023

### Hemis Festival: Celebrating the Victory of Good over Evil



Buddhism, which originated in India, branched into multiple schools over the course of centuries, as it spread to different parts of the globe. One such prominent school is Vajrayana Buddhism. Buddhism is said to have been spread in Tibet by one such practitioner of Vajrayana Buddhism, Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche. It is in his honour that every year, the Hemis Festival is celebrated in Ladakh, the scenic Union Territory of India in the high north. In 2023, the festival was celebrated on 28th – 29th June.



The Hemis Festival is celebrated in end-June or early-July, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the Tibetan calendar. It marks the birth of Guru Padmasambhava, who is worshipped as the "Second Buddha" in the Tibetan school of Buddhism. In the Tibetan tradition, it is believed that the teachings of the Guru include an oral lineage and a concealed, written lineage. It is said that the Guru himself appears in the dreams of those destined to discover the texts and guides them towards those treasures.

According to legend, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the then king of Tibet invited a Buddhist monk to propagate Buddhism and establish the first monastery in Tibet. However, this angered the local gods who prevented such an endeavour. The Buddhist monk returned with Guru Padmasambhava, who was adept in Tantric/Vajrayana Buddhism. Having vanquished and tamed the local spirits and gods, Guru Padmasambhava is said to have laid the foundations of Buddhism in the region. The king's daughter, Yeshe Tsogyal, also became a consort and student of the Guru and attained Buddhahood in her lifetime, thus becoming a female Buddha.

The myths and legends around Guru Padmasambhava are also associated with several landmarks, two of which are the Chumi Gyatse waterfalls in Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China and the Tiger's Nest Monastery in Bhutan.



- 1. Chumi Gyatse Waterfalls (left):** It is said that during a spiritual debate with the high priest of the Bonpa sect in Arunachal Pradesh, Guru Padmasambhava flung his rosary with 108 beads at the rocks and water spouted from those points, creating the scenic Chumi Gyatse waterfalls. It is today revered by the Monpa tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, who follow Tibetan Buddhism.
- 2. Tiger's Nest Monastery:** According to legend, the Guru transformed Yeshe Tsogyal into a flying tigress and flew to the Monastery which is precariously situated on a cliff. It is called the "Paro Takstang" or the Tiger's Nest.

Guru Padmasambhava is also worshipped as the patron saint of Sikkim. The world's tallest statue of the Guru is in Namchi district of Sikkim.



Statue of Guru Padmasambhava in Namchi District of Sikkim

The Hemis Festival is celebrated for 2 days every year. It is held in the vast courtyard of the Hemis Monastery, which belongs to the Drukpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Though some accounts date the existence of the monastery way back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the current monastery has been in existence since the 1630s. While the festival is celebrated every year, it gains much more fervour every 12<sup>th</sup> year, or the Year of the Monkey, when the world's largest *thangka* (Tibetan scroll painting) – nearly two storeys high! – of Guru Padmasambhava is displayed.

The festival is an integration of the local culture with religious symbolism. One of the major attractions is the Cham dance, performed wearing vibrant masks, colourful headgears and ornate costumes. This mystic, Tantric art form depicts the victory of good over evil, reminiscent of the vanquishing of demons and spirits by Guru Padmasambhava. It is considered as a form of meditation and an offering to God. The Cham dance forms part of the "*tsechu*" tradition. In Tibetan Buddhism, *tsechu* refers to festivals which enable large social gatherings, including settlements that are far and spread out. The monks also play long, traditional trumpets called the "*dungchen*" during the festivities.

Thanks to the vibrant carnival that occurs every year, the Hemis Festival attracts tourists not only from India but also from countries globally. This is not only for the spiritually inclined, but for anyone with a spirit of curiosity and exploration. The Hemis Festival, along with other charming locations in Ladakh have placed the region on the global tourist map. Since the formation of the Union Territory of Ladakh in 2019, the region has received greater focus for economic development as well.

