

# CSIR Weekly Briefing : Cultural Connect



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## **Global Celebrations of Buddha Purnima**

On May 1, 2026, with the nationwide and international celebration of the 2570th Buddha Purnima. Bharat as the cradle of Buddhism, utilized this 'triple anniversary' marking the birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana of Siddhartha Gautama to reaffirm its role as a spiritual center for the Asian continent and the wider world. The primary focal point for domestic celebration and outreach was Buddhavanam at Nagarjuna Sagar in Telangana. The 2026 celebrations were significant for their ritualistic grandeur for the launch of a 'Mobile Museum on Wheels'. The museum aims to showcase archaeological discoveries and teachings, thereby strengthening the regional Buddhist tourism circuit and encouraging family-based spiritual tourism.

In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the 'Buddhist Circuit' saw an unprecedented influx of international pilgrims and scholars. Bhartiya Railways supported this outreach by operating special 'Buddha Purnima Express' trains (14223/14224), which facilitate access to the holy sites of Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar. The celebration at Nalanda University further bridged the gap between spirituality and the performing arts. A curated Kathak performance titled 'I Am Bihar,' supported by ICCR Patna, was held at the Sushma Swaraj Auditorium, integrating classical Bhartiya dance with the 'Nalanda Spirit' of knowledge and inquiry.

Source: Hindustan Times <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/festivals/buddha-purnima-2026-date-buddha-purnima-kab-hai-gautama-buddha-2588th-birth-anniversary-101777609503276.html?hl=en-IN>

## **EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar's Mission to Jamaica and Suriname**

Between May 2 and May 7, 2026, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar embarked on a historic nine-day tour of the Caribbean, with the first leg focusing on Jamaica and Suriname. This tour was the first of its kind for an Bharat's External Affairs Minister and was specifically designed to strengthen strategic and cultural ties with the CARICOM nations.

### **Jamaica: The 181-Year 'Living Bridge'**

In Jamaica, from May 2 to May 4, the discourse was centered on the 181st anniversary of the arrival of Bhartiya indentured laborers. Dr. Jaishankar's visit to the Bhartiya Arrival Memorial at Old Harbour served as a poignant reminder of the 'Girmitya' legacy. The Minister noted that between 1845 and 1917, over 36,000 Bhartiyas arrived in Jamaica aboard ships like the *Blundell Hunter*, bringing with them traditions that have now become an integral part of Jamaica's social, cultural, and economic fabric.

Culturally Bharat pledged a contribution of JMD 2 million for the celebration of Bharat Arrival Day on May 10, 2026 and inaugurated an electronic scoreboard at Sabina Park a gift that leverages the shared passion for cricket as a diplomatic tool.

Dr. Jaishankar's public conversation at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, titled 'A World in Transition,' provided the intellectual framework for this outreach. He stated that the current global order is experiencing '80 years of pent-up change,' where the interests of the Global South must be championed through a collective voice. The MEA further underlined that Dr. Jaishankar's address at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, reflected Bharat's commitment to strengthening intellectual, educational, and people-to-people exchanges with the Caribbean region.

### **Suriname: 50 Years of Diplomatic Resonance**

Following Jamaica, the Minister traveled to Suriname (May 6–7), where Bharat and Suriname are marking 50 years of formal diplomatic relations. The visit highlighted the 'Girmitiya' heritage, which constitutes over 27 percent of Suriname's population. The Ministry emphasized the deep civilizational bonds arising from the shared Girmitiya heritage. Dr. Jaishankar paid tributes at the Baba and Mai monument and the Mahatma Gandhi statue, recognizing the resilience and historical journey of the Bhartiya-origin community in Suriname. MEA also highlighted EAM's visit to the Lallarookh Museum, described as the custodian of the cultural heritage of the Hindustani community, as well as the inauguration of a week-long National Archives exhibition showcasing the history of Bhartiya migration to Suriname. During the event, Dr. Jaishankar acknowledged the 'courage and resilience of Girmitiyas who continue to inspire generations and strengthen the bonds of friendships.'

Source: MEA, GOI

<https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/41099/Remarks+by+EAM+Dr+S+Jaishankar+at+the+Old+Harbour+Indian+Memorial+Site+Jamaica+May+03+2026&hl=en-IN>

## **Enhanced Partnership with Vietnam**

The state visit of Vietnamese President To Lam to Bharat (May 5–7, 2026) marked a transformative moment in Bharat's 'Act East' policy. The primary outcome was the elevation of bilateral relations to an 'Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' in the spirit of strategic convergence and substantive cooperation.

