



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

This publication is a monthly analytical survey of developments and policy trends that impact India's interests and define its challenges across the extended Indo-Pacific maritime space, which has become the primary theatre of global geopolitical contestation. It is authored by Cmde. Lalit Kapur (Retd.), DPG Senior Fellow for Maritime Strategy, assisted by Ms. Divya Rai, based on open source reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to the author at lalit@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

Cover Images:

Closing ceremony of Exercise MILAN 2026 on board INS Vikrant at Visakhapatnam, February 25, 2026. Source: Indian Navy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets French President Emmanuel Macron at the Lok Bhavan, Mumbai, on February 17, 2026. Source: PIB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim at Kuala Lumpur on February 08, 2026. Source: PIB

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

February 2026

Abstract

The Indian Navy hosted three major international events in and off Visakhapatnam: The International Review of the Fleet by the President on February 18, Exercise MILAN 2026 from February 19-25, and the 9th IONS Conclave of Chiefs on February 20. 19 warships from 18 countries participated in the Fleet Review, 74 countries participated in Exercise MILAN with 18 warships and three maritime patrol aircraft, and Chiefs of Navies and Heads of Maritime Security Agencies from 33 countries participated in the Conclave of Chiefs. The three events were intended to strengthen maritime partnerships and foster bridges of friendship between participating nations.

The USS Abraham Lincoln and the USS Gerald Ford Carrier Strike Groups took up strike positions in the Gulf of Oman and the Eastern Mediterranean respectively. Talks between Iran and the US continued, as President Trump considered options on a possible strike.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her 9th Union Budget on February 01. The budget estimates India's GDP for 2026-27 as ₹393,00,393 crores (about \$ 4.33 trillion), and allocates ₹784,678.28 crores (about \$ 86.5 billion), marginally under 2% of the GDP and 14.67% of the Union budget, to the Ministry of Defence.

Elections in Japan on February 08 returned Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's LDP to a 316-seat supermajority in the 465 seat House of Representatives, the first time since WWII that any party has won over two-thirds of the seats. The election victory places Takaichi in a strong political position, though she still lacks a majority in the House of Councilors for which fresh elections are not due till 2028.

In other regional elections, the BNP-led alliance won 212 of the 300 seats in Bangladesh's parliamentary elections held on February 12. Tarique Rahman was sworn in as Prime Minister on February 17. In Thailand, a snap election on February 08 resulted in Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's Bhumijaithai Party winning 193 seats in the 500-member house, sufficient to retain power along with its coalition partner Pheu Thai.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made Malaysia the destination of his first international trip in 2026, visiting Kuala Lumpur on February 07-08 and taking forward the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership. His second international visit during the month was to Israel from February 25-26, where he became the first Indian Prime Minister to

address the Knesset and upgraded bilateral relations to a special strategic partnership for peace, innovation and prosperity.

A series of international leaders visited India during the month. President Patrick Herminie of The Seychelles made India the first international destination of his presidency from February 5-10. President Macron of France visited India from February 17-19, elevating bilateral relations to a Special Global Strategic Partnership. Leaders from 20 countries attended the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi on February 19, which adopted a New Delhi Declaration. Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva paid a State Visit to India from February 18-22. Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney arrived in India on February 27, signalling a reset in bilateral relations.

President Trump urged the UK not to return Diego Garcia to Mauritius, notwithstanding the State Department's official announcement of support for the Mauritius-UK deal.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Jakarta from February 05-07 to sign the Australia Indonesia Treaty on Common Security.

India's Coast Guard seized three shadow fleet tankers carrying sanctioned Iranian Crude in the Arabian Sea on February 06. In another action in the Indian Ocean on February 24, the US Navy captured MT Bertha, a shadow fleet tanker carrying sanctioned crude.

As tensions between China and Japan persisted, Japan seized a Chinese fishing boat operating illegally in its EEZ on February 13. An LDP panel called on the Japanese government to ease rules on arms transfers, allowing export of lethal equipment to countries with which Japan has signed defence equipment and technology transfer agreements. China announced on February 24 the restriction of exports to 20 Japanese entities having ties with the defence industry.

An Indonesian military spokesman announced on February 15 that Indonesia was preparing to send troops to Gaza for a peacekeeping mission as part of President Trump's Board of Peace initiative. Indonesia's Navy Chief announced on February 12 that Indonesia's first aircraft carrier, the Italian Guiseppe Garibaldi, was due to arrive in Indonesia before the Indonesian National Armed Forces anniversary in October 2026.

The Indian Navy assumed command of CTF 154 on February 11, charged with training partner navies and improving their operational capability to enhance maritime security in the Middle East.

Indian Navy's Maritime Diplomacy

by Divya Rai

The Indian Navy hosted Exercise MILAN-2026 alongside two other hallmark events – the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Ninth Conclave of Navy Chiefs - on India's Eastern Seaboard from February 15 to 25, 2026¹. The Presidential Fleet Review at Sea and 13th edition of MILAN witnessed participation from 74 nations, affirming Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *MAHASAGAR* vision (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).

India launched Exercise MILAN in Port Blair in 1995 with four countries – Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Sri Lanka – to foster partnerships through joint training and discussions. Timed with its “Look East” policy and elevation to full ASEAN dialogue partner status, the inaugural edition marked New Delhi's shift from Cold War-era isolation toward deeper economic and security ties with Southeast Asia. Early editions in 1997 and 1999 built momentum through regional ties and cultural exchanges, with participation expanding steadily to include Asia-Pacific nations. The 2014 edition of MILAN expanded strategic outreach to the western Indian Ocean and Africa. Due to increasing participation, the Indian Navy shifted the exercise from Port Blair to Visakhapatnam in 2022, attracting participants from Europe, Latin America, and remote partners such as Yemen. From these modest beginnings, MILAN has evolved over three decades into one of the world's largest multilateral naval exercises, reflecting India's expanding maritime ambitions.

Table 1: MILAN Exercise Previous Editions²

Year	Location	Countries participated	Highlights
1995	Port Blair	04	Inaugural Exercise MILAN. Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand participated.
1997	Port Blair	06	Eleven warships from seven countries participated (Malaysia and Bangladesh were the new entrants).
1999	Port Blair	06	Organised on the west coast (Kochi) for the first time. Navies from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand attended.
2001	Exercise not held due to International Fleet Review 2001		

¹ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, “Exercise MILAN 2026”, November 19, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2184765®=3&lang=2>.

² Prepared by Author from multiple sources

2003	Port Blair	08	Warships and delegates from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Singapore participated.
2006	Port Blair	08	Warships from Myanmar participated for the first time, marking the first-ever visits of a Myanmar warship (UMS Anawyahta) to any foreign port. An Australian warship participated for the first time.
2008	Port Blair	10	Naval vessels from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, along with naval delegations from Brunei, Malaysia, New Zealand and Vietnam, participated.
2010	Port Blair	12	12 navies/representatives across the Asia Pacific participated: Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam and New Zealand.
2012	Port Blair	14	Warships and delegations from 14 countries, including Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius.
2014	Port Blair	16	Kenya and Tanzania participated for the first time, along with island nations of Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles. It was also the first time that Philippines and Cambodia participated.
2016	Exercise not held due to International Fleet Review 2016.		
2018	Port Blair	16	Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand attended the exercise. Since its inception, this was the first instance the Maldives did not participate.
2020	Exercise cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic		
2022	Visakhapatnam	40	Exercise shift to Visakhapatnam with around 40 countries sending their warships/high-level delegations. The United States Navy joined the exercise for the first time.
2024	Visakhapatnam	46	Italy, Namibia, Peru, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Spain, Tonga, and Yemen participate for the first time.
2026	Visakhapatnam	74	Warships from Germany, Philippines, UAE participated for the first time.

The 2024 edition was already considered successful with 46 participating nations, encompassing Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littorals and Pacific Island states. This year, participation has surged in magnitude, drawing 74 countries from invitations to over 135, featuring approximately 19 foreign warships – including from Russia – plus three aircraft, underscoring the scale and diversity of maritime participation. Engagements span IOR navies, Southeast Asia, the Western Pacific, and further afield, highlighted by maiden appearances from Germany, the Philippines, and the UAE, positioning MILAN-26 as a truly Indo-Pacific forum³. Notably, China, Pakistan and Turkey have not been invited for the event.