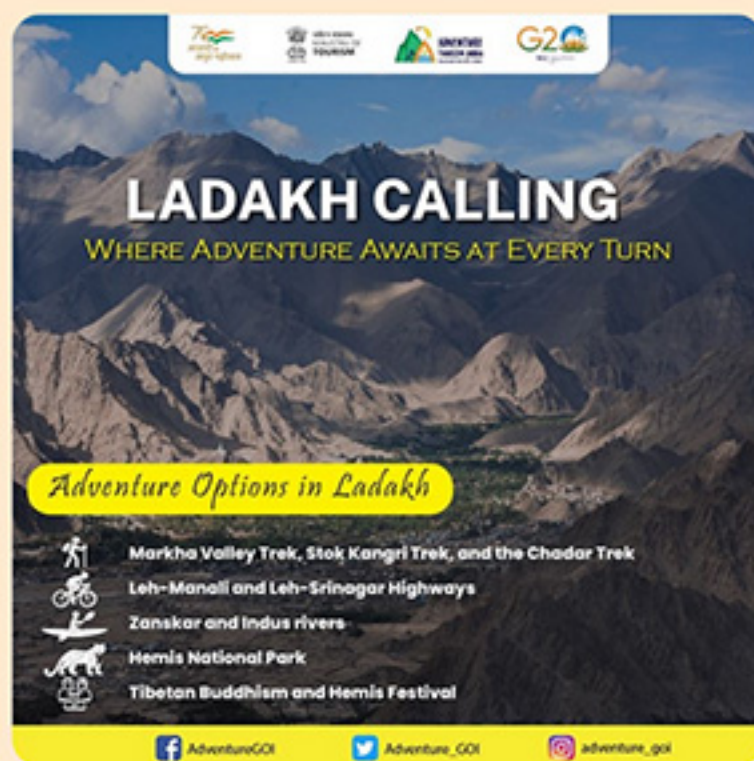


## State Spotlight: LADAKH (UNION TERRITORY)

MAP OF UT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR AND UT OF LADAKH



Ladakh is the largest and the second-least populous Union Territory (UT), which was formed after the division of the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir, in 2019. With a diverse landscape comprising of the majestic Himalayas, cold desert, picturesque lakes coupled with a distinct culture, Ladakh is a hugely popular tourist destination. The scenic Pangong Tso lake, the Nubra Valley and the world's highest motorable road, the Khardungla Pass are among the major highlights on the tourist circuit in the UT. Estimates for 2021 indicate a footfall of over 3 lakh tourists, which will only grow, as Ladakh offers a wide variety of options for tourism.





Snow leopard

Ladakh is contiguous with the Tibetan landscape, which is known as the "Roof of the World." It receives about 320 clear, sunny days annually, making it a favourable destination for investments in renewable energy. As per estimates, it has the potential to generate 35 GW of solar energy and 4 GW from wind energy. Thus, it can contribute to India's concerted push towards green development and adaptation to climate change.

