

CSIR Weekly Briefing : Cultural Connect



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Diaspora and Diplomacy: Concluding The Caribbean Mission:

On May 8–9, 2026, External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar concluded his historic nine-day tour of the Caribbean with a final two-day official visit to the twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). This visit provided a fresh impetus to bilateral ties, translating historical kinship into modern, tangible deliverables.

1. Nelson Island: Safeguarding the Girmitya Legacy

On May 9, Dr. Jaishankar, joined by T&T Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, visited the historic Nelson Island, the primary disembarkation site where approximately 143,000 indentured workers (Girmityas) from the Bharatiya subcontinent (predominantly northern Bharat and Bihar) arrived between 1845 and 1917.

To honor their resilience, Dr. Jaishankar launched a Quick Impact Project (QIP) for the upgradation of cultural heritage facilities on the island, fully supported by Bharatiya grant assistance. The project elements include:

- The construction of a dedicated memorial monument.
- The creation of a digital hub containing historical data from the national archives.
- A state-of-the-art digital audio-visual experience for visitors.

On PM Narendra Modi's direct instructions, Bharat is also working to establish a dedicated Girmitya Studies Centre to study this historical legacy. To facilitate this, a landmark Archival Cooperation Agreement was signed between the National Archives of Bharat and Trinidad and Tobago, designed to help descendants trace their ancestral roots and reconnect with their families.

2. Concrete Developmental Manifestations

During his visit, the EAM emphasized that under PM Modi's leadership, the Ministry of External Affairs is focused on taking successful domestic development models and implementing them in partner countries. Key achievements during this leg of the visit included:

- **The Healing Touch of Jaipur Foot:** PM Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Dr. Jaishankar jointly inaugurated the National Prosthetics Centre in Penal. The center utilizes the globally renowned, low-cost *Jaipur Foot* technology, following the successful completion of a fitment camp that benefited 800 limb-loss patients in T&T.
- **Ayurveda Chair:** The two nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up an Bharatiya Chair on Ayurveda at the University of the West Indies, institutionalizing traditional holistic healthcare.
- **Digital Support for Youth:** In the presence of PM Persad-Bissessar, Bharat handed over the first batch of **2,000 laptops** to selected local school children, strengthening educational ties.
- **Agro-Processing Facility:** EAM Jaishankar inaugurated an agricultural processing facility in Couva, equipped with \$1 million worth of machinery gifted by Bharat.

Source: MEA,GOI

<https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/41120>

Civilizational Science: *Shunya to Ananta* at The UN

On May 11, 2026, the Permanent Mission of Bharat to the United Nations opened a major exhibition at the UN Headquarters in New York City titled ‘From Shunya to Ananta (Zero to Infinity) The Bharatiya Civilisation’s Contribution to Mathematics’. Running through May 15, the interactive showcase was formally inaugurated by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar, alongside his wife Kyoko Jaishankar, Ambassador Harish Parvathaneni, and the world-renowned mathematician Manjul Bhargava.

1. Documenting Ancient Knowledge Systems

The exhibition seeks to correct historical biases and highlight the profound, non-Western intellectual traditions that shaped modern science and technology. Key historical contributions documented include:

- The concept of *Shunya (Zero)* as a formal numeral, which Bhargava noted emerged directly from the philosophical and yogic concept of attaining ‘*shunyata*’(absolute emptiness).
- The Decimal Place-Value System, negative numbers, and quadratic equations.
- The first exact infinite series formula for the value of π (*Pi*) and foundational trigonometric functions like sine and cosine.

2. The Technological Continuum: From Sanskrit to AI

Addressing the international assembly of delegates, Dr. Jaishankar explained that mathematics is a ‘*universal language*’ whose global spread has served the collective good. He linked ancient achievements directly to Bharat’s current global leadership in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):

‘This exhibition is a reminder that the very code which is the basis of our current technological age was conceptualized in Bharat centuries ago... Sanskrit poetry utilized structures that were early iterations of binary code, which now run through the world’s digital infrastructure, algorithms, and artificial intelligence.’

The exhibition also foregrounded how mathematics in the Bharatiya tradition was never viewed merely as a technical discipline, but as an organic extension of philosophy, cosmology, aesthetics and spiritual inquiry. According to the DD News-linked coverage and associated remarks made during the exhibition: “The exhibition emphasised that the history of scientific progress has often been viewed through a ‘narrow geographical and historical lens,’ and therefore sought to create space for ‘a broader cultural rebalancing’ by recognising diverse civilisational narratives.”