Each edition of the MILAN unfolds in two distinct phases. The Harbour Phase, commencing February 19, fostered deliberations on shared maritime concerns through an International Maritime Seminar, complemented by an International City Parade to showcase naval bonds. This stage transitioned into the intensive Sea Phase (February 21-25) in the Bay of Bengal. Unlike prior iterations, 2026 prioritises "multi-domain synergy", incorporating submarine operations, surface-to-air manoeuvres, and advanced electronic warfare (EW) simulations⁴. These elements rigorously evaluate interoperability among warships of varied technological pedigrees, enabling cohesive responses to common maritime threats. These events elevated this year's MILAN beyond ritual, transforming them into platforms for strategic dialogue, operational trust and enduring people-to-people engagement.

On February 18, the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 was conducted off the coast of Visakhapatnam with participation from 74 countries, marking a grand maritime spectacle that showcased India's advancing maritime prowess and dedication to international naval collaboration. As India's third IFR – succeeding Mumbai (2001) and Visakhapatnam (2016) – the event saw President Droupadi Murmu, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, inspect the fleet from INS Sumedha, an indigenous Offshore Patrol Vessel repurposed as the Presidential Yacht⁵. The fleet review featured 85 vessels in total, including 19 warships from foreign navies, exemplifying the breadth and heterogeneity of global maritime engagement. India's contribution encompassed 60 Navy ships, four Coast Guard vessels, and one each from the

³ International Fleet Review Milan 2026, "Milan Sea Phase To Begin in Bay off Vizag on Saturday", IFR Milan 26 (website), February 19, 2026, <https://www.ifrmilan26.com/media-details/milan-sea-phase-to-begin-in-bay-off-vizag-on-saturday>.

⁴ PTI, "A Blueprint for Shared Security: MILAN 2026 as the Global Anchor for Collective Maritime Peace", *The Wire*, February 12, 2026, <https://m.thewire.in/article/ptiprnews/a-blueprint-for-shared-security-milan-2026-as-the-global-anchor-for-collective-maritime-peace/amp>

⁵ PIB, "Hon'ble President of India Reviews the International Fleet Review 2026 and Presents President's Standard and Colours to INS Sardar Patel and President's Colour to 32nd Armoured Regiment", February 18, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2229820®=3&lang=2>

Shipping Corporation of India and the National Institute of Ocean Technology. The display further integrated three Indian Navy submarines, a French Atlantique maritime patrol aircraft and over 60 aircraft, demonstrating multi-domain coherence and integrated maritime projection. This composition embodied India's MAHASAGAR vision, which resonates very well with the event's theme, "United Through Oceans".⁶

Parallel to sea drills and fleet review, the 9th Conclave of Chiefs of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) convened at Visakhapatnam on February 20, bringing together Chiefs of Navies and Heads of Maritime Security Agencies from 33 countries—including IONS members, observers, and other Indian Ocean littoral states. A major highlight of the forum was the Indian Navy's assumption of IONS chairmanship from the Royal Thai Navy, signifying India's return to leadership after 16 years and positioning IONS as a cornerstone for professional maritime dialogue. Deliberations emphasised maritime security, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), and information sharing alongside interoperability as core pillars of collaboration. In addition, the conclave expanded IONS's remit by admitting the Philippines as an observer and integrating Oman into the HADR Working Group. India further delineated its chairmanship priorities: orchestrating the IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX), sustaining IOS SAGAR deployments to member states with onboard personnel from IONS navies, and hosting targeted workshops and dialogues to advance operational synergy, professional interchange, and capacity development⁷.

In the backdrop of the heightening tensions, MILAN serves as a prominent instrument of naval diplomacy; the Presidential Fleet Review stands as the grandest showcase of its military maritime strength, while the IONS Conclave represents the premier forum for high-level deliberations among naval chiefs. For India, orchestrating all three concurrently—a logistical feat of exceptional magnitude—transcends ceremonial pomp and is seen as a part of the larger maritime outlook of India. It solidifies India's stature as a responsible net security provider in the region. The fact that invitations were extended to 135 nations attests to the Indian Navy's expanding global reach and clout, and these vectors of engagements not only broaden the scope of the maritime security canvas but also open new avenues for naval cooperation among nations. Over the years such a kind of maritime engagement has been instrumental in the Indian Navy's wider outreach. For India, the MILAN series exemplifies its burgeoning naval

⁶ International Fleet Review Milan 2026, "Bangladesh, Iran Present as Navy Exhibits Self-Reliance at 74-Nation Fleet Review". IFR Milan 26 (website), February 2026, <https://www.ifrmilan26.com/media-details/bangladesh-iran-present-as-navy-exhibits-self-reliance-at-74-nation-fleet-review>

⁷ Press Information Bureau, "President of India Presents President's Standard to INS Sardar Patel", February 23, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2231000®=3&lang=2>

diplomacy throughout the Indo-Pacific, while engagements like the Fleet Review and IONS conclave become instruments of soft power. These events together form the bedrock of India's holistic maritime doctrine, transcending normative frameworks to encompass multifaceted collaborations and operational readiness.

India's Defence Budget 2026

Presenting a record ninth consecutive union budget in parliament on February 01, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman spoke of her three *kartavyas* (duties): sustaining and accelerating economic growth; fulfilling aspirations and building capacity, and *Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas* (together with all, development for all)⁸. She was conscious of and provided for the inescapable requirements of national security, even though her 'duty' focus was accelerating economic growth, building infrastructure and ensuring social welfare.

India's budget for 2026-27 estimates a GDP of ₹393,00,393 crores (about \$ 4.33 trillion⁹) for FY 2026-27¹⁰. In comparison, the IMF has estimated India's nominal GDP in 2026 to be over \$ 4.5 trillion. Going by GOI estimates, India will remain the world's fifth largest economy in 2026, behind the US, China, Germany and Japan (whose 2026 GDP is estimated to be \$4.46 trillion). The budget caters for a total government expenditure of ₹5347315 crores (\$589.9 billion, 13.6% of GDP).

The allocation for the Ministry of Defence is ₹784678.28 crores (about \$ 86.5 billion), marginally under 2% of the GDP and 14.67% of the Union budget. Of this, the allocation for MOD (Civil) is ₹28554.61 crores (\$3.15 billion). Revenue expenditure is allocated ₹365478.98 crores (\$40.3 billion), 46.6% of the budget; of this, ₹207182 crores (26.4% of the defence budget) goes towards pay and allowances, while ₹158297 crores (20.17% of the defence budget) goes towards operations and maintenance. Capital expenditure is estimated at ₹219306.47 crores (\$32.1 billion), 27.9% of the budget. ₹1.39 lakh crores of this is allocated for procurement from domestic defence industry. Expenditure on pensions is estimated at ₹171338.22 crores (\$18.9 billion), 21.8% of the MoD budget. The allocation for the DRDO is ₹29100.25 crores (about \$ 3.2 billion).

⁸Budget 2026-27 Speech of Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance, https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/budget_speech.pdf

⁹ At the current official exchange rate of \$1=₹90.667

¹⁰Budget at a Glance 2026-27, https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/Budget_at_Glance/budget_at_a_glance.pdf

The allocation for the Ministry of External Affairs is ₹22118.97 crores (about \$ 2.44 billion). Of this, ₹5685.56 crores (\$ 627 million) is earmarked for aid to other countries. The lion's share of this goes to Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives and Mauritius).

The record allocation for capital procurement in the Defence Budget 2026 drives several high priority acquisition projects. For the Army, this includes anti-tank missile systems, light combat (Prachand) helicopters, upgrades for tanks, the induction of advanced towed artillery gun systems, and Pinaka Multi-barrelled rocket launchers, etc. For the Navy, the wish list includes four Landing Platform Docks, six more P-8I aircraft and six Project 75I submarines, while ongoing projects include the remaining Nilgiri class frigates, the two Tripat class frigates being built by Goa Shipyard, the Sea Guardian drones, and the remaining MY-60R helicopters being inducted from the US. The Indian Air Force would like to conclude the contract for procurement of 114 Multi Role Fighter Aircraft (probably Rafale); progress the induction of 73 + 97 Tejas Mk 1A, and induct 12 more Netra Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems.