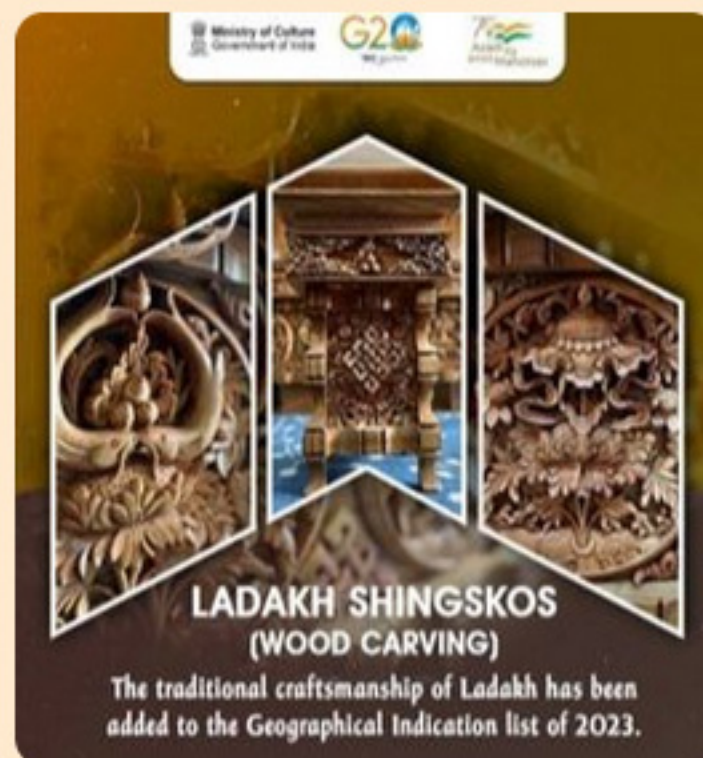
In recent years, after the bifurcation of the erst-while state, energy and connectivity projects have received special attention:

- In November 2021, Minister of Power, New and Renewable energy
- In October 2021, BRO announced five major road infrastructure projects to boost connectivity in a Ladakh.
- Mr. Raj Kumar Singh stated that Ladakh will provide additional 20,000 acres of land to set up a new 10-Gigawatt (GW) energy park.
- In February 2021, an MoU was signed between Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and the UT administration of Ladakh to develop a geothermal field development project with a power potential of 200 MW.
- In January 2021, the central government and the Central Water Commission (CWC) sanctioned eight hydropower projects of 144 MW on the Indus River and its tributaries in Ladakh.

Given the weather conditions and sparse population, the Indian Astronomical Observatory has been set up in Hanle. In March 2023, India's first "Night Sky Sanctuary" was inaugurated, providing a boost to the nascent astrotourism sector. Due to its altitude and location in the rain-shadow region of the Himalayas, the sanctuary will offer the ideal setting for stargazers throughout the year.



Apart from tourism and renewable energy, horticulture is another focus sector in Ladakh. The union territory is the country's largest producer of apricot, constituting nearly 62% of total production. The Raktsey Karpo apricot from Ladakh also has a GI Tag.



Among industries, 95% of MSMEs operate at a household level and are engaged in traditional arts and crafts, preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region. Ladakh is also known to be the producer of the world's finest pashmina wool. In 2022, Shri Tsering Namgyal was awarded the Padma Shri, India's 4<sup>th</sup> highest civilian award, for having been the torchbearer of the traditional Ladakh wood carving for over four decades. In March 2023, Ladakh wood carving received a GI Tag as well.

Given the picturesque locations, Ladakh is a favourite spot for film shootings as well. Bollywood's "3 Idiots" not only had scenes based in Ladakh but also, Aamir Khan's character Funsuk Wangdu was based on Ladakh's noted educationist Sonam Wangchuk.



Mr. Wangchuk runs the Students' Educational & Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) since 1988 and has been experimenting with education reforms. Some of the methods pioneered by his organization are the formation of village education committees, creation of education content relevant to local conditions and in the local language and development of child-centric, activity-based teaching techniques. He also designed the "Ice Stupa" to address water scarcity in Ladakh.

The school itself is a model for eco-friendly, sustainable living. It is largely powered by abundant solar energy. Organic farming is undertaken to ensure supply of vegetables for the residential campus, apart from composting toilets and greywater harvesting.

Under India's G20 Presidency this year, it has been a priority of the government to hold events and meetings in various parts of the country, showcasing India's cultural richness and diversity. Leh, Ladakh hosted the Youth-20 or #Y20 Summit in April 2023, bringing together young changemakers from over 30 countries for over two days. The discussions revolved around future of work, youth in democracy and governance, sustainability, climate change and disaster risk reduction.