Dr. S. Jaishankar described mathematics as a 'universal language' whose spread has continuously served the 'global good,' while simultaneously underlining that every 'supply chain of ideas has a starting point, often India.'

Source: DD News

<https://ddnews.gov.in/en/tag/united-nations/>

Emphasis on people to people Linkages at BRICS Summit

On May 14–15, 2026, New Delhi became the epicenter of global diplomacy as Dr. S. Jaishankar chaired the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting at Bharat Mandapam. Held under Bharat's 2026 Chairship theme, 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability', the high-level meeting brought together members and partner countries, including foreign ministers from Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE.

Cultural Integration: 'The People-to-People' Pillar

The delegates successfully advanced the 'Cultural and People-to-People Relations' pillar. On the evening of May 14, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar hosted a formal dinner for the visiting ministers, showcasing a curated performance of Bharat's classical arts and culinary heritage.

Further reinforcing the cultural and civilizational dimension of BRICS cooperation, the BRICS Women's Business Alliance (WBA) Creative Industries Working Group emphasized the need to 'foster collaboration, policy dialogue, and economic growth across the creative and cultural sectors.' The initiative specifically seeks to deepen intra-BRICS cooperation in 'art, films, music, advertising market, gaming, fashion, design and etc.' thereby creating a wider framework for cultural exchange and creative partnerships among member countries.

The Working Group also highlighted that leaders from 'film, technology, design, gaming, academia, and entertainment' now represent Bharat on this international platform, reflecting Bharat's 'rapidly expanding creative economy and its growing influence on the global cultural stage.'

In addition, the BRICS WBA underscored that the alliance promotes 'partnerships to increase women's representation and provide them with equal opportunities in the creative industries sector.' The broader objective remains the strengthening of 'cross-border partnerships,' promotion of 'skills development,' and encouragement of 'innovation in women-owned businesses' within the cultural and creative ecosystem of BRICS nations.

The cultural pillar was further complemented by proposed and ongoing collaborative initiatives such as the 'BRICS Creatives Festival,' 'BRICS Africa Film City,' 'FICCI FRAMES,' and the 'BRICS Kids Channel,' all aimed at expanding people-to-people engagement through shared cultural productions, media cooperation, and creative exchanges.

Source: BRICS WOMEN, MEA

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/education-beyond-borders-and-barriers/articleshow/130965419.cms>

Commemoration, Classics, and Literary Legacies

1. The 165th Rabindra Jayanti (May 9, 2026)

The 165th Rabindra Jayanti celebrations in 2026 reflected Rabindranath Tagore's continuing role as a cultural and civilisational symbol of Bharat's literary, artistic and educational heritage. The observances at Santiniketan particularly embodied Tagore's vision of integrating knowledge, creativity and nature within a holistic cultural framework.

The dawn Baitalik processions at Visva-Bharati University carried forward the traditional Santiniketan practice established by Tagore himself, where music and collective artistic expression became instruments of cultural awakening. The performances of Chitrangada and Chandalika highlighted the enduring relevance of Tagore's dance-drama tradition in Bharatiya cultural life, blending literature, music and philosophical reflection.

The exhibition at the Uttarayan Complex displaying original paintings and handwritten manuscripts symbolised the preservation of Tagore's multidimensional legacy as a poet, painter, philosopher and educationist. The celebrations collectively reinforced Santiniketan's identity as a living centre of Rabindrik culture rooted in harmony between humanity, art and the natural world.

International commemorations such as the British Council's 'Echoes of Harmony' programme also reflected the continuing global resonance of Tagore's literary and cultural connections with the United Kingdom through music, storytelling and intellectual exchange. These celebrations reaffirmed Tagore's enduring contribution to cross-cultural dialogue and universal humanism.

Source: Sonajhuri Athithi Nibas

<https://sonajhuriatithinibas.com/rabindra-jayanti-2026-date/>

ICCR Scholarship Portal

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) reached a critical operational milestone during this week. May 15, 2026, marked the strict deadline for Bharatiya Missions abroad to allocate scholarship slots and generate formal offer letters for international candidates under schemes like the Atal Bihari Vajpayee General Scholarship Scheme. ICCR data from this week highlights Bharat's strategic focus on neighbourhood education and human capital development in conflict-affected regions :

- **The Neighborhood First Focus:** Bangladesh remains the single largest beneficiary country, with **1,619 students** currently studying in Bharat, supported by 500 exclusive slots under the *Suborno Jayanti Scholarship Scheme*.
- **Digital Afghan Outreach:** Following the shift to a fully digital platform for Afghan students, women outnumbered men for the first time in the program's history (511 women enrolled against 489 men). 'The data suggests India preserved its educational outreach to Afghanistan by digitising it.'