In sum, India's Ministry of Defence has received its highest ever allocation, a 15% increase over the previous year. The allocation has climbed to nearly 2% of the GDP, but remains substantially below the benchmark of 2.5-3% of GDP excluding pensions, required to achieve decisive military overmatch as recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence. The increased allocation for domestic procurement and the thrust towards startup innovation and technology development are positives, as is the increased funding for next generation aircraft, naval platforms and drones. However, the critical dependency on foreign OEMs for hi-tech systems like marine propulsion and jet engines remains a strategic weak spot. Over 48% of the defence budget still goes towards manpower costs (pay and allowances and pensions), limiting funds for new acquisitions. The slow procurement process remains a structural bottleneck, delaying the modernisation of the three armed forces. A non-lapsable modernisation fund for defence acquisitions is not yet in sight, though in fairness it must be acknowledged that the armed forces did not surrender any funds and in fact spent more than the ₹180,000 crores allocated under the Capital Head in 2025-26. India's investment in Defence R&D, well below 1% of the Defence budget, still remains significantly lower than that of contemporary middle powers, limiting hi-tech self-reliance.

Takaichi's Triumph

When Sanae Takaichi succeeded in October 2025 in her third attempt to become President of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), she faced a difficult political environment. The 26-year-old LDP-Komeito coalition held 215 of the 465 seats in the House of Representative and 122 of the 248 seats in the House of Councillors, leaving

it a minority in both houses of parliament. Komeito withdrew from the coalition in a bid to sabotage her election as Prime Minister. Takaichi responded by forging a new agreement with the Japan Innovation Party and was elected as Japan's 104th Prime Minister, assuming office on October 21, 2025.

A statement she made regarding Japan's involvement in a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan led to a diplomatic crisis, with China invoking wolf warrior diplomacy and economic coercion to build political and economic pressure on her to withdraw her remarks. Takaichi stood firm and announced a snap general election, which took place on February 08. The election results vindicated her political instincts: the LDP secured 316 of the 465 seats in the lower house, the first time since World War II that any Japanese party has won a two-thirds super-majority on its own. The Japan Innovation Party won another 36 seats, taking the coalition total to 352. Takaichi was sworn in as Japan's 105th Prime Minister on February 18¹¹.

What does the supermajority mean for Takaichi's leadership? It enables the LDP to push through bills on its own, even if they are rejected by the House of Councillors, where it holds only 101 of the 248 seats. She has committed to revising Japan's three security documents during the current year, and to accelerating achievement of the target of spending 2% of the GDP to this year. Revision of the constitution, necessary to achieve her ambition to transform Japan's military however requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament. This could prove difficult till at least 2028, when elections to the House of Councillors fall due.

The Takaichi cabinet, unchanged from her previous administration, comprises 23 ministers, 26 State Ministers, 28 parliamentary vice-ministers and five special advisers. Prominent members include Hayashi Yoshimasa as the Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications¹²; Motegi Toshimitsu as the Minister for Foreign Affairs; Katayama Satsuki as the Minister of Finance; Koizumi Shinjiro as the Minister of Defence and Akazawa Ryosei as the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. The cabinet has identified three priorities in the statement of its basic policy¹³. First is accelerating the growth strategy to realise a strong economy, while keeping the sustainability of public finances firmly in mind. Takaichi will push ahead with plans for public-private investment in 17 strategic industrial and technological areas, including AI and semiconductors, shipbuilding, quantum technology, biotechnology, aviation and space, digital and cybersecurity, digital content industry, food tech,

¹¹ Designation of the Prime Minister, February 18, 2026, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/actions/202602/_00001.html

¹² List of Ministers Inaugurated on February 18, 2026, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/meibo/daijin/index.html>

¹³ Basic Policy, February 18, 2026, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/decisions/2026/_00001.html

energy security and green transformation, disaster prevention and national resilience, drug research and advanced medicine, fusion energy, security supply chains for critical minerals and component materials, port logistics, defence industry, information and communications, marine and ocean industry and resources. Second is supporting the growth of areas outside major urban centres while safeguarding people's daily lives. Third is building Japan's diplomatic capacity, defence capabilities and information capabilities.

Takaichi called on opposition parties to cooperate with her in passing bills that need to be passed by the end of the fiscal year, including next year's budget and tax reform bills¹⁴. Her policy speech to the 221st session of the Diet reiterated her priorities¹⁵.

China's campaign of economic coercion following Takaichi's Taiwan remarks in November, designed to generate political costs and create pressure on her to change her policy, has backfired. Chinese airlines cancelled nearly 500,000 tickets, and tourist arrivals from China dropped from 716,700 in October 2025 to 330,000 in December 2025. China also reimposed a ban on Japanese seafood imports, which had only been lifted months earlier after a dispute over wastewater release from the damaged Fukushima nuclear reactor. Then, in a further escalation, Beijing imposed export controls on select dual-use and strategically sensitive goods, including rare earth elements. China's campaign generated limited economic damage, but produced a strong political blowback, rallying public opinion behind Takaichi.

Her landslide demonstrates the limits of China's coercion. Japan is strengthening its defence capabilities and deepening security ties with the US, Australia, and regional partners to counter China's coercion in the East and South China Seas. Takaichi has signalled a stronger, direct interest in regional stability and Taiwan's security, and a willingness to stand up to China's coercion. While China will remain Japan's top trading partner, Japan will accelerate efforts to derisk relations, including diversifying supply chains away from China to reduce vulnerability. It is in the interests of both sides to maintain diplomatic dialogue and avoid direct, uncontrolled conflict, though China does not seem to have grasped this yet. She will have a free hand to pursue her China agenda.

Japan US relations are expected to strengthen. Trump broke tradition to endorse Takaichi before the election and clearly values Takaichi, a fellow defence hawk and immigration sceptic. Takaichi in turn has described the Japan-US alliance as the

¹⁴ Press Conference by Prime Minister Takaichi, February 18, 2026, <https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/105/statement/2026/0218kaiken.html>

¹⁵ Policy Speech by Prime Minister Takaichi to the 221st Session of the Diet, February 20, 2026, <https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/105/statement/2026/0220shiseihoshin.html>

cornerstone of Japan's foreign and security policy. She has also committed to working with countries that share fundamental values and principles, such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Her bilateral visit to the US is expected in March 2026 and will indicate the fresh directions of the alliance.

Japan's relations with India are also expected to strengthen, with the defence and security pillar of the bilateral strategic partnership receiving a fillip. Economic security is expected to receive a fresh impetus. Cooperation within the Quad is expected to grow.

Japan under Takaichi is set to emerge as a more autonomous strategic actor, with high-intensity governance that prioritizes national security and industrial strength. It has already announced that it will update the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. It can be expected to play a greater part in Indo-Pacific security.

Visit of President of Seychelles to India

Patrick Herminie was sworn in as the 6th President of Seychelles in October 2025. Just over three months later, he made the first international visit of his presidency to India, from February 5-10, 2026.

An archipelagic nation of 115 islands located northeast of Madagascar in the southwestern Indian Ocean; the Republic of Seychelles has great importance for India's maritime security. It provides an excellent location from which to build domain awareness of maritime developments in the Western Indian Ocean and to support anti-piracy activities in the region. Seychelles is Africa's smallest nation, with a population of around 130,000, and among its wealthiest, with a nominal per capita GDP of over \$ 21,600. It has an EEZ of about 1.37 million Km², compared to its land area of just 452 Km². Seychelles' ability to govern the EEZ is not commensurate with its size; it has a small Coast Guard equipped with short-range patrol vessels donated by India, China, the UAE and Sri Lanka; and four patrol aircraft provided by India, China and Canada.

