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S. Jaishankar: Diplomat, Author, and External Affairs Minister

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S. Jaishankar: Diplomat, Author, and External Affairs Minister

He was India’s longest-serving envoy in Beijing. Later he became its top diplomat. S. Jaishankar has spent fifty years in the foreign service. He has held many hard posts abroad.



S. Jaishankar at the EU-Indo-Pacific Forum, Stockholm, May 2023. Photo by Michael Gruber, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

What happened, in order?

What happened in 1955?

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar is born on **9 January 1955**, in New Delhi.

What happened in 1977?

He joins the Indian Foreign Service. His career will rise over four decades.

What happened in 2009-2013?

He serves as India's **Ambassador to China**. It is his longest single posting.

What happened in 2015-2018?

He rises to become **Foreign Secretary**. This is India's top career diplomat.

30 May 2019: External Affairs Minister

He is sworn in as India's Minister of External Affairs. He moves straight from the civil service into a Cabinet post.

This is unusual. Most ministers come from politics, not from the diplomatic service.

What happened in 2024?

He publishes "**Why Bharat Matters**." It is his second book on India's foreign policy and global strategy.

> **Quick check 1.** Jaishankar was born in New Delhi in 1955. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What are the key basics?

Born in New Delhi

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar was born on 9 January 1955, in New Delhi.

Chemistry First, Then International Relations

He studied Chemistry at St. Stephen's College, Delhi. Then he earned an MA, MPhil and PhD in International Relations at JNU.

From Foreign Service to Foreign Secretary

He joined the Indian Foreign Service in **1977**. Over four decades he rose to be Foreign Secretary, from 2015 to 2018.

This is the career route. A diplomat joins by exam and then moves up through postings abroad and at home.

External Affairs Minister Since 2019

He has been India's Minister of External Affairs since **30 May 2019**.

Two Books on Foreign Policy

He wrote "**The India Way**: Strategies for an Uncertain World" (2020). He also wrote "Why Bharat Matters" (2024). Both books are about India's foreign policy.

Reading them is not needed for the exam. You only need to know the titles, the years and the author.

> **Quick check 2.** Jaishankar was India's Ambassador to China from 2009 to 2013. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What more should you know?

Early Postings

He served in Moscow (1979-1981), Washington D.C. (1985-1988) and Sri Lanka (1988-1990). In Sri Lanka he was political adviser to the Indian Peacekeeping Force.

Early postings like these build a diplomat's skills. They also explain how he reached the top posts later.

Ambassador to China

He was India's Ambassador to China from 2009 to 2013. It was his longest single posting. See IntlRel0041.

Ambassador to the US

He then served as India's Ambassador to the United States, from 2013 to 2015.

The US is another key partner, so this post is also one of the most important in Indian diplomacy.

A Role in the Nuclear Deal

He was Joint Secretary for the Americas from 2004 to 2007. He helped negotiate the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement. See SciTech0028.

The Padma Shri

He received the Padma Shri in 2019. It is India's fourth-highest civilian honour.

The Padma awards are given by the Government of India. Do not confuse the Padma Shri with the Bharat Ratna, which is the highest.

> **Quick check 3.** Foreign Secretary and External Affairs Minister are the same post. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How has UPSC tested this?

Who Wrote Both Books

UPSC CSP 2024, Q86 → asked who wrote both "The India Way" and "Why Bharat Matters." The answer is Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The other options were Shashi Tharoor, Bhupender Yadav and Nalin Mehta. Each is known for other books.

So a wrong option can look familiar. Match the book titles to the author, not to a famous name.

Foreign Secretary Isn't External Affairs Minister

Do not mix up his two top roles. The Foreign Secretary (2015-2018) is India's top career diplomat. The External Affairs Minister (since 2019) is the political head of the same ministry, at Cabinet level.

One is a civil servant who advises. The other is an elected leader who decides. Exam options often swap the two. See Polity0145.

> **Quick check 4.** Jaishankar left government service in 2018 to join Tata Sons. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What goes deeper?

A Brief Corporate Interlude

He retired as Foreign Secretary. Then he worked briefly at Tata Sons, as President of Global Corporate Affairs, from 2018 to 2019. After that he joined the government as a minister.

An Unusual Entry Into Government

Jaishankar became a Rajya Sabha MP and Cabinet Minister without serving in the Lok Sabha first. That is an unusual route to a top post.

The Longest-Serving in the Role

He is the longest-serving minister to hold External Affairs on its own, with no other ministry added. See IntlRel0060 for a comparison with India's first Foreign Secretary.

A Recurring Exam Pattern

UPSC often asks about recent Indian authors and their books. This is likelier when the author is a serving public figure. Both of Jaishankar's books fit.

> **Quick check 5.** Jaishankar wrote The India Way and Why Bharat Matters. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What is new?

A Two-Day Visit to Russia

On 23-24 August 2026, Jaishankar made an official two-day visit to Russia. He co-chaired the 27th Session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission. It deals with trade, economic, science, technology and cultural ties. See IntlRel0073. Source: Ministry of External Affairs

Talks With Lavrov, a Call on Putin

He held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey **Lavrov** on regional and global issues. He also met Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin.

> **Quick check 6.** In August 2026 Jaishankar visited Russia. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Ready to practise?

Practice MCQs

1. In which year was S. Jaishankar born?

A. 1960

B. 1955

C. 1965

D. 1950

See answer ↓

2. Which country did Jaishankar serve in as Ambassador from 2009 to 2013?

A. Russia

B. Singapore

C. China

D. Japan

See answer ↓

3. Which post did Jaishankar hold from 2015 to 2018?

A. External Affairs Minister

B. Cabinet Secretary

C. Foreign Secretary

D. National Security Adviser

See answer ↓

4. Which company did Jaishankar join in 2018 after retiring as Foreign Secretary?

A. Adani Group

B. Reliance Industries

C. Infosys

D. Tata Sons

See answer ↓

5. Which of these books was written by S. Jaishankar?

A. The Argumentative Indian

B. Why Bharat Matters

C. India Unbound

D. India After Gandhi

See answer ↓

6. In August 2026, which country did Jaishankar visit for talks with Foreign Minister Lavrov?

A. Japan

B. China

C. Russia

D. Iran

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.**
   Subrahmanyam Jaishankar was born on 9 January 1955 in New Delhi.
   Sources: Britannica · Hindusthan Samachar.
   ↑ Q1
2. **C.**
   He was India's Ambassador to China from 2009 to 2013, then to the US.
   Sources: Ministry of External Affairs · Indian Express.
   ↑ Q2
3. **C.**
   He was Foreign Secretary in 2015–18. He became External Affairs Minister only in 2019.
   Sources: Ministry of External Affairs · Indian Express.
   ↑ Q3
4. **D.**
   He joined Tata Sons as President, Global Corporate Affairs, in 2018.
   Sources: Tata Group · Tribune.
   ↑ Q4
5. **B.**
   He wrote The India Way (2020) and Why Bharat Matters (2024).
   Sources: New Indian Express · SAGE Journals.
   ↑ Q5
6. **C.**
   He visited Russia on 23–24 August 2026 and also called on President Putin.
   Sources: Ministry of External Affairs · ABP Live.
   ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** He later joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1977. ↑ 1
2. **True.** He then served as Ambassador to the United States. ↑ 2
3. **False.** The Foreign Secretary is the top civil servant. The External Affairs Minister is a political post. ↑ 3
4. **True.** He returned as External Affairs Minister in 2019. ↑ 4

5. **True.** They came out in 2020 and 2024. ↑ 5
6. **True.** He held talks with Lavrov and called on President Putin. ↑ 6

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