## The Month That Was:

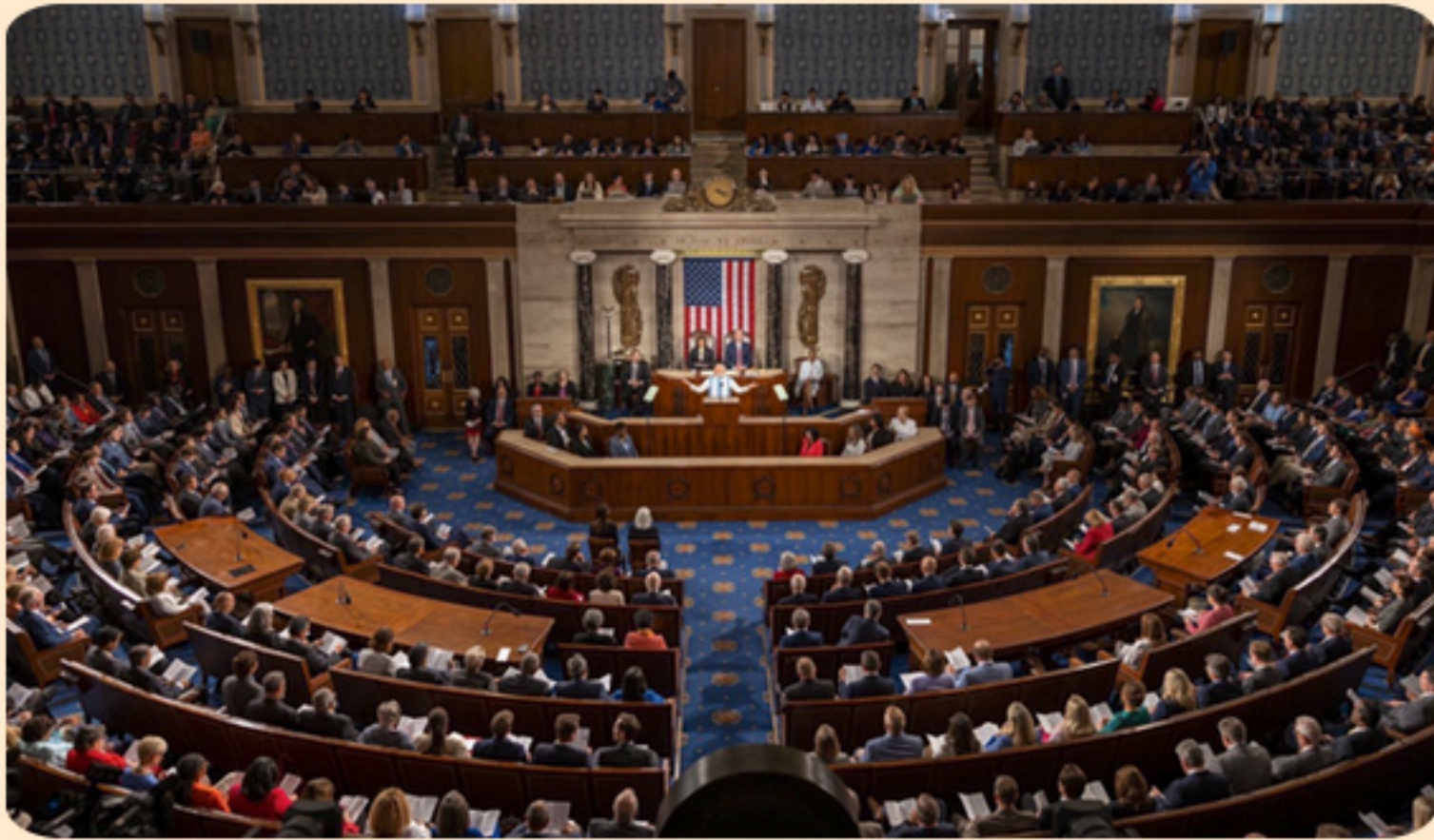
### Prime Minister Modi's State Visits to USA and Egypt



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited USA and Egypt from June 20 - 25, 2023.