It is India's geostrategic interest to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship with the Seychelles, and to prevent any adversarial nation from dominating the country. The Seychelles was the first destination of Prime Minister Modi's visits to Indian Ocean island nations (Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka) in March 2015, when he enunciated India's Indian Ocean policy, SAGAR¹⁶. India has long sought to

¹⁶ Text of the PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda, 12 March 2015, <http://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/erecontent.aspx?reid=116881>

strengthen Seychelles' ability to secure its EEZ against piracy, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism and illegal fishing. It has provided more than half of the Seychelles fleet of patrol vessels and surveillance aircraft, helps out with joint EEZ surveillance using IN ships deployed in the region, and has provided coastal surveillance radars. A resident Indian Defence Attache is positioned in the Seychelles and facilitates collaborative efforts, including joint EEZ surveillance, training of Seychelles' military officers and joint exercises. An Indian objective is to gain access to Assumption Island, to enable surveillance of shipping routes through the Mozambique Channel by India.

President Herminie arrived in Chennai on February 05, met the Governor of Tamil Nadu, took part in a business event, and visited the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management and Apollo Hospital. He then travelled to Mumbai on February 07, where he met the Chief Minister and participated in a business event. He arrived in Delhi on February 09 and was accorded full ceremonial, including a visit to Rajghat and a call on by the External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar. He reviewed bilateral relations with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 10, with special emphasis on issues related to maritime safety, security, defence cooperation, development cooperation and capacity building. His programme included a call on the President of India, as well as a visit to the Taj Mahal in Agra.

President Herminie and Prime Minister Modi announced the India - Seychelles Joint Vision for Sustainability, Economic Growth and Security Through Enhanced Linkages¹⁷. The leaders agreed to deepen cooperation and intensify parliamentary exchanges between the two countries. Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to remaining a pivotal and reliable partner in Seychelles' national development agenda, with particular focus on sustainability, defence and maritime security, capacity building, resilience and inclusive growth. India announced a special economic package of \$ 175 million for the Seychelles, including blended financial assistance of \$ 125 million in Rupee-denominated Line of Credit and a \$ 50 million grant for development cooperation projects, capacity building for civilian and defence officials, and maritime security. Both leaders agreed to collaborate on the long-term augmentation of healthcare infrastructure in the Seychelles. They agreed that Seychelles would join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). They agreed to step up cooperation in hydrography, with Seychelles agreeing to establish a Seychelles Hydrography Unit with Indian assistance. They resolved to work closely together to counteract maritime challenges such as piracy, smuggling of narcotics and human trafficking, IUU fishing and other transnational crimes, including those with

¹⁷ India - Seychelles Joint Vision for Sustainability, Economic Growth and Security Through Enhanced Linkages, February 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2225395®=3&lang=1>

linkages to organised crime and terrorism financing. Both leaders agreed to strengthen bilateral training cooperation and provision of naval assets and transport vehicles. Prime Minister Modi welcomed the decision of Seychelles to become a full member of the Colombo Security Conclave. Seven MoUs were signed, and another seven announcements made¹⁸.

There was, however, no announcement regarding Assumption Island or India's aspirations for building a surveillance base there. The agreement PM Modi signed in March 2015 with then President James Michel of Seychelles regarding the development of infrastructure on Assumption Island remains in limbo¹⁹. President Herminie had, during his election campaign, vowed to review the agreement. His view is that any project must be driven by Seychelles' national priorities and the requirement to maintain full sovereign rights. An innovative solution that maintains the interests of both parties may yet be possible, but will require further negotiation.

Strategic competition in the Seychelles between India and China can be expected to continue. While India acts as a net security provider, China acts as a creditor and builder, investing heavily in Seychelles' infrastructure, including constructing a media broadcasting facility, a court building and the La Gogue Dam project. It has built a container terminal, and its large fishing trawlers operate in the region. The Seychelles State Visit to India is in keeping with the country playing both sides to maximise its benefits. It can be expected that a visit to China will follow in the near future.

The India Malaysia Summit

India's relations with Malaysia have been generally steady, with their ups and downs. They became strained in December 2019 following then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's ill-advised remarks about India's Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 depriving some Muslims of their citizenship²⁰. India responded by describing his words as factually inaccurate²¹ and imposed curbs on Palm Oil imports from Malaysia. After assuming the office of Prime Minister in November 2022, Anwar Ibrahim led the repair effort with a visit to India in August 2024. Bilateral ties were

¹⁸ List of Outcomes: State Visit of President of Seychelles (February 05-10, 2026), February 09, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40720/List_of_Outcomes_State_Visit_of_President_of_Seychelles_February_05_10_2026

¹⁹India-Seychelles Bilateral Relations, August 27, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Seychelles-Bilateral-27.8.2024.pdf>

²⁰ 'People Dying': Malaysia's Mahathir slams India's citizenship law, December 21, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/21/people-dying-malaysias-mahathir-slams-indias-citizenship-law>

²¹ Factually Inaccurate Remarks by Prime Minister of Malaysia on CAA, December 20, 2019,

elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) during this visit²². Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the relationship further forward by making Malaysia the destination of first international trip in 2026²³.

Geographically located at the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Malaysia comprises two parts. Peninsular Malaysia lies on the northern side of the Malacca Straits, a critical choke point on the world's (and India's) east-west trading corridor. East Malaysia lies across the South China Sea from the Malaysian Peninsula, on the same trade route. The country is thus important for India's Act East Policy, sitting astride the sea route connecting India to the East. It is a founding member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and was the ASEAN chair in 2025. It is home to India's third largest diaspora, after the US and UAE, and has a population of over 2.91 million overseas Indians²⁴, out of a total population of about 34.3 million²⁵. Malaysia has a GDP of about \$470 billion, growing at 5%, as per IMF data of October 2025. Per Capita income is around \$ 12,300 (IMF estimates), making it an upper middle-income country.

India's strategic interests in Malaysia are rooted in strengthening its "Act East" policy, securing maritime trade routes, and enhancing the economic partnership with Southeast Asian countries. A friendly Malaysia is important for India's Free and Open Indo-Pacific outlook and for geopolitical balancing. The two countries have growing defence ties. Malaysian officers regularly attend India's NDC and DSSC courses, while Indian officers attend the Malaysian Command and Staff Course. Ships of the two countries call at each other's ports, and Malaysia participates in India's Exercise MILAN. There are also bilateral exercises (Harimau Shakti, Udara Shakti and Samudra Laksmana). Service-to-service staff talks for all three services are held annually. India's Defence Minister visited Malaysia and met his counterpart in July 2023. The export of advanced equipment like the Tejas LCA and Brahmos missile to Malaysia is being explored, and HAL maintains a regional office in Kuala Lumpur.

On the economic front, bilateral trade stands at about \$ 19.9 billion annually. Malaysian investment in India stands at around \$ 4.6 billion, while Indian companies

²² Joint Statement on India - Malaysia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, August 20, 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2047076®=3&lang=2>

²³ India - Malaysia Joint Statement on the occasion of the Official visit by Prime Minister of India to Malaysia, February 08, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2225059®=3&lang=1>

²⁴ Population of Overseas Indians, <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>

²⁵ Demographic Statistic Malaysia, Third Quarter 2025, November 13, 2025, <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/demographic-statistic-malaysia-third-quarter->

have invested over \$ 2.6 billion in Malaysia²⁶. A bilateral investment treaty between the two countries was terminated by India in 2017; however, the Malaysia India Comprehensive Economic Agreement of 2011 has a chapter on investment. Both countries have agreed to promote trade settlement in local currency to reduce dollar dependency.

On arrival, Prime Minister Modi was received at the airport by his counterpart and accorded a Guard of Honour. He and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim travelled together to a convention centre where they both addressed the Indian community. The two Prime Ministers reviewed bilateral cooperation across the full spectrum of the partnership, including trade, investments, defence, security, semiconductors, digital technologies, financial technologies (Fintech), renewable energy, education, healthcare, culture, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. They also discussed key regional and global issues. An exchange of bilateral agreements and MOUs followed, with 11 documents being exchanged and five announcements, including an agreement between India's UPI and Malaysia's PAYNET on cross-border QR-based merchant payments²⁷. Significantly, the two Prime Ministers unequivocally and strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism, and called for zero tolerance of terrorism and for concerted international efforts to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner.