The report further noted that the transition fundamentally altered the nature of

engagement: 'the nature of access changed fundamentally from students physically studying in Indian universities to remote learning-based engagement.' Highlighting the humanitarian and cultural significance of the outreach, the report observed: 'For the first time, women outnumbered men under the programme, with 511 women enrolled against 489 men in 2025-26.' The Times of India also emphasized the wider context of educational deprivation in Afghanistan, noting: 'Afghanistan is the only country in the world where women are effectively shut out of higher education.'

Source: Times of India

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/education-beyond-borders-and-barriers/articleshow/130965419.cms>

Global Cultural Presence in Bharat

Japan: Cinema, Language, and the Search for Identity

The Japan Foundation India positioned Japanese cultural diplomacy in Bharat around introspection, language learning, and contemporary storytelling. Describing the ongoing JFF Theater digital showcase, the Foundation noted that the season is 'centered around the profound concept of 'The Journey of the Self.'" It further explained that 'each film explores the intricate layers of human identity, questioning how well we truly know those around us and ourselves.' The Foundation added that the lineup includes 'stories of personal growth and navigating hidden secrets to the pursuit of one's authentic path in life.' The Foundation expanded its linguistic outreach through the IRODORI teachers' initiative in Kerala. According to the official announcement, the programme would allow participants to 'explore effective ways to teach speaking skills using IRODORI,' while emphasizing a 'Can-do-based approach.' The Foundation stated that the training is designed to help teachers 'acquire practical teaching skills to efficiently teach speaking and listening activities using IRODORI textbooks.'

United Kingdom: Creative Dialogue and Cultural Exchange

The British Council India framed Indo-UK artistic engagement as a collaborative and transnational cultural process. In describing Stray Birds: Journey Together, the Council stated that the exhibition 'features a unique artistic dialogue between Indrapramit Roy and Mark Cazalet.' It further observed that the exhibition 'explores themes of movement, memory, and the 'fragment' of lived experience.' According to the Council, the works 'offer a meditative space where these two distinct journeys converge through a shared India-UK creative inquiry.'

On the educational-cultural front, the Council emphasized that Study UK Creative Connections 2026 focuses on 'creative collaboration, cross-cultural exchange, and the impact of UK education on alumni careers.' The platform was described as one that enables alumni 'to present their work, share their journeys, and inspire prospective students while

strengthening UK–India cultural ties.' The British Council further underlined that its broader arts initiatives aim at 'building creative and collaborative global communities that inspire innovation, inclusion, and enterprise.'

France: Francophone Networks and Intellectual Culture

The Alliance Française Chandigarh presented the Défi Inter-Alliances 2026 as 'a vibrant celebration of French culture and the global Francophone community.' The institution highlighted that the competition brings together 'Alliances Françaises from across the world' through an 'exciting general knowledge quiz in French.' The official description stressed that the challenge spans 'history, geography, music, cinema, sport, literature,' thereby reinforcing Francophone culture as an interconnected civilizational sphere rather than merely a language-learning exercise. The screenings of Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* and the associated discussions on French social history also reflected the continued use of cinema as an instrument of intellectual-cultural engagement between France and Bharat. Through film, debate, and pedagogy, the Alliance Française network continued to deepen public engagement with French society, literature, and critical traditions.

Italy: Design Heritage and Academic Internationalization

The Italian Cultural Institute New Delhi continued promoting Italian aesthetic traditions and educational cooperation through design exhibitions and higher education partnerships. The Icons of Design exhibition highlighted award-winning historic Italian design pieces, foregrounding Italy's legacy in industrial creativity and visual culture.

The Institute's announcement on Luiss Business School scholarships emphasized managerial education within a global cultural framework. According to the official note, the programme seeks to help students 'develop the skills and awareness necessary to succeed in the global economy.' It further stated that the initiative is aimed at nurturing the 'capacity to drive change' and understand 'social issues.'

Source: Italian culture institute New Delhi, Alliance francaise Chandigarh , British council , Japan foundation New Delhi

<https://nd.jpf.go.jp/events/event/a-brand-new-selection-of-japanese-cinema-has-arrived-at-jff-theater-running-from-may-7-to-august-5-2026/>

<https://www.britishcouncil.in/events>

<https://chandigarh.afindia.org/events/defi-inter-alliances-2026/>

<https://iicnewdelhi.esteri.it/en/>

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