At the invitation of Mr. Joseph Biden, President of the USA, and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, PM paid an Official State Visit to the USA. The visit began in New York, where PM led the celebrations of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga at the United Nations Headquarters on June 21. In December 2014, the UN General Assembly had adopted a resolution proclaiming June 21 as the International Day of Yoga.

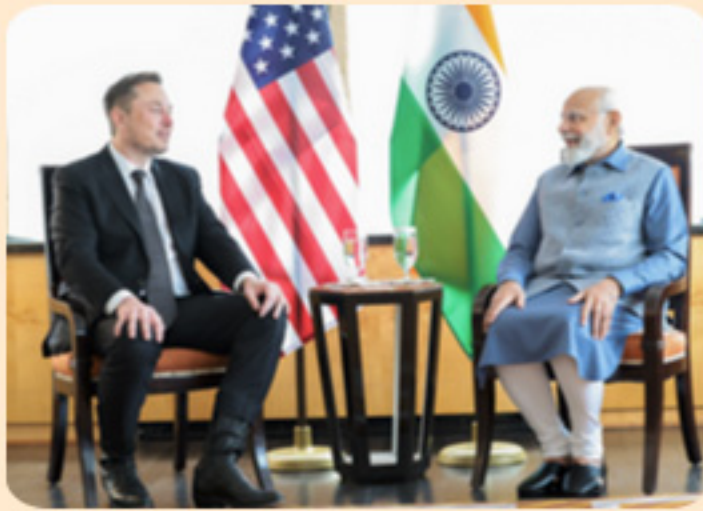
PM then travelled to Washington D.C., where he received a ceremonial welcome at the White House on June 22 and met with President Biden to continue their high-level dialogue. President Biden and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden hosted a State Dinner in honor of PM the same evening.