Differences in geopolitical outlooks remain. Both sides have a shared interest in maritime security, resulting in growing maritime cooperation. However, Malaysia remains opposed to India's requests to participate in the Malacca Straits Patrol, due to concerns about sovereignty and alienating China. It is very careful to weigh its relations with India and China and not do anything that could antagonise China. India's objective, on the other hand, is to guard against China's growing influence in the region becoming overwhelming. India is a Quad partner, while Malaysia views the Quad with suspicion. Malaysia relies on the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA, with Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK) for its deterrence, while India pursues strategic autonomy. Malaysia provides refuge to Zakir Naik, while India seeks his extradition on charges of money laundering, inciting communal hatred and promoting radicalism through inflammatory speeches. These differences have, however, been managed and have not been allowed to derail the bilateral relationships

²⁶ India-Malaysia Bilateral Relations, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Malaysia-bilateral-relations-2025.pdf>

²⁷ List of Outcomes: Official Visit of the Prime Minister to Malaysia, February 08, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2225060®=3&lang=1>

On balance, the Modi visit to Malaysia has continued the reset in bilateral engagement evident in the Anwar Ibrahim visit of 2024, while preventing differences in geopolitical outlook from harming the relationship. Areas of bilateral cooperation continue to grow, albeit incrementally and in non-controversial areas. Malaysia's leadership of ASEAN has not been enough for it to push the organisation to meet its deadline of revision of the AITIGA by December 2025. Bilateral relations can be expected to remain steady, without any transformational development that could impact regional security.

The Modi Macron Summit

President Macron visited India for the fourth time from February 17-19, attending the AI Impact summit and holding bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mumbai. His other visits were in January 2024, when he was the Chief Guest for India's Republic Day celebrations; in September 2023, when he attended the G20 Summit hosted under India's Presidency, and in March 2018, when he co-chaired the founding summit of the International Solar Alliance.

France is India's first strategic partner, with the two nations entering into a strategic partnership in 1997. Both countries have a long history of cooperation in defence and security, civil nuclear energy, satellite development and space, digital and cyber space, health, culture, trade, economy, and people-to-people links. They agreed to elevate bilateral relations to a Special Global Strategic Partnership, reflecting growing ambitions and a vision for the partnership to act as a force for global good that not only helps build prosperity and resilience and advances security, but also works towards addressing challenges in an increasingly uncertain global environment²⁸. President Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated the 2026 India-France Year of Innovation in Mumbai on 17 February. They established an annual Foreign Ministers' Dialogue to regularly review implementation of the elevated partnership and Horizon 2047 Roadmap. President Macron invited Prime Minister Modi to participate in the G7 Summit to be hosted by France in June 2026, as well as in the "Africa Forward: Partnerships between Africa and France for Innovation and Growth" Summit in Kenya in May 2026. Prime Minister Modi accepted both invitations.

Under the partnership for security and sovereignty, the leaders agreed to intensify joint research, co-design, co-development and co-production of advanced defence platforms in all three domains, in line with the ambitious Defence Industrial Roadmap

²⁸ India - France Joint Statement, February 17, 2026, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2026/02/17/india-france-joint-statement-1>

agreed in 2024. The leaders commended the contract to procure 26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets and expressed their wish to further strengthen the partnership in defence aeronautics, especially in the manufacturing of fighter aircraft and combat aircraft engines under the Make in India initiative. They appreciated the ongoing partnership between Safran and HAL for the development of the Indian Multi Role Helicopter (IMRH). Both sides welcomed the inauguration of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility for LEAP engines, the establishment of MRO facility for M-88 engines mounted on Rafale aircraft and the Joint Venture with Bharat Electronics Limited to produce the HAMMER Missiles in India. Both leaders also jointly inaugurated the H125 Final Assembly Line, a first of its kind private sector helicopter manufacturing facility in India. They highlighted the success of the made in India Scorpene submarine programme, the last submarine under which was delivered in January 2025.

The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to cooperate on the India - Middle East - Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and encouraged the first IMEC Ministerial Meeting to take concrete steps to advance the initiative in 2026. They appreciated cooperation in the trilateral formats with Australia and the UAE, and directed their concerned officials to infuse new ambition to work together with UAE and Australian officials to implement mutually identified areas of work under these initiatives. They reaffirmed their commitment to a free, open, prosperous and rules-based Indo-Pacific and called for closer collaboration in the region, in line with their 'Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region' of 2018 and 'India-France Indo-Pacific Roadmap' of 2023. They unequivocally and strongly condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism.

Under the partnership for the planet, both leaders recognised the worsening impact of climate change and agreed to cooperate closely for effective implementation of the Paris Agreement, including by holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. They reiterated their commitment to the CDRI and ISA and welcomed the ongoing discussions for establishment of a European office of the International Solar Alliance in Paris. President Macron lauded India's ambitious target to achieve 100 GW nuclear power capacity by 2047 and India's recent reforms of its nuclear sector, including the allowing of private investment in this sector. The leaders agreed to deepen India-France cooperation in nuclear energy across the value chain from research, skills development to industrial applications, and explore possibilities to collaborate, for making it a major pillar in India's energy mix. The two sides agreed to explore the

possibility of establishing cooperation in research and development on small and advanced modular reactors. They welcomed the sustained growth in bilateral trade and the strong two-way investments between the countries, and reaffirmed their commitment to fully realizing untapped economic potential. Both leaders expressed their satisfaction over continuous progress made by UPI in France.

Under the partnership for the people pillar, the leaders emphasised the need to further deepen cooperation in this field. The leaders welcomed the progress in existing bilateral cooperation on critical and emerging technologies, including on space, civil nuclear energy, cyber and AI, and encouraged to go further in technology cooperation. They welcomed the launch of a new airline route between Saint-Denis de la Réunion and Chennai, which will help develop economic and cultural exchanges between La Réunion and India. Building on the long-standing cultural collaboration between the two nations, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to deepening cultural ties, particularly in the context of the India–France Year of Innovation 2026, by organizing a series of cultural events in both countries, aimed at celebrating and promoting the rich cultural heritage shared by India and France. Both leaders reaffirmed the priority given to strengthen educational cooperation and student mobility. This will help in achieving the objective of France welcoming 30,000 Indian students to France by 2030, up from 10,000 at present. The two leaders welcomed the upcoming revision of the agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Qualifications.

The elevation of bilateral ties marks a flowering of the partnership, shifting from a transactional defence relationship to a deep strategic partnership aiming to act as a force for global good. India and France share the desire for a multipolar world, offering an alternative in the current era of geopolitical competition. The partnership with France (and with Germany) will also help in India's ties with the EU, particularly significant following conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement. All in all, this has become a significant all-weather friendship, strengthening the ability of both nations to manage geopolitical, maritime and technological challenges.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

Bangladesh Elections. Elections to the Jatiya Sangsad (Bangladesh Parliament) on February 12 resulted in the Tarique Rahman led BNP alliance securing 212 of the 300 seats, a two-thirds majority²⁹. The opposition Jamaat-e-Islami alliance won 68 seats. Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, which had won the previous four elections, was banned and could not participate. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated

²⁹ Bangladesh Nationalist Party wins landslide majority in first election since Gen Z uprising, February 13, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/cd03znje072t>

Tarique Rahman on the BNP's election victory³⁰. The elections may have brought the BNP to power, but whether they will result in stability may be questionable; the hardline opposition Jamaat-e-Islami has accused the BNP of using the state apparatus to rig the election results, including through cash for votes and the midnight stamping of ballot papers. The speaker of India's Lok Sabha Shri Om Birla represented India at the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman³¹. A cautious reset and period of strategic uncertainty in Bangladesh relations with India is to be expected.

Thailand Elections. A snap general election in Thailand on February 08 led to the Conservative Bhumjithai Party led by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul winning 193 seats in the 500-member house, up from the 71 seats it had in 2023³². The Pheu Thai party, which entered into a coalition with Charnvirakul, won another 71 seats. Voters also participated in a national referendum regarding the 2017 military-backed constitution, with 65% backing the proposal to draft a new constitution.

Thailand Cambodia Conflict. The fragile ceasefire in the Thailand Cambodia border conflict continued to hold notwithstanding an exchange of fire on February 24³³. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet called for de-escalation and peaceful resolution.