### **cultural relations and Institutional Synergy**

While defense and technology (including discussions on the BrahMos missile system and rare earth elements) were central, the visit produced a robust set of cultural MoUs. The leaders adopted the Vietnam-Bharat Cultural Cooperation Programme for 2026–2030, which focuses on:

- **Heritage Conservation:** Bharat will continue its conservation work at the My Son UNESCO World Heritage Site and has agreed to digitize the manuscripts of the Champa civilization to preserve a shared heritage currently threatened by time and environmental factors.

- **Academic Collaboration:** The establishment of two new ICCR chairs of Bhart Studies in Vietnamese universities specifically at the University of Danang and VNU Ho Chi Minh City aims to foster a deeper academic understanding of Bhartiya philosophy and modern policy.
- **Institutional Linkages:** An MoU between Nalanda University and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics will facilitate scholarly exchanges and joint research into Buddhist and political philosophy.

## **The 10th Anniversary and the ‘Nalanda Spirit’**

The year 2026 marks the 10th anniversary of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and both nations agreed to celebrate this milestone with grand cultural events. Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that over 15 million people in Vietnam had visited the Buddhist relics sent from Bharat in 2025, a statistic that underscores the profound spiritual bond between the two populations. The Prime Minister’s invitation for Vietnamese pilgrims to visit the Buddhist Circuit in Bharat serves to convert this spiritual interest into economic value through high-end cultural tourism. During the bilateral discussions, both sides emphasized strengthening tourism, cultural exchanges, and educational cooperation alongside strategic and economic engagement. The agreements exchanged during the visit included cooperation in tourism and culture, reflecting the growing role of cultural outreach and civilizational diplomacy within the broader Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership framework.

Source: New Delhi Times

<https://www.newdelhitimes.com/india-vietnam-issue-joint-statement-on-enhanced-comprehensive-strategic-partnership/?hl=en-IN>

## **Institutional Outreach: The Bhartiya Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)**

### ● **Scholarship Diplomacy and Global Enrollment**

The A2A Scholarship Portal (Admissions to Alumni) was fully operational during this week, processing applications for the 2026–27 academic year. Bharat’s scholarship program is a strategic investment in 'educational cultural relations,' creating a global network of alumni who have lived and studied in Bharat.

Bangladesh has emerged as the single largest beneficiary, with 1,619 students currently studying in Bharat under various schemes, including the Suborno Jayanti Scholarship.

A notable development in 2026 is the sharp rise in female participation from Afghanistan. Following the move to fully digital education for Afghan students, female enrolment jumped to 511 in the 2025–26 cycle, outnumbering men for the first time. This initiative allows Bharat to bypass physical mobility restrictions and continue supporting the education of women in a restrictive environment, thereby projecting values of equality and empowerment.

## ● **Foundation Day Celebrations**

Though the actual anniversary of the ICCR is April 9, commemorative events continued into May at various Bhartiya missions. In Kuala Lumpur, the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Bhartiya Cultural Centre (NSCBICC) celebrated its 15th anniversary alongside the ICCR's foundation day. The program included rhythmic yoga demonstrations and classical dance performances like Bharatanatyam and Kathak, performed by local Malaysian students. In Birmingham, the Consulate General hosted an evening featuring Sattriya, Bihu, and Garba, showcasing the diversity of Bharat's folk and classical traditions to a British audience. The ICCR scholarship framework particularly emphasizes exposure to Bharat's linguistic, artistic, and regional diversity. DD News reporting on the Dhaka scholars' interaction noted that students selected under the programme would 'experience the diversity of Bharat's various regions, their culture and tradition,' thereby positioning higher education as a vehicle of cultural diplomacy rather than only professional advancement. Beyond the initiatives already mentioned, the same ICCR-linked cultural ecosystem during May 2026 also reflected a wider emphasis on intercultural dialogue, artistic collaboration, and immersive language engagement. The Bhartiya Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) continued highlighting international cultural exchange as a central pillar of cultural diplomacy through collaborations with foreign cultural institutions functioning in Bharat. ICCR's broader framework emphasized 'cultural dialogue,' 'artistic exchanges,' and exposure to 'global traditions,' reinforcing the role of foreign cultural centres as spaces of sustained people-to-people interaction rather than only academic engagement.

