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Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

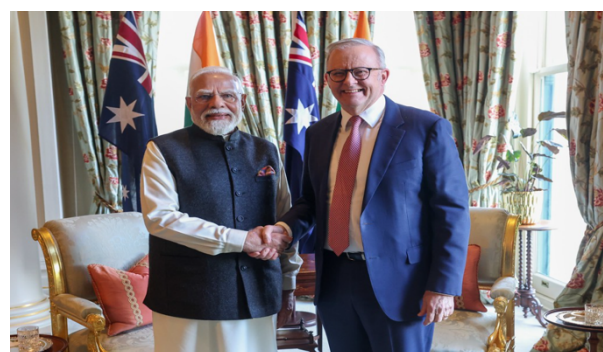
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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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, Research Associate, 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](#).

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Cover Images:

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi meet at Hyderabad House, New Delhi, on July 02, 2026. Source: PIB
2. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is received by Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto at Jakarta Airport on July 06, 2026. Source: MEA Photo Gallery
3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at Melbourne on July 09, 2026. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

July 2026

Abstract

The 16th India-Japan Summit held in New Delhi on July 02 saw the announcement of the first bilateral defence co-development project, for the UNICORN naval ship antenna. The author explores the evolution of bilateral defence cooperation over the years, observing that the real potential of the relationship to advance regional stability lies in increased defence industrial collaboration.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Indonesia from July 07-08, the first leg of his tour of the Indo-Pacific. A significant development was the announcement that India would export Brahmos and Astra missiles to Indonesia. However, bilateral trade and investment have not delivered on potential, while defence and maritime security cooperation is still at a nascent stage.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Australia followed from July 08-10, continuing the transformation in bilateral relations. Significant outcomes were an upgraded joint declaration on defence and security cooperation, a maritime security cooperation roadmap, a joint statement on energy security, finalisation of the administrative arrangement for the bilateral civil nuclear agreement, and the announcement of a partnership for cyber, critical technologies and supply chains.

In the final leg, PM Modi visited New Zealand from July 10-11, reflecting India's expanding relationships in Oceania. This was the first visit by an Indian PM to that country in four decades. New Zealand became India's 46th strategic partner, and the two countries set ambitious targets for the next five years.

Quad Foreign Ministers met in Manila on July 22 and reiterated their unwavering support for ASEAN unity and centrality. They discussed opportunities to strengthen support for implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

The fragile ceasefire between Iran and the US broke down during the month. The US reimposed its blockade of Iranian ports, revoked its permission for Iran to export oil and repeatedly struck Iranian targets, while Iran's countered with missile and drone strikes on US bases in Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan. Meanwhile, the Houthis declared a blockade on Saudi ships using the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb.



India commissioned two warships, INS Mahendragiri and INS Malvan, during the month. India also conducted Operation Southern Readiness 26-2 at Kochi from July 20-23, as part of its ongoing leadership of the Coalition Maritime Force's CTF 154. Ships of India's Eastern Fleet completed their annual deployment to the Western Pacific with visits to Ho Chi Minh City, Sattahip and Singapore.

China continued to demonstrate its growing military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific through the first test of a Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile on July 6, live-firing exercises in the vicinity of a Japan-claimed island in the Philippines Sea, and physical enforcement of its claims in the Second Thomas Shoal and Scarborough Shoal.



Japan in India's Defence and Maritime Security Calculus

The 16th India-Japan Annual Summit on July 02, 2026, occurred at a time when Japan is strengthening its response to the deteriorating Asian security environment by consciously rethinking its pacifist post-war defence posture and assuming greater responsibility for its own defence. It has formally removed decades old restrictions enabling export of lethal weapons such as warships and submarines to partner countries, including India¹. Enabling legislation has been passed to establish a national intelligence agency². Japan's National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and Defence Buildup Programme are being revised. Defence spending has hit the 2% of GDP target ahead of schedule, and the pledge to transform the country's defence capabilities in the next five years indicates that it could rise further³. What do these developments portend for India – Japan defence cooperation?

The security environment in Asia's maritime faces, the Indian and Pacific Oceans (the Indo-Pacific), continues to deteriorate. Two fundamentally opposed regional visions compete with each other to reshape developmental and security structures throughout the region. Authoritarian and revisionist China preaching national rejuvenation seeks to establish its hegemony and drive US power out of Asia, replacing the existing Western-led regional order with a Sinocentric one. It has propagated five normative visions, beginning with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to transform the geo-economic landscape across the region in its favour by financing connectivity and power infrastructure to extract natural resources to feed its growth. The BRI has been characterised by inadequate project evaluation resulting in returns falling well short of expectations; elite capture and opaque lending processes locking host countries into unfavourable terms without public or legislative oversight; control over critical mineral resources passing to China, debt traps that force nations to hand over strategic infrastructure (as in Hambantota, Djibouti and Gwadar); and the export of China's excess industrial capacity to secure geopolitical footholds. Next is the Global Developmental Initiative (GDI) of 2021 with its eight focal areas intended to benefit the Global South⁴, amidst continuing concerns about disregard for environmental and social standards, hidden terms and elite capture, the

¹ See Lalit Kapur, "Japan Approves Changes in Rules on Arms Exports" in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume VII Issue 4, April 2026, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%204.pdf

² Japan's parliament passes bill to create national intelligence bureau, May 27, 2026, https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20260527_12/

³ Jesse Johnson, "Japan reveals hint of new defense spending target in fiscal blueprint", July 21, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/07/21/japan/politics/japan-defense-spending-target-fiscal-blueprint/>

⁴ China Primer: China's Global Development Initiative, September 08, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13099>

favouring of Chinese firms and labour over local resources, and the creation of dependencies.

Third is the Global Security Initiative (GSI), proposed by President Xi Jinping in April 2022⁵. It propagates cooperative and indivisible security, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, adherence to the UN Charter, and peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue. However, China's actions in the South and East China Seas and on its border with India contradict these lofty pronouncements. The GSI has thus become a ploy to establish China's hegemonic power. Fourth is the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI) introduced by President Xi in 2023⁶. The GCI prioritises absolute national sovereignty over human rights, legitimises the China's repression in Xinjiang and Tibet, erodes democratic values and enables China's influence over pliable elites, particularly in the Global South. Finally, there is the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) proposed by Xi Jinping in September 2025⁷. This seeks to democratise international relations while offering an alternate Sino-centric vision of global order, but undermines universal values and legitimises authoritarian regimes.

In execution of these normative visions, China has developed alternate multilateral organisations (such as BRICS and the SCO) and institutions (AIIB and NDB), disregarded existing international law with impunity (as in the South China Sea Arbitral Award), set out non-negotiable core interests, made its law applicable to emigrants in extra-territorial jurisdictions, indulged in extensive economic and grey zone coercion, and launched a massive military modernisation programme, including unprecedented expansion of its maritime capability and deployment.

But China is only part of the rising challenges to the maritime commons and the rule of maritime law. In the Western Indian Ocean, Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz in response to US aggression has changed the fundamental precept of freedom of navigation, severely restricting the export of hydrocarbons from the region and thus impacting the regional and global economy. Threats by the Houthis to close the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb threaten maritime connectivity between Europe and Asia. North Korean threats in the Western Pacific continue unabated. Non-traditional threats to security, including piracy, terrorism, trafficking in people, narcotics and weapons, and IUU fishing are growing.