US Aircraft Carriers in the Middle East. The USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group continued to operate in the Arabian Sea, posing a threat to Iran, throughout the month. On board aircraft shot down an Iranian Shahed-139 drone that approached the carrier on February 3³⁴. A US destroyer also provided escort for a US-flagged merchant vessel transiting the Straits of Hormuz that was harassed by Iranian vessels and a Mohajer drone. As the month approached an end, the USS Gerald R Ford CSG was operating in the Eastern Mediterranean in support of possible operations against Iran.

³⁰ Prime Minister congratulates Tarique Rahman on Bangladesh election victory; reaffirms India's commitment to bilateral ties, February 13, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2227572®=3&lang=1>

³¹ Lok Sabha speaker Represents India at Swearing-in Ceremony of Bangladesh Prime Minister Mr. Tarique Rahman, February 17, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2229289®=3&lang=1>

³² Thai PM claims election victory with conservatives well ahead of rivals, February 09, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2jn4z4eq0o>

³³ Thailand Cambodia border clashes reignite: Bangkok accuses Phnom Penh of ceasefire breach, February 24, 2026, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/thailand-cambodia-border-clashes-reignite-bangkok-accuses-phnom-penh-of-ceasefire-breach/articleshow/128746277.cms>

³⁴ US Fighter Jet Shoots Down Iranian Drone Amid Heightened Tensions, February 3, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/03/us/politics/us-iran-drone-downing.html>

PM Modi Visit to Israel. Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid his second State Visit to Israel on February 25-26³⁵. He became the first Indian Prime Minister to address the Knesset. India and Israel elevated bilateral relations to a special strategic partnership for peace, innovation and prosperity³⁶. The leaders noted the immense progress made in the India-Israel bilateral relationship across diverse domains, including emerging technologies, cyber, agriculture, water management, health, entrepreneurship, defence, security, and more. They affirmed their commitment to integrating India's and Israel's advancements in AI, cybersecurity, semiconductors, quantum computing, biotechnology, agriculture and water management, defence platforms, and space exploration. The two countries decided to conclude a free trade agreement, and agreed to use India's UPI in Israel. Media reports indicate that Israel has offered India full technology transfer and joint production under the "Make in India" initiative for the Iron Dome and Iron Beam air defence systems.

AI Impact Summit. The AI Impact Summit was held in New Delhi on February 19. Leaders from 20 countries³⁷, including Bhutan, Bolivia, Brazil, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Guyana, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Mauritius, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Switzerland, the Netherlands and UAE attended, along with representatives from 88 countries. The summit concluded with the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration³⁸, endorsed by 89 countries and international organisations, reflecting a broad-based global consensus on leveraging AI for economic growth and social good³⁹.

Brazilian State Visit to India. Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva paid a State Visit to India from February 18-22. He participated in the 2nd AI Impact Summit from February 19-20 and had a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Modi on February 21. A joint statement was issued⁴⁰.

³⁵ Visit of Prime Minister to Israel, February 24, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2232225®=3&lang=1>

³⁶ India-Israel Joint Statement, February 26, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2233228®=3&lang=1>

³⁷ World Leaders at the India - AI Impact Summit 2026, February 13, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40773/World_Leaders_at_the_IndiaAI_Impact_Summit_2026

³⁸ AI Impact Summit Declaration, New Delhi, February 21, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40773/World_Leaders_at_the_IndiaAI_Impact_Summit_2026

³⁹ AI Impact Summit Concludes with Adoption of New Delhi Declaration, February 21, 2026 https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40810/AI_Impact_Summit_2026_Concludes_with_Adoption_of_New_Delhi_Declaration

⁴⁰ India - Brazil Joint Statement: State Visit of President of Brazil to India, February 21, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40812/India_Brazil_Joint_Statement_State_Visit_of_President_of_Brazil_to_India

The Modi Carney Summit. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney began his first official visit to India commencing February 27⁴¹. The business segment of the visit was scheduled from February 27 – March 01, while the political part is scheduled on March 02. Carney is scheduled to travel to Australia and Japan thereafter⁴². The visit signals a reset in India-Canada relations, which had gone into deep freeze after former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged there was credible evidence linking India to the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada. A Canadian commission has since said no definitive link to a foreign state had been proven in the killing of Nijjar.

Brazil South Korea Upgrade Ties to Strategic Partnership. Following his State Visit to India, Brazil's President Lula visited South Korea from February 22-24, marking the first state visit by Brazil to South Korea in 21 years. He and South Korea's President Lee Jae-myung upgraded bilateral relations to a strategic partnership⁴³ and adopted a joint four-year action plan (2026-2029) as the blueprint for future cooperation.

Chancellor Merz Visits China. As China once again emerged as Germany's top trading partner, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz paid his first official visit to Beijing from February 25-26, meeting President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang⁴⁴. He addressed the unhealthy €90 billion trade deficit Germany has with China and urged China to reduce market-distorting subsidies and systemic overcapacity in sectors like electric vehicles and chemicals⁴⁵. He requested Xi Jinping to use China's influence to help end the war in Ukraine; Xi maintained that diplomacy and negotiation provide the key to a solution. Merz reaffirmed Germany's One-China policy but emphasised that reunifications must be achieved peacefully and not through the use of force. China agreed to purchase up to 120 aircraft from Airbus, a move Merz cited as proof of the trip's value. Both sides agreed to restore inter-governmental consultations that had been stalled by the pandemic and political shifts.

⁴¹ Visit of the Prime Minister of Canada to India (February 27 – March 02, 2026), February 26, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40825/Visit_of_the_Prime_Minister_of_Canada_to_India_February_27_March_02_2026

⁴² Prime Minister Carney to diversify Canada's trade, attract new investment, and secure new partnerships with visits to India, Australia and Japan, February 23, 2026, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2026/02/23/prime-minister-carney-diversify-canadas-trade-attract-new-investment>

⁴³ President Lee, Brazil upgrade ties to strategic partnership, February 24, 2026, <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/policies/view?articleId=287898&pageIndex=1>

⁴⁴ President Xi Jinping Meets with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, February 25, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202602/t20260225_11863591.html

⁴⁵ German Chancellor warns of trade imbalance with China during first Beijing trip, February 25, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yjpke8072o>

Australia Indonesia Treaty on Common Security. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Jakarta from Feb 05-07 to sign the Australia Indonesia Treaty on Common Security, also known as the Jakarta Treaty⁴⁶. The Treaty commits both sides to consult at the leader and ministerial levels about matters affecting their common security, as well as in the event of adverse challenges to either party. It emphasises economic security, including through increased investment and trade. The two sides also agreed to promote mutually beneficial cooperative activities in the security field. It does not, however, bind the two sides to mutual defence. It remains for both sides to ratify the treaty.

India Seizes Sanctioned Shadow Fleet Tankers in the Indian Ocean. India's Coast Guard seized 'Shadow Fleet' tankers Stellar Ruby, Asphalt Star and Al Jafzia carrying sanctioned Iranian crude in an unprecedented enforcement action on February 06, the same day that India and the US unveiled their bilateral trade deal⁴⁷. The seizure reflects a thaw in India-US relations after they spiralled downwards following the announcement of the additional tariffs on India over purchases of Russian crude.

LDP Panel Calls on Japan's Government to Ease Rules on Arms Transfers. Japan moved a step closer to allowing the export of lethal arms as an LDP Panel approved a proposal calling on the government to ease rules limiting defence equipment transfers⁴⁸. The panel seeks to scrap a requirement limiting Japan's military transfers to five non-lethal categories: rescue, transport, reconnaissance, surveillance and minesweeping, and to classify all equipment into two categories: lethal and non-lethal. The new rules will allow export of lethal equipment to countries with which Japan has signed defence equipment and technology transfer agreements.