Source: ICCR <https://iccr.gov.in/?hl=en-IN>

## **Global Cultural Presence in India**

### ● **Japan: 'The Journey of the Self' and Language Pedagogy**

The Japan Foundation New Delhi (JFND) launched a brand-new selection of Japanese cinema at the JFF Theater on May 7, 2026. The theme, 'The Journey of the Self,' invites Bhartiya viewers to explore human identity and universal emotions through free streaming of contemporary Japanese films. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to cultivate 'empathy, trust, and friendship' through culture.

In addition to cinema, the JFND continued its focus on language and professional training:

- **JF Koza:** The Foundation's flagship Japanese language course, which uses the 'Marugoto' textbook to prioritize real-world communication over rote grammar.
- **Cultural Rentals:** The JFND maintains a service for renting traditional Japanese items, including Yukata, Shogi, and Igo, to educational institutions and NGOs in Bharat, thereby embedding Japanese traditions in the Bhartiya educational ecosystem.

**Source:** 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/?hl=en-IN>

## **France: Cinematic Rendezvous and Linguistic Quizzes**

The Alliance Française de Bombay continued its 'Rendezvous with French Cinema' in early May, screening *Le Mohican* (2024), a film about a Corsican shepherd's resistance against modernization. These screenings are followed by discussions in English led by professors, aiming to connect French storytelling with Bharat's academic perspectives.

Concurrently, the Alliance Française network launched the 6th edition of the 'Défi Inter-alliances 2026,' a global quiz competition. Students from various chapters, including Chandigarh, participated in local selections on May 8, testing their knowledge of French history, geography, and literature. The competition incentivizes linguistic excellence by offering top performers a trip to Brussels, thereby strengthening the link between Bharat's youth and the global Francophone community.

Source: Afi India

<https://bombay.afindia.org/events/rendezvous-with-french-cinema-may-2026/?hl=en-IN>

## **The United Kingdom: Reading Ambassadors and Culture Fridays**

The British Council Bhart launched several initiatives in the first week of May targeting young learners and library members. The 'Reading Ambassador Programme 2026' (beginning May 5) invites members aged 14–28 to lead reading activities and build community skills, as part of the UK's National Year of Reading. Additionally, 'Culture Fridays' in Delhi and Kolkata provide free weekly events, ranging from film screenings to book club discussions such as a session on Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* designed to explore the historical and cultural connections between the UK and Bharat.

Source: British Council

<https://www.britishcouncil.in/events?hl=en-IN>

## **The Bhartiya Ocean Dialogue and Maritime Heritage**

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) recently hosted the 10th edition of the Bhartiya Ocean Dialogue (IOD) in New Delhi on May 7–8 under the theme 'Bhartiya Ocean Region in a Transforming World.' The Dialogue, a flagship Track 1.5 initiative of the Bhartiya Ocean Rim Association (IORA), brought together policymakers, scholars, diplomats, and strategic experts from 23 member nations to deliberate on maritime security, blue economy cooperation, climate resilience, and regional connectivity. Bhart, which currently chairs IORA for the 2025–27 term, used the platform to reiterate its MAHASAGAR vision — 'Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions.'

Beyond strategic and maritime concerns, the Dialogue also underscored the importance of cultural outreach and civilizational diplomacy in strengthening regional cooperation. Analysts highlighted the relevance of the ancient 'Mandala model,' rooted in Bharat's historical worldview, which emphasizes interconnectedness, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect among neighbouring regions. In this context, Bhart's Buddhist heritage emerged as a significant soft-power instrument for engagement with Bhartiya

Ocean countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Mauritius, all of which share deep historical links with Buddhist philosophy and maritime cultural exchanges.