⁵ Full Text: President Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the opening ceremony of BFA annual conference 2022, April 21, 2022, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202204/21/content_WS62616c3bc6d02e5335329c22.html

⁶ Full text of Xi Jinping's keynote address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting, March 16, 2023, http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/2023-03/16/content_85171478.htm

⁷ Full text of Xi Jinping's speech at the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus' Meeting, September 01, 2025, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202509/01/content_WS68b584acc6d0868f4e8f53c8.html

The competing vision, at its core, prioritises the retention of political, economic, developmental and security freedoms without being subject to coercion. Its constituent pillars are respect for sovereignty, independence and freedom of choice; respect for international law (including UNCLOS) and peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with law; and free, fair and open trade. Japan's FOIP, initially introduced by Shinzo Abe⁸ and now upgraded by Sanae Takaichi⁹, is a subset of this vision. So is India's MAHASAGAR, which focuses on mutual security for a shared future; building robust supply chain networks and increasing regional trade; and capacity building for sustainable growth.

A parallel vision is the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific¹⁰, which espouses essentially the same principles as FOIP, but through ASEAN-centric eyes. These prioritise inclusivity and the centrality of ASEAN. However, while a bureaucratic organisation focused on political, economic and socio-cultural advancement can turn a blind eye towards China's burgeoning military capability, its increasingly coercive outlook and the increasingly obvious contradictions between China's words and actions, nation states cannot.

Effective defence and security cooperation between India and Japan is a long-standing political aspiration beginning with the post Pokhran-II revival of bilateral relations by the visit of then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to India¹¹. Enhanced security dialogue and cooperation was the third of eight initiatives identified in the joint statement of 2005¹². Areas of defence and security cooperation, together with mechanisms, were identified when India's Defence Minister visited Tokyo in May 2006¹³; these were formalised in a joint declaration on security cooperation in 2008¹⁴. This declaration did not, however, envisage defence industry cooperation.

The desire for cooperation received impetus when the late Shinzo Abe elucidated his democratic security diamond thesis, envisaging that Australia, India, Japan and the US form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian

⁸ Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>

⁹ Foreign Policy Speech by Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae, Mat 2, 2026, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/speech/202605/02fpspeech.html>

¹⁰ ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf

¹¹ Prime Minister Mori made a State Visit to India from August 21-25, 2000, during which both countries agreed to enter into a security dialogue, see https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha?dtl/9764/Q_493_Visit_of_Japanese_PM

¹² Joint Statement, India-Japan Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of India-Japan Global Partnership, April 29, 2005, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/6627/>

¹³ Joint Statement, Visit of Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of Defence to Japan, May 25, 2006, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/6159/Joint_Statement_Visit_of_Mr_Pranab_Mukherjee_Minister_of_Defence_to_Japan

¹⁴ Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan, October 22, 2008, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5408/>

Ocean to the Western Pacific¹⁵. Defence and security cooperation became the first pillar as India and Japan elevated bilateral relations to a special strategic and global partnership and set out Vision 2025¹⁶. They concluded their agreement on the transfer of defence equipment and technology at this time. The joint declaration on defence and security cooperation was upgraded in August 2025¹⁷. Progress in defence industry cooperation, however, remained slow. It fixated for long on the transfer of Shinmaya US-II amphibian aircraft to India at a prohibitive cost. Joint development projects for unmanned ground vehicles and robotics did not deliver results.

The 16th India-Japan Annual Summit on July 02, which brought Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to New Delhi for the first time, continued talking about increasing defence cooperation. A day before the summit began, Takaichi reiterated Abe's statement about a strong India being good for Japan and a strong Japan being good for India¹⁸, while expressing her conviction that leveraging each other's strengths and becoming more resilient and prosperous together would serve the interests of both nations. The joint statement identified defence and security cooperation as the first of three priority areas for advancing cooperation (the others being the economic partnership and people-to-people exchanges)¹⁹. Leaders of the two countries reaffirmed their commitment to deepening cooperation based on the joint declaration of 2025²⁰, and concurred on deepening maritime security cooperation through enhanced exercises, maritime domain awareness using satellite capabilities, naval maintenance, repair and overhaul cooperation, and defence equipment and technology cooperation. They expressed satisfaction at the agreement on the UNICORN project and concurred on exploring ways to materialise other such projects.

How far have the two countries actually come in their defence cooperation? The last two decades have witnessed substantial growth in dialogue. At the political level, Japan is one of the only two countries with which India has an annual summit and regular ministerial level dialogues (the other being Australia). The last India-Japan

¹⁵ Shinzo Abe, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond", December 12, 2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>

¹⁶ Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World, December 12, 2015, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/26176/Joint+Statement+on+India+and+Japan+Vision+2025+Special+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership+Working+Together+for+Peace+and+Prosperity+of+the+IndoPacific+R>

¹⁷ Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan, August 29, 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/40065/Joint+Declaration+on+Security+Cooperation+between+India+and+Japan+August+29+2025>

¹⁸ Takaichi Sanae, "Japan and India: Strategically Aligned Trusted Partnership" in the Times of India, July 01, 2026, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/101053051.pdf>

¹⁹ 16th India-Japan Annual Summit Joint Statement, July 02, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2280587®=48&lang=1>

²⁰ Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan, August 29, 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/40065/Joint+Declaration+on+Security+Cooperation+between+India+and+Japan+August+29+2025>

2+2 Ministerial Dialogue was held in August 2024²¹; perhaps the only deliverable in its joint statement was revision of the 2008 joint declaration on security cooperation, which has happened. Leaders have directed that the next 2+2 be held in the second half of the current year. Defence Ministers of India and Japan have been meeting regularly; the last such meeting was in May 2025²², and reports indicate that Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi will visit India in August 2026²³. At the senior bureaucratic level, the 8th India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue took place in Tokyo in July 2026²⁴. The last maritime security dialogue between the two countries took place in April 2025²⁵. At the military level, the 11th IN-JMSDF Staff Talks took place in January 2026²⁶, the 8th Indian Army-JGSDF Staff Talks took place in April 2026²⁷, the 6th IAF-JASDF staff talks took place in June 2025²⁸, while the 2nd Joint Service Staff Talks took place in November 2024²⁹. These exchanges have advanced mutual understanding and resulted in the conclusion of a number of bilateral military agreements, including for the protection of classified military information, transfer of defence equipment and technology, enhanced domain awareness and information sharing between the IN and the JMSDF, and the reciprocal provision of defence supplies³⁰.