Japan Seizes Chinese Fishing Boat. Japan seized a Chinese fishing boat operating in its EEZ off Nagasaki on February 13 and arrested its Captain, in a sign of firmer implementation of security regulations in its EEZ⁴⁹. The boat was ordered to stop by a fisheries inspector, but failed to comply and attempted to flee. This is the first time since 2022 that Japan has seized a Chinese fishing boat. The captain was later released

⁴⁶ Treaty Between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia on Common Security, February 06, 2026, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-indonesia-treaty-common-security.pdf>

⁴⁷ India's coastal authorities 'seize' 3 US-sanctioned oil tankers linked to Iran, February 17, 2026, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indian-coastal-authorities-seize-3-us-sanctioned-oil-tankers-linked-to-iran/articleshow/128437223.cms>

⁴⁸ Japan takes step closer to easing rules on export of lethal weapons, February 25, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/02/25/japan/defense-exports-rules-revision/>

⁴⁹ Japan says it seized Chinese vessel amid tensions with Beijing, February 13, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2e4791re38o>

after China guaranteed payment of cash collateral⁵⁰. China hoped that the Japanese side would strictly observe the China-Japan fisheries Agreement, ensure impartial law enforcement and protect the safety of the Chinese crew and their lawful rights and interests⁵¹.

Diego Garcia Update. A mercurial President Donald Trump once again changed his mind and urged British PM Sir Kier Starmer not to give Diego Garcia away⁵². This despite his own State Department having officially supported the deal between Mauritius and the UK. The UK Foreign Office said that the agreement they had reached was the only way to guarantee the long-term future of the Diego Garcia military base. The US and Mauritius were scheduled to hold a discussion on bilateral security, including the effective implementation of security arrangements for the Diego Garcia base to ensure its long-term, secure operation⁵³.

China Restricts Exports to Japan. China ratcheted up its pressure on Tokyo over Taiwan, saying on February 24 that it would restrict exports to 20 Japanese entities with ties to the defence industry⁵⁴. The restrictions are intended to prevent Japan's re-militarisation and thwart its nuclear ambitions, according to China's Commerce Ministry. Another 20 entities were placed on the watch list. Japan strongly protested the measures and sought their immediate withdrawal.

Sentencing of Jimmy Lai. Jimmy Lai, Hong Kong's 78-year-old democracy advocate and media tycoon, was sentenced to 20 years in jail under the city's controversial national security law for colluding with foreign forces⁵⁵. The sentence is indicative of China's determination that Jimmy Lai's voice is never heard again. While western countries made muted protests, they have evidently decided to live with the situation and move ahead with relations with China.

⁵⁰ Japan releases arrested Chinese fishing boat captain, reports say, February 14, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/02/14/japan/japan-china-fisherman-released/>

⁵¹ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference, February 13, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202602/t20260213_11858899.html

⁵² Do not give away Diego Garcia, Trump tells UK in fresh attack on Chagos deal, February 19, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c309qqyer8yo>

⁵³ United States and Mauritius to Hold Bilateral Security Discussions, February 17, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/02/united-states-and-mauritius-to-hold-bilateral-security-discussions/>

⁵⁴ China Amps Up Pressure on Japan with Export Bans, February 24, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/24/world/asia/china-japan-export-ban.html>

⁵⁵ Hong Kong pro-democracy tycoon Jimmy Lai gets 20 years' jail, February 09, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8d5pl34vv0o>

HMAS Toowoomba Transits Taiwan Straits. HMAS Toowoomba transited the Taiwan Strait on February 20-21, remaining in international waters throughout⁵⁶. HMAS Brisbane had earlier transited the Strait in September 2025.

Japan Bangladesh Agreement Regarding Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology. Japan and Bangladesh signed an agreement on February 3 regarding the transfer of defence equipment and technology⁵⁷. The agreement establishes the legal framework for handling of equipment to be transferred and enters into force immediately. No equipment for transfer was, however, identified.

Xi Pressurising US to Stop Arms Sales to Taiwan. Reports indicate that a major US arms-sales package for Taiwan is in limbo following pressure from Xi Jinping and concern that going ahead would derail President Trump's visit to China in April⁵⁸. An \$11.1 billion package has already been approved by the administration, while another package is working its way through internal processes. Trump acknowledged that the issue was discussed during his telephone call with Xi earlier this month and he was still to make a decision. It may be recalled that Taiwan's opposition KMT and TPP are currently blocking President Lai Ching-te's proposed \$40 billion special defence budget, effectively stalling critical arms purchases.

Report on USAF Prospects in War Against China. A report by the Hudson Institute concludes that the USAF could be defeated in a future conflict against China, and even if it receives funding for more of the same aircraft, weapons and flight hours, the force would likely fail⁵⁹. It recommends that the USAF adopt a revised force design including fielding forward deployed, runway independent units with air surveillance and targeting counter-air and maritime strike capabilities; enhance long-range strike capability comprising bombers, nuclear ICBMs and other assets; transform the core force (of ISR and targeting, counter-air, strike, mobility and C² capabilities) with advanced mission systems and longer-range and more survivable tankers; and field key enablers.

⁵⁶ Australian warship transits Taiwan Strait, tracked by Chinese Navy, February 22, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/02/22/asia-pacific/australia-taiwan-strait-transit/>

⁵⁷ Agreement Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, February 03, 2026, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100973068.pdf>

⁵⁸ US Arms Sale to Taiwan in Limbo Amid Pressure Campaign from China, February 18, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/world/china/u-s-arms-sale-to-taiwan-in-limbo-amid-pressure-campaign-from-china-d228f912>

⁵⁹ Flipping the Script: Redesigning the US Air Force for Decisive Advantage, February 17, 2026, <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/flipping-script-redesigning-us-air-force-edge-pulsed-resilient-airfields-timothy-walton-dan-patt>

Deployment of Indonesian Troops in Gaza. Indonesia's Army spokesman, Brig. Gen. Donny Pramono said on February 15 that Indonesia was preparing to send troops to Gaza for a peacekeeping mission as part of President Trump's Board of Peace initiative⁶⁰. He said that around 1000 troops would be ready to deploy to Gaza by mid-April, and the contingent could grow to 8,000 by June. Indonesia's Foreign Ministry said that any role would be strictly humanitarian, focusing on civilian protection, medical services and reconstruction, with no combat operations. If approved by President Prabowo, Indonesia will be the first country to formally commit troops to the security mission under Trump's Board of Peace initiative.

US Captures MT Bertha in the Indian Ocean. US personnel roping down from a Navy MH-60S helicopter captured the Iranian shadow fleet tanker MT Bertha in the Indian Ocean on February 24, after tracking the tanker from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean⁶¹. This was the third tanker captured during the month.

Trump Establishes America First Arms Transfer Strategy. An Executive Order from President Donald Trump established an America First Arms Transfer Strategy on February 06⁶². The strategy is intended to ensure that US arms transfers build production capacity for weapons that are most operationally relevant for the execution of the National Security Strategy (NSS), support domestic reindustrialisation and improve the resiliency of the US defence industrial base, strengthen critical supply chains, and prioritise partners that have invested in their own self-defence and have a critical role or geography for executing the NSS.

Great Nicobar Island Infrastructure Project. A bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) cleared the way for the ₹92,000 crore Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project by disposing of challenges to the grant of Environment Clearance (EC) to it⁶³. A challenge to the project is still being heard by the Kolkata High Court.

Sale of Italian Aircraft Carrier Guiseppe Garibaldi to Indonesia. Indonesia's navy chief Admiral Muhammad Ali said that Indonesia's first Italian built aircraft carrier,

⁶⁰ Indonesia Says It's Preparing Thousands of Peacekeeping Troops for Trump's Gaza Plan, February 16, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/16/us/politics/indonesia-peacekeeping-troops-trump-gaza.html>

⁶¹ US Captures Third Shadow Fleet Tanker in Indian Ocean, February 24, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/02/24/u-s-captures-third-shadow-fleet-tanker-in-indian-ocean>

⁶² Establishing an America First Arms Transfer Strategy, February 06, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/02/establishing-an-america-first-arms-transfer-strategy/>

⁶³ NGT clears Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project, cites 'strategic importance', February 16, 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/ngt-clears-great-nicobar-island-mega-infrastructure-project/article70637613.ece>

the Guiseppe Garibaldi, is targeted to arrive in Indonesia before the Indonesian National Armed Forces anniversary on October 05, 2026⁶⁴. The ship was decommissioned by the Italian Navy in October 2024, and is being converted to a helicopter and UAV assault ship for Indonesia.