The discussions stressed that Buddhism's teachings of non-violence, compassion, dialogue, and harmony can serve as guiding principles for contemporary diplomacy in the Bhartiya Ocean Region. Bhart's cultural outreach through restoration of Buddhist sites, promotion of pilgrimage circuits, academic exchanges, and people-to-people connectivity was seen as an effective way to deepen trust among IORA members. By integrating maritime cooperation with shared civilizational values, Bhart seeks to position itself not merely as a strategic power, but also as a cultural bridge connecting diverse societies of the Bhartiya Ocean. This approach reflects a broader vision where heritage diplomacy complements geopolitical engagement to foster regional stability, inclusiveness, and long-term cooperation

Source: MEA, GOI

[https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl%2F39510%2F10th\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_Dialogue\\_May\\_0708\\_2026=&utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl%2F39510%2F10th_Indian_Ocean_Dialogue_May_0708_2026=&utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## **Heritage Management**

The effectiveness of Bharat's international cultural outreach is fundamentally tied to the management of its domestic heritage sites. In May 2026, a Parliamentary Standing Committee recommended a 'comprehensive review' of maintenance standards and visitor facilities at all UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Bharat. The Ministry of Tourism's heritage-oriented framework further underlined that the development of cultural destinations must focus on 'improving the tourist experience at heritage sites, monuments and tourist sites' while simultaneously promoting the 'cultural and heritage value of the country.' The Ministry also emphasized the need to create 'awareness about the heritage sites/tourist sites in the country' through sustainable tourism infrastructure and long-term maintenance mechanisms. The Ministry additionally highlighted that heritage conservation should contribute to 'employment opportunities and support livelihoods of local communities at the heritage and tourist sites,' linking cultural preservation with community participation and cultural continuity. Within its broader tourism strategy, the Ministry of Tourism identified 'Marketing Promotion & International Cooperation,' 'Strategy & Product Development,' and 'Research & Analytics' as key institutional pillars supporting Bharat's cultural tourism outreach and heritage presentation efforts.

## **The Five-Year Strategy and Utilization Data**

The committee urged the Ministry of Culture to prepare a 'five-year UNESCO nomination strategy,' aiming for at least 10 potential new nominations. Notable current nominations include the 'Living Root Bridges of Meghalaya' for the 2026–27 cycle and the 'Ancient Buddhist Site, Sarnath' for 2025–26. Financial data revealed that while the Archaeological Survey of Bhart (ASI) had maintained utilization rates above 99 percent in previous years, the rate for 2025–26 stood at 67.17 percent by November 2025, prompting calls for a time-bound revamp plan to ensure global standards are met.

Source: Ministry of Tourism , GOI

[https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-05/Adopt%20A%20Heritage%20Project%20Guidelines.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-05/Adopt%20A%20Heritage%20Project%20Guidelines.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## **Festivals of Bharat abroad**

On 1 May 2026, the Ministry of Culture reiterated through its official programme guidelines that 'Festivals of Bharat Abroad' were being organized to strengthen bilateral cultural contacts and project Bharat's cultural image internationally. According to the Ministry, these festivals formed an important part of Bharat's cultural diplomacy initiatives and were intended 'to promote Bhartiya culture abroad,' 'strengthen bonds of foreign countries with Bharat,' and 'project Bharat's cultural image abroad.' The Ministry stated that these programmes were designed to create long-term cultural engagement with partner countries through the promotion of Bhartiya heritage, traditions, arts, and civilizational values. The official guidelines stated that the Festivals of Bharat abroad were organized in multiple cities and venues across host countries and included a wide range of cultural activities showcasing Bhartiya performing arts and traditional knowledge systems. The Ministry specified that the programmes included dance performances covering 'classical and traditional, modern experimental/contemporary, folk, fusion etc.,' music performances including 'classical, semi-classical, light, modern carnatic etc.,' instrumental music concerts, theatre presentations, folk arts, puppetry, exhibitions, literary festivals, food festivals, film festivals, yoga programmes, textile exhibitions, and fashion shows. The documents noted that the festivals aimed to present 'the best of Bhartiya talent in performing arts such as dance, music, folk arts, theater, puppetry, exhibitions etc.' to international audiences. The Ministry further stated that these initiatives were intended to 'have a lasting impact on the people of the host country' and function as 'tools of cultural diplomacy that project the cultural outreach of Bharat.' The guidelines explained that the programmes also aimed to strengthen people-to-people contacts and support sectors including 'tourism, health, education, commerce etc.' through cultural engagement. Bhartiya Missions abroad were instructed to organize culturally diverse programmes that would 'broad base the projection of Bhartiya culture' and increase awareness about Bharat's heritage and traditions among partner countries.

Source : Ministry of Culture, GOI

[https://culture.gov.in/offering/international-cultural-relations?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://culture.gov.in/offering/international-cultural-relations?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

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