Service-to-service engagement through joint exercises have also increased substantially. The seventh edition of ground forces exercise Dharma Guardian was held in February/March 2026³¹. The first ever amphibious engagement between the countries took place in Thiruvanthapuram in February 2026³². The ninth edition of the India-Japan Maritime Exercise JIMEX took place off Japan in October 2025³³. The

²¹ Joint Statement: Third India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting, August 20, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/38190/Joint+Statement+Third+IndiaJapan+22+Foreign+and+Defence+Ministerial+Meeting>

²² Raksha Mantri holds bilateral meeting with his Japanese counterpart in New Delhi, May 05, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2127087®=3&lang=2>

²³ India, Japan to Expand Defence Cooperation, Discuss Indo-Pacific Security, July 16, 2026, <https://www.freepressjournal.in/world/india-japan-to-expand-defence-cooperation-discuss-indo-pacific-security>

²⁴ Defence Secretary and Japanese Vice Minister of Defence for International Affairs co-chair 8th India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue in Tokyo, July 13, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2284070®=6&lang=1>

²⁵ India-Japan Bilateral Relations, https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/eoityo_pages/NzE, <https://x.com/indiannavy/status/2017179991172419610>

²⁶ <https://x.com/IndianEmbTokyo/status/2047550341907177763>

²⁷ https://x.com/IAF_MCC/status/1930630862195900584

²⁸ India-Japan Joint Service Staff Talks (JSST) concluded in New Delhi, November 20, 2024, <https://newsonair.gov.in/india-japan-joint-service-staff-talks-jsst-concluded-in-new-delhi/>

²⁹ Agreement Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of India Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Indian Armed Forces, September 09, 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100091751.pdf>

³⁰ 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>

³¹ JGSDF, February 09, 2026, https://x.com/Japan_GSDF/status/2020769647188967696

³² Japan India Maritime Exercise (JAIMEX) - 2025, October 22, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2181539®=48&lang=2>

IAF and JASDF conducted the inaugural Exercise Veer Guardian in January 2023³⁴. Armed Forces of the two countries also meet in multinational exercises such as Milan, Malabar, Sea Dragon, Talisman Sabre, Pitch Black, Kakadu and Rimpac.

In addition, the two countries have significantly increased their operational presence in each other's operating areas. JMSDF ships, beginning with JS Sazanami and JS Samidare, commenced Japan's first anti-piracy escort mission in the Horn of Africa in March 2009. P-3C maritime patrol aircraft also started deploying in the region in June 2009, operating from the US Camp Lemonnier; Japan transitioned to an independent base in Djibouti in July 2011. It participates in the activities of CTF 151 in the Horn of Africa as well as the training activities of CTF 154, including Operational Southern Readiness in Kochi in July 2026³⁵. On the other hand, Indian warships have deployed to the Western Pacific more often since 2014, though not for prolonged periods.

Nevertheless, increased dialogue, service-to-service exchanges and presence in each other's operating areas are not enough to address the growing challenges to the maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific. Only increased cooperation in defence equipment and technology offers the requisite transformational potential, especially following Japan's removal of restrictions on defence exports. Yet it is this area where progress has remained slow. Japan's advanced defence industry is handicapped by its high production costs and could gain substantially from linking up with India's skilled yet low-cost manpower base. This will enable Japan's defence products to become more competitive throughout the region. The agreement for joint production of the Nomura Unicorn antenna, the first outcome in over a decade of effort, could open the doors to other such cooperative arrangements. High impact areas for cooperation include maritime ballistic missile systems, underwater technology, cheaper counters to anti-access and area denial systems such as missiles and drones, etc. India has expressed interest in tank and aero engines³⁶, as well as surveillance and unmanned systems³⁷, among others.

Presently fitted on Japan's Mogami-class frigates, the unicorn antenna is projected to equip India's future major surface combatants. However, Project 15B has ended and Project 17A will end later this year. Their successor projects are still on the drawing board and will not result in the commissioning of warships for at least a decade. Thus,

³⁴ IAF's Joint Air Defence Exercise with Japan, 'Veer Guardian 2023' concludes, January 27, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1894080®=48&lang=2>

³⁵ Over 25 nations to join Indian Navy-led maritime exercise in Kochi from July 20, July 16, 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/over-25-nations-to-join-indian-navy-led-maritime-exercise-in-kochi-from-july-20/article71230784.ece>

³⁶ Raksha Mantri holds bilateral meeting with his Japanese counterpart in New Delhi, May 05, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2127087®=3&lang=2>

³⁷ India-Japan Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister of Japan to India, September 14, 2017, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000289999.pdf>

it will be at least 10 years before an Indian warship fitted with a Unicorn antenna becomes operational. It remains to be seen whether the arrangement for its manufacture in India contains a provision for export to other countries.

India - Japan defence cooperation is driven by the shared vision of a free, open, interconnected, secure and stable region, where sovereignty is respected, disputes are resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law, freedom of navigation and a rules-based order prevails. This vision is increasingly challenged by China's reshaping of the regional environment through coercion and assertion, disdain for international law, mercantilism and influence operations. India and Japan don't depend on each other to address territorial challenges: India relies on its own capability to defend its land border with China, while Japan relies on its own capability and the alliance with the US to handle challenges in the East China Sea. Their focus is maritime security cooperation, where the present mechanisms are reaching structural limits. It is time to focus on what will truly increase the strength of both nations and contribute to regional stability. That is defence and security cooperation.

Engaging Indonesia

As an immediate maritime neighbour located astride all commercially used straits connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans and thus providing the maritime connectivity necessary for India's Act East Policy, a friendly, stable and secure Indonesia is a key foreign policy interest. The country has Southeast Asia's largest geographic spread, maritime zones and population. India's key objectives in Indonesia can be summarised as engaging for mutual benefit with ASEAN's only trillion dollar economy, balancing China's increasing economic and military influence, addressing challenges to choke point security, expanding critical minerals supply chains, and strengthening ASEAN centrality. Successive Indian leaders have invested substantially in building bilateral relations, with results visible in the strategic partnership of 2005³⁸ (India's first with a Southeast Asian country) and its upgradation to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018³⁹. Prime Minister Modi carried

³⁸ Joint Declaration between the Republic of India and the Republic of Indonesia, November 23, 2005, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/7067/Joint+Declaration+between+the+Republic+of+India+and+the+Republic+of+Indonesia>

³⁹ India-Indonesia Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia, May 30, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/29932/IndiaIndonesia+Joint+Statement+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+Indonesia+May+30+2018>

forward the momentum with a visit to Indonesia on July 07-08⁴⁰, as a continuation to that of President Prabowo to India in January 2025⁴¹.

Indonesian fighter jets escorted PM Modi's aircraft when it entered Indonesia's air space on the evening of July 07. President Prabowo received him personally at the airport. He bestowed Indonesia's highest civilian and military honour, the 'Bintang Adipurna of the Republic of Indonesia (Star of the Republic of Indonesia) on Modi, making him the second Indian Prime Minister, after Jawaharlal Nehru, to receive this award. Modi also became the first Indian Prime Minister to address Indonesia's parliament⁴². The two leaders inaugurated the beginning of restoration work at the Pramban Temple in Yogyakarta together, and President Prabowo joined Modi at a reception hosted for him by the Indian community. The visit optics, therefore, contained much to be satisfied about.

Less rosy is the picture on the trade and investment front. India's merchandise exports to Indonesia have declined from over \$10 billion in 2022-23 to just over \$5 billion in 2024-25. Imports from Indonesia have declined from nearly \$29 billion in 2022-23 to under \$23 billion in 2024-25⁴³. Indonesia has maintained a trade surplus with India to the tune of over \$17 billion for the last few years. India's investment in Indonesia is about \$1.73 billion, while that of Indonesia in India is about \$668.74 billion⁴⁴. Significantly, there was no mention of a bilateral trade target in the joint statement issued by the two sides.