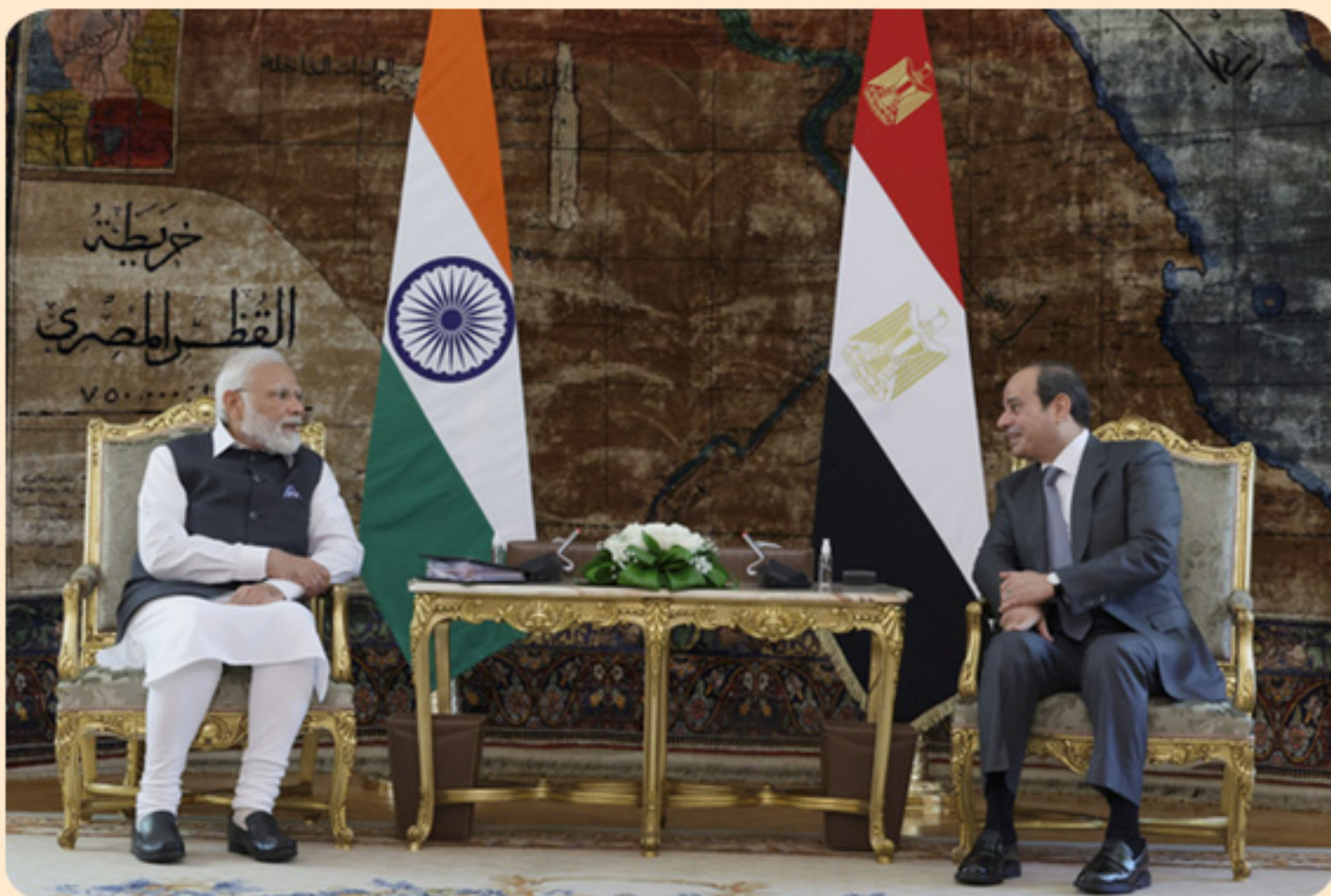
At the invitation of Congressional Leaders, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives Mr. Kevin McCarthy and Senate Majority Leader Mr. Charles Schumer, PM addressed a Joint Sitting of the U.S. Congress on June 22, for a record second time. This makes him only the 4<sup>th</sup> international statesman, after Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela and Benjamin Netanyahu to address the joint session of the US Congress for two or more times.



On June 23, PM was jointly hosted at a luncheon by Ms. Kamala Harris, Vice President, and Mr. Antony Blinken, Secretary of State.



In addition to the official engagements, PM had interactions with leading CEOs, including Tesla's Elon Musk, professionals, and other key stakeholders. He also met with members of the Indian Diaspora.



PM subsequently travelled to Cairo, Egypt on a State Visit from June 24-25, 2023. The visit was at the invitation of Mr. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of Egypt, which he extended to PM in January 2023 when he graced India's Republic Day celebrations as the 'Chief Guest'.



Apart from his engagements with President Sisi, PM interacted with senior dignitaries from the Egyptian Government, prominent Egyptian personalities, as well as the Indian community in Egypt. Relations between India and Egypt are based on ancient trade and economic linkages as well as cultural and deep-rooted people-to-people ties. During the visit, 3 MoUs were signed in the areas of Agriculture, Archaeology & Antiquities and Competition Law.

### **The Month That Was:**

### **9<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga**



PM led the 9th International Day of Yoga celebrations on 21 June 2023, at the iconic North Lawn of the UN HQ in New York City.

The theme for this year is 'Yoga for Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (*The world is one family*).



The event witnessed an overwhelming response from thousands of yoga enthusiasts from over 135 nationalities, setting a Guinness World Record for participation by maximum number of nationalities in a Yoga session. A video message by UN Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres was played as well.

The President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, conveyed warm greetings to all on the occasion of the International Day of Yoga. In her message, the President highlighted Yoga as a significant accomplishment of our civilization and India's invaluable gift to the world. Emphasizing the holistic approach of Yoga that unites the body and mind, she encouraged individuals to embrace Yoga in their daily lives and experience its transformative power in overcoming challenges.