India-Indonesia-Japan Maritime Exercise. Ships from the navies of India, Japan and Indonesia took part in the maiden trilateral exercise involving the three countries in the Andaman Sea on February 13, 2026, boosting combined operational readiness and interoperability and reinforcing maritime cooperation towards a safe, secure and stable region⁶⁵. The exercise signals the development of a new middle power coalition, one involving a key ASEAN member state, to provide maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

HMS Anson to Undergo Maintenance in Australia. HMS Anson, the Royal Navy's only operational Astute Class SSN, arrived at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia to undergo the first ever maintenance period on a British SSN in Australia⁶⁶. The deployment is part of the optimal plan developed under the AUKUS agreement to provide Australia with SSN capability.

Indian Navy Assumes Command of CTF 154. The Indian Navy assumed command of CTF 154 for the first time on February 11, when Cmde Milind Mokashi, SC, took over from Cmde Andrew Bielli of the Italian Navy⁶⁷. Established in May 2023, CTF 154 trains partner navies and improves their operational capabilities to enhance maritime security in the Middle East.

India US Trade Deal. US President Donald Trump announced on February 02 that the US had reached a trade agreement with India that would reduce to 18% the punishing 50% tariffs the US had placed on Indian imports⁶⁸. The two countries released a joint

⁶⁴ The Navy Chief of Staff aims to have Indonesia's first aircraft carrier ready before the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) anniversary, February 12, 2026, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/5412442/ksal-targetkan-kapal-induk-pertama-indonesia-hadir-sebelum-hut-tni>

⁶⁵ Japan-India-Indonesia Trilateral Exercise, February 16, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202602/20260216en.pdf>

⁶⁶ AUKUS enters new era with the arrival of UK submarine into Western Australia, February 22, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-02-22/aucus-enters-new-era-arrival-uk-submarine-into-western-australia>

⁶⁷ Indian Navy Assumes First-Ever Command of Combined Task Force (CTF) 154, February 12, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2226776®=3&lang=1>

⁶⁸ Trump Announced Trade Deal with India to Reduce Tariffs, February 02, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/02/us/politics/trump-tariffs-india-trade-deal.html>

statement on February 06⁶⁹. The statement said that India intends to purchase \$500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal over the next five years.

Exercise Cutlass Express. Exercise Cutlass Express 2026 took place in Port Louis, Mauritius, from February 2-12⁷⁰. The exercise brings together 19 partner nations to improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity and promote regional security in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean. India was among the participating nations.

Agni-3 Test Firing. India successfully test fired the Agni-3 IRBM from ITR Chandipur on February 06⁷¹. The missile has a range of 3000 Km and has been in service with India's Strategic Forces since 2011.

IAF RTAF Exercise. The Indian and Thai Air Forces conducted an exercise in the Indian Ocean from February 09-12, operating from bases in the A&N islands and in Thailand respectively⁷².

Germany May Join GCAP Fighter Programme. Germany is reported to be considering joining the Italy-Japan-UK joint venture to develop the GCAP fighter, according to media reports⁷³. The programme is seen as a more viable alternative than the ongoing Future Combat Air System (FCAS) it is developing with France and Spain. Germany has already ordered 35 US F-35 aircraft to replace its ageing Tornado fleet. Joining GCAP would align with Germany's goal to maintain sovereign, next generation fighter technology while fostering deeper European-Asian industrial collaboration.

PLAN J-15 Seen Equipped with YJ-15 Hypersonic Missiles. A carrier-borne PLAN J-15 was seen equipped with China's latest anti-ship missile, the YJ-15⁷⁴. While China

⁶⁹ United States India Joint Statement, February 06, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/02/united-states-india-joint-statement/>

⁷⁰ Exercise Cutlass Express 2026 to Enhance Maritime Security in East Africa, February 04, 2026, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4397194/exercise-cutlass-express-2026-to-enhance-maritime-security-in-east-africa/>

⁷¹ Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile 'Agni-3' successfully test-fired, February 06, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2224636®=3&lang=1>

⁷² The Indian Air Force (IAF) Conducts in-situ Joint Exercise with Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) in the Indian Ocean Region, February 13, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2227536®=3&lang=1>

⁷³ Germany considers jointing GCAP fighter project with Japan, UK and Italy, February 11, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/02/11/japan/germany-fighter-jet-program/>

⁷⁴ Chinese Carrier-based Fighter Seen Equipped with New Supersonic Anti-Ship Missile, February 10, 2025, <https://news.usni.org/2026/02/10/chinese-carrier-based-fighter-seen-equipped-with-new-supersonic-anti-ship-missile>

has yet to release the missile specifications, analysis indicates that it can strike targets 1200 – 1800 Km away and achieve speeds in excess of Mach 5. The J-15 has hitherto been equipped with YJ-12 anti-ship missiles, with a 500 Km range and supersonic speeds.

DAC Accords AON for Procurement of Rafale, P-8I Aircraft. The Defence Acquisition Council accorded Acceptance of Necessity for the procurement of 114 Rafale aircraft, six P-8I Poseidon aircraft and other projects collectively valued at ₹3.6 lakh crores (about \$ 40 billion)⁷⁵. The proposals will now be tendered, after which they will move to the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) for final approval.

Launch of CTS Krishna. Yard 18003 Krishna, the first of three Cadet Training Ships being built by M/s L&T Kattupalli was launched on February 16⁷⁶. The ship is expected to be delivered by the end of 2026.

Commissioning of INS Anjadip. INS Anjadip, the third ASW Shallow Water Craft built by GRSE Kolkata, was commissioned into the Indian Navy at Chennai on February 27⁷⁷. The ship is designed to act as a submarine hunter, focused on the detection, tracking, and neutralisation of enemy submarines in coastal areas.

Mission Jeanne d'Arc. FS Dixmunde and FS Aconit departed from Toulon on February 17, for deployment to the Middle East, East Africa and the Indo-Pacific⁷⁸. The five month long annual deployment will visit Djibouti, Mombasa, Dare-es-Salaam, Mayotte, Reunion, Jakarta, Bali, Singapore, Colombo, Kochi and Abu Dhabi. It will also participate in Exercise La Perouse 2026 in the Indian Ocean.

Exercise Dharma Guardian. The seventh edition of Exercise Dharma Guardian, involving the Indian Army and the Japanese Ground Self Defence Force, kicked off at Chaubattia, in Uttarakhand, from February 24 – March 09⁷⁹. The exercise is intended

⁷⁵ DAC clears Rs 3.6 lakh crores worth of capital acquisition proposals to enhance the combat readiness of defence forces, February 12, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2227018®=3&lang=1>

⁷⁶ Launch of First Cadet Training Ship - Krishna at M/S L&T Kattupalli, Chennai, February 16, 2026,

<https://indiannavy.gov.in/content/launch-first-cadet-training-ship-krishna-ms-lt-kattupalli-chennai>

⁷⁷ Indian Navy to Commission Anjadip, February 23, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2231754®=3&lang=1>

⁷⁸ French Navy Kicks off Jeanne d'Arc Middle East, Pacific Deployment, February 19, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/02/19/french-navy-kicks-off-jeanne-darc-middle-east-pacific-deployment>

⁷⁹ India-Japan Joint Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' Commences in Chaubattia, Uttarakhand, February 24, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2232191®=3&lang=1>

to strengthen military collaboration and enhance combined capabilities to undertake joint operations in a semi-urban environment.

Exercise Vajra Prahar. The 16th edition of India US Joint Special Forces exercise Vajra Prahar ran from February 24 - March 16 at Bakloh, in Himachal Pradesh⁸⁰. The exercise is designed to strengthen combined capabilities for conducting joint Special Forces operations in mountainous terrain.

New Zealand Positions Defence Attache in India. To implement the India New Zealand MoU on Defence Cooperation signed during the visit of PM Christopher Luxon to India in March 2025, New Zealand appointed Cmde Andy Dowling to take up the appointment of Defence Adviser at the New Zealand High Commission in New Delhi⁸¹. The officer assumed charge in late January 2026.

⁸⁰ India-US Joint Special Forces Exercise Vajra Prahar to be Conducted in Himachal Pradesh, February 24, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2232288®=3&lang=1>

⁸¹ New NZDF appointment underscores growing defence relationship with India, January 20, 2026, <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/news/ew-nzdf-appointment-underscores-growing-defence-relationship-with-india/>



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