Protectionism, domestic politics and a poorly negotiated ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA), as well as the absence of a bilateral trade agreement, limit India's exports to Indonesia. In February 2026, the Prabowo administration placed an order for 105,000 light commercial vehicles, valued at around \$ 1.5 billion, on Tatas (70,000 vehicles) and Mahindra (35,000 vehicles)⁴⁵. Indonesia's parliament and industry opposed the order on the grounds that Indonesia's automotive sector

⁴⁰ India-Indonesia Joint Statement on the State Visit by Prime Minister of India to Indonesia, July 07, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282084®=48&lang=1>

⁴¹ India - Indonesia Joint Statement on the State Visit of H.E. Prabowo Subianto, President of the Republic of Indonesia, January 26, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/38944/IndiaIndonesia_Joint_Statement_on_the_State_Visit_of_HE_Prabowo_Subianto_President_of_Republic_of_Indonesia_2326_January_2025

⁴² This happened nearly 13 years after China's President Xi Jinping addressed Indonesia's parliament in 2013 and set out his vision for a Maritime Silk Road.

⁴³ https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_trade

⁴⁴ Economic and Commercial Brief, Embassy of India Jakarta, May 2026, https://www.indianembassyjakarta.gov.in/users/assets/pdf/whatsnew/current_news_1219025182.pdf

⁴⁵ Indonesia order 105,000 trucks from India, February 19, 2026, <https://www.just-auto.com/news/indonesia-orders-105000-trucks-from-india/?cf-view>

could produce these trucks domestically⁴⁶. The order has been suspended, and 1000 vehicles that have already been delivered are idling at Jakarta.

An investment project that found mention was the integrated development of Sabang port. During his visit to India in May 2018, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan said Indonesia had agreed to allow India to invest in Sabang's port and economic zone, and noted that the port's 40 metre depth was suitable for all ships, including submarines⁴⁷, even though Indonesia's non-aligned foreign policy prohibits foreign military bases. He also noted that India - Indonesia relations were important for the balance of power in Asia. In the May 2018 India-Indonesia joint statement upgrading bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership, the leaders appreciated the decision to set up a Joint Task Force to undertake projects for port related infrastructure in and around Sabang⁴⁸. This task force met twice, in December 2019 and in December 2022. Mention of Sabang was dropped in the joint statement of the Prabowo visit to India in January 2025, but has resurfaced in the joint statement of July 2026, with a meeting of the Joint Task Force planned in the second half of the year. Bilateral cooperation in this project is framed as spanning tourism facilities, ship-building and repair, and shore-based services supporting offshore energy activities in the Andaman Sea. Whether this framing can go beyond an aspiration to project definition, financing and execution while successfully navigating Indonesia's domestic politics remains to be seen.

The slow pace of movement on Sabang Port also reflects persistent questions about its economic viability and the strategic benefits. India is simultaneously promoting the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) development project, which includes an international container trans-shipment terminal and a greenfield international airport⁴⁹, both intended for dual civil and military use. The commercial or strategic justification for investing in a competing port, that too in a neighbour country, just 90 nautical miles away, is dubious. India's strategic interests would be better served by investing in the development of an Indonesian port across the Malacca Strait, in Java, Kalimantan or Sulawesi, but these are not on offer. Meanwhile, Indonesia offered China port development projects in North Sumatra⁵⁰, Jakarta⁵¹, Sulawesi⁵² and North

⁴⁶ Indonesia Pauses Massive Import Order from Tata, Mahindra, February 27, 2026, <https://www.rushlane.com/indonesia-pauses-import-order-from-tata-mahindra-12540792.html>

⁴⁷ Indonesia gives India access to strategic port of Sabang, May 17, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indonesia-gives-india-access-to-strategic-port-of-sabang/story-KPXWKy7PGAHFUi0jCL26yJ.html>

⁴⁸ India-Indonesia Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia, May 30, 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/29932/IndiaIndonesia_Joint_Statement_during_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Indonesia_May_30_2018

⁴⁹ Great Nicobar Project, May 01, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?id=158406&NoteId=158406&ModuleId=3®=3&lang=2>

⁵⁰ Kuala Tanjung, undergoing expansion.

⁵¹ Tanjung Priok, now operational.

⁵² Morowali Industrial Park Port, now operational, and Bitung Port SEZ, currently in progress.

Kalimantan⁵³, among others. Three of these are operational, with the fourth well under way.

India and Indonesia signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2001; this was renewed in 2006 and upgraded in 2018. They also announced a shared vision of maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in 2018⁵⁴. This vision focuses on soft security, including promoting maritime safety and security. The third edition of the India-Indonesia Defence Ministers' Dialogue took place in November 2025⁵⁵ and there has been progress on some of its commitments. Service chiefs of the two countries exchange visits, and annual staff talks are held between the three services. The 46th edition of the India-Indonesia CORPAT, started in 2002, was held in May 2026⁵⁶. India participates in Indonesian exercises Samudra Shakti and Garuda Shakti, as well as in Super Garuda Shield (as an observer) and Komodo; while Indonesia participates regularly in the Indian Navy's Exercise Milan. An Indonesian liaison officer was positioned in IFC (IOR) Gurugram just before the Modi visit⁵⁷. In a significant development, India agreed to export Brahmos cruise missiles and the Astra AAM to Indonesia.

On the other hand, India and Indonesia have not yet been able to conclude a White Shipping Agreement, despite the 2018 commitment to enhancing information sharing related to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region⁵⁸. Their vision for maritime cooperation is restricted to enhancing trade and investment, sustainable development of marine resources, disaster risk management, tourism and cultural exchanges, academic and science and technology cooperation, and limited cooperation in promoting the regional architecture for maritime safety and security, anchored in ASEAN led mechanism. There is only symbolic cooperation in improving maritime security coordination in what has emerged as one of the world's most piracy and armed robbery afflicted areas.

While India and Indonesia concluded their continental shelf boundary agreement five decades ago, negotiations to delimit their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) are stalled due to a fundamental disagreement over baseline calculations: India wants the EEZ

⁵³ In the planning stage.

⁵⁴ Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, May 30, 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/29933/Shared_Vision_of_IndiaIndonesia_Maritime_Cooperation_in_the_IndoPacific

⁵⁵ Raksha Mantri and his Indonesian counterpart co-chair 3rd India-Indonesia Defence Ministers' Dialogue in New Delhi, Agree to further deepen defence ties, November 27, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2195269®=48&lang=2>

⁵⁶ https://x.com/AN_Command/status/2056984642260234349

⁵⁷ https://x.com/IFC_IOR/status/2072306007112601674

⁵⁸ Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, May 30, 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/29933/Shared_Vision_of_IndiaIndonesia_Maritime_Cooperation_in_the_IndoPacific

boundary to be based on the baseline used for determining the boundaries of the continental shelf, while Jakarta contends that the concept of an EEZ did not exist when the continental shelf agreement was signed, and a different baseline should be used for the EEZ boundary negotiations. Different baselines potentially create a situation where resources under the sea bed may be owned by one country, while those in the water column are owned by the other, leading to jurisdictional conflict, enforcement issues and conflict in resource extraction. The International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) has ruled conclusively in favour of a single baseline, including in the Qatar vs Bahrain case of 2001, the Romania vs Ukraine case of 2009, and the Somalia vs Kenya case in 2021.

In other visit developments, both leaders agreed to hold regular summit meetings including on the sidelines of multilateral events. They expressed a desire for timely conclusion of the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) review, followed by a comprehensive deeper bilateral trade engagement. They underscored the importance of further strengthening collaboration in critical minerals and rare earths, with a focus on building diversified and resilient supply chains. PM Modi appreciated Indonesia's continued support to the Gaganyaan Mission through the Biak Telemetry, Tracking and Command facilities, while President Prabowo appreciated India's support for the launch of Indonesian satellites (India has launched three Indonesian satellites, with the last launch on June 22, 2016⁵⁹). The two leaders welcomed the proposed setting up of a campus by IIM Bangalore in Indonesia.