## The Month That Was:

### G20 Development Ministers' Meeting in Varanasi



The G20 Development Ministers' Meeting under the Indian Presidency was held between June 11 - 13 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Union Minister of External Affairs Dr S. Jaishankar chaired the meeting.

PM delivered a special video address at the beginning of the meeting.

The Varanasi Development Ministers' Meeting took place amidst mounting developmental challenges that had been further aggravated by economic slowdown, debt distress, impacts of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, growing poverty and inequality, food and energy insecurity, cost-of-living crisis, global supply-chain disruptions, and geo-political conflicts and tensions.

The meeting was an opportunity to collectively agree on actions for accelerating the achievement of the SDGs and foster synergies between the development, environment, and climate agendas while avoiding costly trade-offs that held back progress for the developing countries.

The meeting followed the Voice of the Global South Summit that was hosted by India in January 2023, and the decisions taken at the Varanasi meeting also contributed to the United Nations SDG Summit which took place in September in New York. It consisted of two main sessions, one on "Multilateralism: Collective Actions for Accelerating Progress towards SDGs" and another on "Green Development: A LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) Approach".

The Development Ministers' Meeting was preceded by the fourth and final Development Working Group (DWG) Meeting, which was held in Delhi from June 6-9.

The DWG, while building on the crucial work done by previous G20 presidencies, carried forward its mandate of enhancing G20's contribution to accelerating progress towards SDGs and strengthening G20's long-term vision in this regard, including by strengthening G20 efforts towards fostering sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economic growth.

Cultural programs, exhibitions, and excursions were also organized to provide the delegates a glimpse into the rich culture and traditions of Varanasi, one of the oldest cities in the world.



## The Month That Was: India - EU Connectivity Conference



The Ministry of External Affairs, the EU Delegation to India, and the Asian Confluence jointly organized the "India – EU Connectivity Conference" in Shillong, Meghalaya on 01 – 02 June 2023. The objective of the conference was to explore connectivity investments and identify concrete projects in India's North Eastern States and with India's neighbours (Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh), for implementation under the India – EU Connectivity Partnership, which was launched during the India – EU leaders Meet in May 2021.

Conference was inaugurated by Shri Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, and Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs (MoS) on 01 June. In his address, MOS stressed the importance placed by the Govt. of India on Connectivity initiatives, both within the country, and as part of India's Development Partnership abroad. MOS further highlighted the tremendous opportunities for India – EU Triangular Development Cooperation in South Asia and the Indo – Pacific.

CM Sangma, in his address emphasized the importance of interstate and cross border connectivity for the North East region as a whole, and for Meghalaya in particular. In that regard, CM referred to India's 'Act East' Policy, within which Meghalaya has an 'Act South' Policy focussing on the need to improve connectivity between Meghalaya and Bangladesh. He suggested a 'Zonal Approach' to connectivity, involving neighbouring states that caters to the needs of each state.

The second day of the Conference saw technical sessions on the themes; Digital Connectivity, Energy Connectivity, Transport Connectivity and Connectivity and Beyond focusing on projects linking the Northeast with India's neighbourhood, as part of the 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First' policies. The sessions saw participation from senior officials of the Govt. of India, the EU Commission, State Government(s) of the North Eastern States of India, North Eastern Council, stakeholders from Nepal, Bangladesh and executives from private sector with presence in the region.

Deliberations in the panel on 'Connectivity & Beyond' focused on the hurdles and bottlenecks faced by these projects, and on ways to ameliorate their impacts. The panel on 'Digital Connectivity' focused on improving the network penetration in the region by deploying infrastructure, and simultaneously building capacity of the various stakeholders to ensure meaningful connectivity. Developing localized off – grid solutions through community participation was stressed as the way forward to promote 'Energy Connectivity' in the region. Experts deliberating on 'Transport Connectivity' appreciated the several ongoing transformative infrastructure developments in road, rail and waterway connections in the region, but suggested there was need for more. Deliberations also focussed on identifying the right projects to source external funding.