Notwithstanding signs of increasing convergence between two neighbours, there are irritants in bilateral ties. Trade is heavily skewed in Indonesia's favour, driven by large Indian imports of thermal coal⁶⁰ and palm oil⁶¹. There are concerns about protectionism, as in Indonesia holding up import of light commercial vehicles from India, or non-tariff barriers holding up export of India's pharmaceutical products or bovine meat. Indonesia depends substantially on China for its infrastructure financing, as well as the critical minerals sector. India's GNI project causes strategic unease in Indonesia. It avoids taking sides on China matters, whereas India seeks a strategic balance. There is the baggage of history, with the memory of Indonesia's pro-Pakistan stance during the 1965 Indo-Pak war not yet having been overcome.

In sum, the Modi visit to Indonesia continued progress in bilateral engagement, without any path-breaking developments. Much will hinge on the delivery of commitments made during this visit. However, Indonesia's own search for regional primacy, its much greater financial and technological links with China and its viewing

⁵⁹ List of Foreign Satellites Launched by ISRO, <https://www.isro.gov.in/ForeignSatellites.html#>

⁶⁰ India sources about 100 million metric tonnes of thermal coal from Indonesia annually, about 60% of its total requirement.

⁶¹ India imports over 4.2 million metric tonnes from Indonesia annually, about 50% of its requirement.

everything through an ASEAN-centric lens limits how far India-Indonesia cooperation can develop.

The Third India Australia Summit

Bilateral relations between India and Australia have come a long way since November 2014, when Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Australia in over three decades⁶². That visit provided a fillip to bilateral relations, which had gone into hibernation after the two countries entered into a strategic partnership in 2009⁶³ and made a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation⁶⁴. It resulted in the establishment of a framework for bilateral security cooperation⁶⁵. The two countries upgraded their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership in June 2020, with maritime cooperation for an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and defence cooperation as key pillars⁶⁶. They also articulated a shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific⁶⁷. The first India Australia annual summit took place in March 2023⁶⁸, and the second in November 2024⁶⁹. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Melbourne for the third India Australia Annual Summit from July 08-10⁷⁰.

Modi was received on arrival at the airport by the Premier of Victoria. He was then given a traditional welcome by the Indian community at his hotel. On July 09, he attended the India-Australia CEOs Forum and the Economic Roadmap Business Reception. He was then accorded a ceremonial welcome and interacted with the Governor of Victoria, before going into a one-on-one interaction with Prime Minister Albanese, followed by delegation level talks. On July 10, he met the leader of

⁶² Joint Statement during Prime Minister's Visit to Australia, November 18, 2014, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/24267/>

⁶³ Joint Statement between India and Australia during visit of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, November 12, 2009, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5023/Joint Statement between India and Australia during visit of Prime Minister Kevin R udd](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5023/Joint+Statement+between+India+and+Australia+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+Kevin+Rudd)

⁶⁴ India-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation during visit of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, November 12, 2009, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5035/IndiaAustralia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation during visit of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5035/IndiaAustralia+Joint+Declaration+on+Security+Cooperation+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+Kevin+Rudd)

⁶⁵ Framework for Security Cooperation between India and Australia, November 18, 2014, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/24268/Framework for Security Cooperation between India and Australia](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/24268/Framework+for+Security+Cooperation+between+India+and+Australia)

⁶⁶ Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia, June 04, 2020, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32729/Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32729/Joint+Statement+on+a+Comprehensive+Strategic+Partnership+between+Republic+of+India+and+Australia)

⁶⁷ Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Between Republic of India and Government of Australia, June 04, 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/joint-declaration-shared-vision-maritime-cooperation-indo-pacific-between-republic-india-and-government-australia>

⁶⁸ Joint Statement, 1st India – Australia Annual Summit, March 11, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-1st-australia-india-annual-summit>

⁶⁹ Joint Statement: 2nd India-Australia Annual Summit, November 19, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/38547/Joint+Statement+2nd+IndiaAustralia+Annual+Summit>

⁷⁰ Third India-Australia Annual Summit Joint Statement, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-india-joint-statement>

Australia's opposition and visited Melbourne Cricket Ground with Prime Minister Albanese for his last official engagement.

18 outcomes were identified by India in the aftermath of the visit⁷¹. These include the Summit Joint Statement⁷², as well as joint statements on defence and security cooperation⁷³, energy security⁷⁴, cyber, critical technology and supply chains⁷⁵, and roadmap for sports collaboration⁷⁶. A roadmap on maritime security collaboration⁷⁷, finalisation of the administrative arrangements for the India-Australia civil nuclear agreement and an MoU between the Indian Coast Guard and Australia's Maritime Border Command were among the other significant outcomes.

The shared commitment to an open and rules-based Indo-Pacific, where nations are free to exercise rights and freedoms consistent with international law, including the freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes and opposition to unilateral actions to change the status quo, provides the foundation that has led to the remarkable growth of India-Australia relations over the last decade. The two countries are committed to strengthening cooperation both bilaterally, as well as through regional and multilateral institutions to address shared challenges, including through ASEAN, IORA and the PIF. Interestingly, the aspiration for an inclusive Indo-Pacific, which had formed part of the first⁷⁸ and second⁷⁹ India-Australia summits, was dropped in the most recent joint statement⁸⁰. This could reflect belated acknowledgement of the reality that given China's pursuit of a diametrically opposed Indo-Pacific vision, the vision shared by India and Australia cannot include China. Inexplicably, India did not sign on to the joint statement by 16 countries on the 10th anniversary of the South China Sea Tribunal award⁸¹, despite having come out openly

⁷¹ Lit of Outcomes: Visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Australia, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282739®=48&lang=1>

⁷² Third Australia - India Annual Summit Joint Statement, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-india-joint-statement>

⁷³ India - Australia Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282685®=48&lang=1>

⁷⁴ India - Australia Joint Statement on Energy Security, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282685®=48&lang=1>

⁷⁵ Australia - India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282692®=48&lang=1>

⁷⁶ India-Australia Roadmap for Sports Collaboration, July 09, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41442/IndiaAustralia_Roadmap_for_Sports_Collaboration

⁷⁷ Content not available in the public domain.

⁷⁸ 1st India-Australia Annual Summit: Joint Statement, March 10, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/36342/1st_IndiaAustralia_Annual_Summit_Joint_Statement_March_10_2023

⁷⁹ Joint Statement: 2nd India Australia Annual Summit, November 19, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/38547/Joint+Statement+2nd+IndiaAustralia+Annual+Summit>

⁸⁰ Third Australia - India Annual Summit Joint Statement, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-india-joint-statement>

⁸¹ Joint Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of the Philippines-China South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal Award, July 11, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/07/joint-statement-on-the-tenth-anniversary-of-the-philippines-china-south-china-sea-arbitral-tribunal-award/>

in support of the award in 2023⁸². Also notable was the elevation of defence and security cooperation as the first pillar of the joint statement and acknowledgement of the reality that it forms the cornerstone of the partnership in an increasingly complex strategic environment⁸³.

Within the defence and security cooperation pillar, the Prime Ministers welcomed the establishment of an annual defence ministers' dialogue; the second such dialogue was held in New Delhi in June 2026^{84,85}. They underscored the centrality of maritime cooperation to their Indo-Pacific vision and agreed to collaborate in information sharing, capability development, capacity building and operational coordination. They sought greater defence industry, research and material cooperation and looked forward to the placement of an Indian military instructor at the Australian Defence College in 2028-29. The two countries committed to consulting each other on defence-related Indo-Pacific developments that affect shared interests; increasing the complexity of their exercises; accelerating interoperability and information sharing; expanding aircraft deployment from each other's territories; deepening exchanges between personnel of their defence services; and exploring opportunities to cooperate in recruiting for skilled defence work forces. They also committed to expanding cooperation with the US and Japan.

Defence and security cooperation between India and Australia has indeed advanced substantially since the two countries upgraded relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2020. Australia is one of the only two countries with which India has both an annual summit and 2+2 foreign and defence ministerial dialogue (the other is Japan). The 10th edition of their bilateral defence policy talks took place in New Delhi on May 08, 2026⁸⁶. India's Army Chief visited Australia in February 2026⁸⁷, reciprocating the visit to India by his Australian counterpart in August 2025⁸⁸. Chiefs of the Navy and Air Force have also exchanged visits in recent years. The last Army-

⁸² Joint Statement on the 5th India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation, June 29, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/36743/Joint_Statement_on_the_5th_IndiaPhilippines_Joint_Commission_on_Bilateral_Cooperati
[on](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/36743/Joint_Statement_on_the_5th_IndiaPhilippines_Joint_Commission_on_Bilateral_Cooperati)

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Joint Statement on the Second India-Australia Defence Ministers' Dialogue, June 01, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2026-06-01/joint-statement-second-india-australia-defence-ministers-dialogue>

⁸⁵ See Lalit Kapur, "The Second India-Australia Defence Ministers' Meeting", Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume VII Issue VI, July 01, 2026, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%206.pdf

⁸⁶ 10th India-Australia Defence Policy Talks held in New Delhi, May 08, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2259170®=3&lang=1>

⁸⁷ Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi is Set to Proceed on Visit to Australia, February 14, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2228155®=3&lang=1>

⁸⁸ Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, Chief of Australian Army, Commences Four-Day Visit to India, August 11, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2155075®=48&lang=2>

Army Staff Talks were held in October 2025⁸⁹; the Navy-to-Navy Staff Talks in May 2024, and Air Staff Talks in May 2026⁹⁰. The two countries had also announced the establishment of Joint Staff Talks to progress joint exercises, operations and interoperability across all domains in October 2025⁹¹; there is, however, no report of these having been held thereafter. In sum, mechanisms for defence and security dialogue between the two countries are well-established.

India and Australia participate in bilateral and multilateral exercises across all three services. These include the bilateral military exercise AUSTRALIND⁹² and naval exercise AUSINDEX⁹³. At the multilateral level, India has become a regular participant in Australia's exercises Pitch Black⁹⁴, Talisman Sabre⁹⁵ and Kakadu⁹⁶, while Australia has been a regular participant in India's Exercise MILAN since 2003 and also participated in the inaugural Exercise Tarang Shakti in 2024. Both countries participate in the annual Exercise Malabar. Training exchanges between the two countries span multiple levels, while the bilateral Mutual Logistics Support Agreement signed in June 2020 has been operational since 2021. Maritime Patrol aircraft from the two countries enjoy access to each other's bases, enabling extension of their reach.

The economic front too has seen significant progress. India and Australia began negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in 2011; these were, however, suspended in 2016. Negotiations were re-launched in the wake of upgrading of relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2021. An interim Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) entered into force in December 2022⁹⁷, while the CECA still remains under negotiation. The MEA briefing following PM Modi's visit indicated that two-way trade between India and Australia has increased by 55%⁹⁸. Ministry of Commerce statistics indicate that India has a negative

⁸⁹ <https://x.com/adgpi/status/1984180270665494764>

⁹⁰ <https://x.com/airnewsalerts/status/2054547710016147682>

⁹¹ India-Australia Defence Ministers' Joint Statement, October 09, 2025, <https://mod.gov.in/sites/default/files/India-Australia-Defence-Ministers%E2%80%99-Joint-Statement.pdf>

⁹² The 4th edition of this exercise was held in Australia from 13-26 October 2025. See <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2178040®=48&lang=2>

⁹³ The 6th edition of this exercise was held in November 2025.

⁹⁴ The IAF first participated in 2018, and is currently participating in the 4th edition from July 20-August 07, 2026. See "IAF to Participate in Exercise Pitch Black 2026", June 16, 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iaf-to-participate-in-exercise-pitch-black-2026-in-australia/article71110194.ece>

⁹⁵ India became a participant for the first time in the 11th edition of the exercise held from July 13 – August 04, 2025. India's

⁹⁶ India has been a participant in this exercise since 2018. INS Nilgiri represented India at the most recent edition of this exercise, in March 2026.

⁹⁷ Australia – India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/in-force/australia-india-ecta>

⁹⁸ Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA on the Official Visit of Prime Minister to Australia, July 09, 2026, <https://www.mea.gov.in/media->

trade balance in the region of USD 6-8 billion during this period⁹⁹ (Australia's trade statistics indicate this in the region of USD 10 billion¹⁰⁰). Notably, India has invested more in Australia (A \$ 45.26 billion – about USD 31.67 billion) than the other way round (Australian investment in India is A \$ 26.83 billion – about USD 18.77 billion).

Security of energy supplies formed an important component of the visit, with a separate joint statement on energy security in which the two countries essentially committed to keeping their energy supply chains open¹⁰¹. Australia imports about 90% of its requirement of liquid fuels, with about 8% of this coming from India's refineries¹⁰². On the other hand, Australia provided around 40% (nearly 25 million tons) of India's requirement of coking coal in 2025 (with the US, Russia, Canada and Mozambique as other suppliers). India also imported about 10% of its requirement of LNG from Australia; this figure could increase following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and agreement between the two countries to further enhance energy trade.

The major development, however, was finalisation of the administrative arrangement for export of Australian Uranium to India. This could be important for India's target of generating 100 GW of nuclear energy by 2047, up from its current installed capacity of less than 9 GW. India produces only about 600 tonnes of Uranium annually from domestic sources at present, as against its requirement of about 1800 tonnes; the gap is currently fulfilled by imports from Kazakhstan, Canada and Uzbekistan. As India scales up its nuclear power generation, the annual gap is expected to rise to around 5000 tonnes. Australia, with by far the world's largest known reserves of Uranium, (followed by Kazakhstan, Canada and Namibia¹⁰³), could emerge as a major supplier, provided it can expand production which is currently limited to mines in South Australia due to political or legislative bans on mining in other states.