Going forward, a study on the existing EU Member States driven projects would be brought out by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). MEA, the EU Delegation and other stakeholders such as RIS would identify suitable projects for joint implementation under the framework of the India-EU Connectivity Partnership. It will be recollected that the first-ever India-EU Trade and Technology Council Ministerial meeting held in Brussels on 16 May 2023 had prioritised - Connectivity Partnership - as one of the important focus areas of cooperation between India and the EU.

## From the Ambassador's Desk:

### Meetings and Engagements in June

As part of the celebration of World Environment Day 2023, Ambassador Santosh Jha administered a pledge towards Mission LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment) to Team India in Brussels. The pledge focused on two key aspects:

- Implementing personal lifestyle changes to safeguard the environment.
- Inspiring and encouraging others to adopt eco-friendly habits.



On 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, the Embassy organized a Mango and Millet Tasting event in the Chancery premises, which was attended by several foreign diplomats, members of the Indian community and guests.

In collaboration with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), the Embassy was delighted to offer a wide range of Indian mango varieties with unique flavor profiles and Geographical Indication (GI) status, indicating their origin from different regions across India. Guests indulged in the richness and diversity of these beloved fruits and had a delightful experience.



Ambassador had a cordial meeting with the Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Global Issues, Ms. Helena König from the EEAS. The discussion revolved around identifying avenues to reinforce cooperation, ensuring effective implementation of decisions made at the inaugural India – EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) meeting, advancing trade negotiations, as well as fostering connectivity and digital partnerships.



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Joint Secretary Sandeep Chakravorty had a highly constructive meeting with Ambassador Jean Cornet d'Elzius, Director for Asia and Oceania, and Ambassador of Belgium in India François Delhaye. The discussion encompassed a comprehensive assessment of the entire spectrum of bilateral relations between India and Belgium, reflecting the commitment to further strengthen and deepen their ties.



In an engaging interaction, Deputy Chief of Mission Debashish Prusty had a productive meeting with Deputy Director-General Signe Ratso of the EU's DG Research & Innovation. The focus was on charting the path for enhanced collaboration in the domains of clean and green technologies. These discussions took place within the framework of the India-EU (TTC).



The 9<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga was organized by the Embassy at the iconic Royal Park, Brussels. Ambassador Santosh Jha presided over the celebrations and addressed the participants. The event witnessed good participation from members of the Indian community and local yoga enthusiasts, despite inclement weather.



The Embassy also observed the International Day of Yoga at the iconic Abbey Neimunster in Luxembourg, in collaboration with the Indian Association Luxembourg. The celebrations were led by Deputy Chief of Mission Debashish Prusty and witnessed good participation from both the Indian diaspora and the local community, engaging in Hatha and Vinyasa Yoga.



Across Belgium, the 9<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga was organized with the support of local entities.

In association with the City of Enghien and Ms. Sigrid Surthal, yoga sessions were held in Enghien.



The Jain Cultural Centre in Antwerp, Belgium, in collaboration with Ms. Reetu Mehta of Vedic Yoga, organized celebrations for #IDY2023, showcasing the harmonious integration of yoga into the community.



On 21 June, yoga enthusiasts gathered by the North Sea at the Port of Antwerp-Bruges in Zeebrugge for a special celebration of the 9th international Day of Yoga, as part of the Global Ocean Ring, infusing the serene practice of yoga with the breathtaking coastal environment.



The spirit of yoga radiated at the IRSA (Institut Royal pour Sourds et Aveugles) during the Brussels Yoga Day celebration. The Embassy participated in this heartwarming event, witnessing children and parents delighting in the practice of yoga.



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