In other areas of cooperation, the two countries launched a partnership on cyber, critical technologies and supply chains¹⁰⁴. Comprising five pillars (supply chain resilience and diversification; critical technology; cybersecurity; digital resilience; and defence research collaboration), the partnership aims to support shared interests in

[briefings?dtl/41439/Transcript of Special briefing by MEA on the Official Visit of Prime Minister to Australia July 09 2026](#)

⁹⁹ Ministry of Commerce Trade Statistics for Australia, accessed on July 16, 2026, https://tradedat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_ttrade

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/inia-cef.pdf>

¹⁰¹ India – Australia Joint Statement on Energy Security, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282685®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰² Patrick Commins, "Seven charts that reveal how unprepared Australia was for the fuel crisis", March 24, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/mar/24/seven-charts-that-reveal-how-unprepared-australia-was-for-the-fuel-crisis>

¹⁰³ World Uranium Mining Production, January 20, 2026, <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/mining-of-uranium/world-uranium-mining-production>

¹⁰⁴ Australia – India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains, July 09, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2282692®=48&lang=1>

national and regional security, empower partners with greater digital choices, and strengthen both supply chains as well as global cyber resilience. It spells out arrangements for oversight and dialogue. The two countries agreed to set up a temporary space tracking terminal on Cocos Keeling Islands to support India's Gaganyaan Human Spaceflight Programme. A roadmap for sports collaboration was unveiled¹⁰⁵; this is in continuation of the 2014¹⁰⁶ agreement to cooperate in strengthening India's sporting capabilities, including through the establishment of a world class sports university (this has still not been done).

India and Australia do not see eye-to-eye on all issues. Australia is deeply embedded in the western security framework, while India prizes its strategic autonomy and shuns alliances. The perspectives of the two countries on Russia and its actions in Ukraine differ. Australia's primary geopolitical concerns about China focus on the lanes connecting it to the Western Pacific, including through the Indonesian Straits and the South and East China Seas, whereas India's concerns focus on its land border with China and Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean. Remaining differences still impede conclusion of the CECA. There are concerns about the targeting of the Indian community (including students) in Australia, as well as about terrorism directed at India. On the whole, however, these differences have been well-managed and subordinated to the convergences that bring the two countries together, including the challenge of China's dominant economic and military weight. Indians have emerged as India's largest overseas born group, with a strength of nearly 850,000 as per MEA statistics¹⁰⁷. The evolutionary progress in the relationship can be expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

A New Chapter in India New Zealand Relations

The final leg of Modi's tour to Southeast Asia and Oceania took him to Auckland, New Zealand, from July 10-11. It was the first Indian Prime Ministerial visit to New Zealand since Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, even though Kiwi Prime Ministers have visited

¹⁰⁵ India-Australia Roadmap for Sports Collaboration, July 09, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41442/IndiaAustralia_Roadmap_for_Sports_Collaboration

¹⁰⁶ Joint Statement During the Prime Minister's Visit to Australia, November 18, 2014, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/24267/>

¹⁰⁷ Population of Overseas Indians as of January 2026, <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians>

India in 2004¹⁰⁸, 2011¹⁰⁹, 2016¹¹⁰ and 2025¹¹¹. The country's geographic location (Southeast of Australia, far from shipping lanes used by India), focus (New Zealand has historically focused on Oceania and the Western Pacific, where its major trading partners lie, and has little interest in the Indian Ocean), the distance factor (India is over 10,000 Km from New Zealand), relatively small economy (New Zealand's GDP in 2025 was only around \$ 259 billion) and limited defence industry (New Zealand depends on the US, Australia and Canada for most of its military platforms) have held back the development of bilateral relations.

New Zealand's current Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has prioritised building the relationship with India; after assuming power, he visited India in March 2025 before going to China in June 2025. He has stated his belief that global rules-based system is rupturing, with a shift from rules to power, economics to security, and efficiency to resilience¹¹². This has resulted in New Zealand's effort to forge more middle power coalitions. Under his leadership, New Zealand has moved rapidly to conclude a Free Trade Agreement with India (negotiations began in 2009 and Kiwi Prime Minister John Keys committed to concluding an FTA during his 2016 visit¹¹³). Luxon also positioned a Kiwi Defence Adviser in New Delhi in January 2026¹¹⁴, fulfilling a commitment made by John Keys in 2011¹¹⁵, and will participate for the first time in the multinational IAF Exercise Tarang Shakti in September/October 2026¹¹⁶. Forging a strategic partnership with India (New Zealand's fourth after Australia, China, and the

¹⁰⁸ Visit of Rt. Hon. Helen Clarke, Prime Minister of New Zealand, October 16-20, 2004, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/7393/Visit_of_Rt_Hon_Helen_Clarke_Prime_Minister_of_New_Zealand_October_1620_2004

¹⁰⁹ Joint Statement on the State Visit of Prime Minister of New Zealand, June 28, 2011, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5011/Joint_Statement_on_the_State_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_New_Zealand

¹¹⁰ India - New Zealand Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister of New Zealand to India, October 26, 2016, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/27535/India_New_Zealand_Joint_Statement_during_visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_New_Zealand_to_India

¹¹¹ India - New Zealand Joint Statement, March 17, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/39197/India_New_Zealand_Joint_Statement_March_17_2025

¹¹² This belief was articulated by him in his address at the Raisina Dialogue 2025, see Lalit Kapur, "New Zealand's Prime Minister Visits India", Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume VI Issue 3, March 2025, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5292.pdf. It was repeated in his State of the Union Speech 2026 on January 19, 2026, see <https://www.national.org.nz/news/20260119-rt-hon-christopher-luxon-state-of-the-nation-speech-2026>

¹¹³ India - New Zealand Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister of New Zealand to India, October 26, 2016, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/27535/India_New_Zealand_Joint_Statement_during_visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_New_Zealand_to_India

¹¹⁴ 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/>

¹¹⁵ Joint Statement on the State Visit of Prime Minister of New Zealand, June 28, 2011, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5011/Joint_Statement_on_the_State_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_New_Zealand

¹¹⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DZE6he6zrbF/>

UK; although New Zealand is a US treaty ally under ANZUS, the US has suspended security obligations under the treaty since 1986) is another step along this path.

Prime Minister Modi arrived in Auckland late evening on July 10. In a special gesture, he was received at the airport by his counterpart. On July 11, he was given a traditional Māori welcome at the Government House, followed by the formal welcome. Discussions between the two Prime Ministers came next, first singly, then at the delegation level. Interaction with the business community followed. Modi departed New Zealand on the evening of July 11.

Ten documents and eight announcements formed the outcomes of the visit¹¹⁷. These include the joint statement¹¹⁸; the partnership roadmap to 2030¹¹⁹; a Memorandum of Arrangement establishing a framework for enhanced maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific through dialogue, coordination, information exchange, and joint activities; an arrangement to strengthen hydrographic cooperation; an arrangement for the provision of mutual logistics support between the Indian Navy and the New Zealand Defence Force (essentially an ACSA Agreement), an arrangement to establish a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism; and a memorandum of cooperation between disaster management agencies. The two countries upgraded bilateral relations to a strategic partnership (making New Zealand India's 46th strategic partner); set a target of doubling trade to NZ\$ 7 billion (about USD 4 billion) by 2030; established a maritime security dialogue; and announced that New Zealand has joined the maritime security pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative.

The joint statement and roadmap are based on six pillars. These include increased political and diplomatic engagement; defence and security cooperation; trade and economic cooperation; people, culture and sport; education, research, science and technology, and disaster management; and regional and multilateral cooperation. In the first pillar, the leaders agreed to regular reciprocal visits by Prime Ministers and other ministers, a foreign ministers' dialogue, annual meetings of senior diplomatic officials, and increased parliamentary exchanges. Notably, a biennial ministerial dialogue and annual foreign ministry consultations at senior officer level had formed part of the 2016 joint statement also, but had remained unimplemented¹²⁰.

¹¹⁷ List of Outcomes: Official Visit of Prime Minister to New Zealand, July 11, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2283528®=48&lang=1>

¹¹⁸ India-New Zealand Joint Statement, July 11, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2283527®=48&lang=1>

¹¹⁹ India-New Zealand Strategic Partnership: Roadmap to 2030, July 11, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2283529®=48&lang=1>

¹²⁰ India - New Zealand Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister of New Zealand to India, October 26, 2016, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/27535/India-New-Zealand-Joint-Statement-during-visit-of-Prime-Minister-of-New-Zealand-to-India>

In defence and security cooperation, the two leaders agreed to maintain a regular structured engagement at the Defence Ministry and Service levels. They also agreed to strengthen cooperation in maritime matters, counter terrorism, cyber security and related security challenges, as well as to strengthen law enforcement cooperation to combat transnational and organised crime. They committed to establishing an annual maritime security dialogue, led by the respective foreign ministries.

China is presently New Zealand's largest trading partner, with total trade valued at NZ\$ 42.11 billion (about USD 24.6 billion), with New Zealand having a surplus of around NZ\$ 4 billion¹²¹. Trade with India is currently valued at NZ\$ 3.94 billion (about USD 2.3 billion), with NZ having a small surplus¹²². The merchandise trade component of this is a little over USD 1 billion, with India having a small trade surplus¹²³. The Prime Ministers welcomed the signing of the FTA and looked to its being brought into force early. They set a modest trade target of NZ\$ 7 billion (a little over USD 4 billion) for 2030. Reports indicate that NZ also committed to investing USD 20 billion in India¹²⁴, although this figure was not connected with the Modi visit.

India and New Zealand share the vision of an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, peaceful and prosperous (notably, the word 'inclusive' was not used in the joint statement), where sovereignty and territorial integrity are respected and the rules-based international order is upheld. The vision encompasses freedom of navigation and overflight and other uses of the sea in accordance with international law, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the centrality of ASEAN. The two countries also share similar views on the major international issues of the day, including UN reform, restoration of trade flows through the Strait of Hormuz, resilient supply chains, and condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations including the cross-border variety.

There is virtually no domestic opposition in India to strengthening relations with New Zealand, but the reverse is not true. The current New Zealand Foreign Minister (and the leader of the New Zealand First party) had, in his Ministry's Foreign Policy document of 2024, committed to significantly increasing focus on India¹²⁵, but has

¹²¹ https://statisticsnz.shinyapps.io/trade_dashboard/

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ https://tradedat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_ttrade

¹²⁴ Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA on Official Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to New Zealand, July 11, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/41457/Transcript_of_Special_Briefing_by_MEA_on_Official_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_Narendra_Modi_to_New_Zealand_July_11_2026

¹²⁵ See foreword to 'Strategic Intentions 2024-28' published by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/About-us-Corporate/MFAT-strategies-and-frameworks/Strategic-Intentions-2024-2028.pdf>

emerged as a vocal opponent of the India New Zealand FTA¹²⁶. His party, moreover, is projected to increase its vote share in the next election¹²⁷. Future prospects for the relationship will, therefore, be determined not only by fulfilment of the ambitious commitments made by the leaders during the visit, but also by New Zealand domestic politics.

Iran US Confrontation in the Strait of Hormuz

The confrontation between Iran and the US entered its sixth month, with no signs of resolution on the horizon. Though multiple differences remain between the two countries (Iran's nuclear aspirations, its support for regional proxies in Lebanon and Yemen, restoration of freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, the threat from its missiles and drones, historical mistrust between the two governments and sanctions on Iran), it is the maritime issue, with Iran seeking to control passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, that dominated developments during the month.

To recapitulate, the Iran US Memorandum of Understanding of June 17, 2026, had called for opening the Strait of Hormuz and the immediate commencement of traffic of commercial vessels through the Strait¹²⁸. Iran had shortly after signing made clear its stand that the Strait of Hormuz would not return to its pre-war operating framework¹²⁹, and that the only route authorised for traffic was through its territorial waters, closer to the northern side of the Strait. The US expectation, on the other hand, was that passage through the Strait would be in line with applicable international law and the sovereign rights of coastal states. The US tried to open up a route passing through Omani territorial waters, resulting in Iran carrying out drone strikes on ships using what it viewed as an unauthorised route.

Matters escalated following an Iranian attack on three ships using the Strait on July 07¹³⁰. The next day, Trump said that the temporary truce with Iran was over and called its leaders "scum" and "evil people"¹³¹. The US revoked the licence it had granted

¹²⁶ Aditya Raj Kaul, "Bad Deal: New Zealand Foreign Minister Slams India Trade Deal", December 23, 2025, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/bad-deal-new-zealand-foreign-minister-slams-india-trade-agreement-9886388>

¹²⁷ Fox Meyer, "Polling data hints at record election performance for New Zealand First", July 18, 2026, <https://newsroom.co.nz/2026/07/18/polling-data-hints-at-record-election-performance-for-nz-first/>

¹²⁸ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Iran US MoU", Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume VII Issue 6, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%206.pdf

¹²⁹ Iran says Strait of Hormuz will no longer operate as before war; Tehran to administer waterway after US talks, June 23, 2026, <https://www.thestatesman.com/world/iran-says-strait-of-hormuz-will-no-longer-operate-as-before-war-tehran-to-administer-waterway-after-us-talks-1503608986.html>

¹³⁰ Jenny Gross, "Oil Shipments in Strait of Hormuz in Jeopardy After Day of Attacks and Retaliation", July 07, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/07/world/middleeast/iran-war-oman-hormuz-tanker.html>

¹³¹ Max Bearak, Tyler Pager, Shrin Hakim and Michael Levenson, US Strikes Iran for a Second Day After Trump Says Truce is 'Over', July 08, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/08/world/middleeast/iran-truce-trump.html>

Iran on June 21 to export crude oil and petrochemical products¹³². US forces struck over 80 targets in Iran¹³³; beginning a round of daily strikes that continued till July 23. This included a strike on Chabahar Port¹³⁴, where India has invested over \$ 120 million to build a direct route to Afghanistan and Central Asia without going through Pakistan. Iran, on the other hand, declared the Strait of Hormuz closed¹³⁵. The US responded by reimposing its blockade on maritime traffic entering and leaving Iranian ports¹³⁶.

On July 13, Trump pronounced the Strait open and the US as its “guardian”. He said the US would be reimbursed at the rate of 20% on all cargo shipped for providing safety and security to this very volatile section of the world¹³⁷. Iran’s Foreign Minister responded by saying that whoever provides safe and secure passage of commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz should be compensated. He added that Iran had always been the guardian of the Strait and would remain so forever. He also observed that 20% was too much, and Iran would be fair¹³⁸. The next day, Trump announced that he had decided to replace the 20% US reimbursement fee with trade and investment deals that the Gulf states would make into the US¹³⁹. On July 29, the US designated the Persian Gulf Marine Insurance Company and Hormuz Safe Marine Services Authority, two Iranian entities backed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), for running coercive “insurance” schemes that extort international shipping transiting the Strait of Hormuz¹⁴⁰.

On July 16, Iran told its Houthi proxies to close the Red Sea gateway (the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb) if the US hit Iran’s power network¹⁴¹. On July 20, Yemen’s Houthi militia

¹³² Revocation and Wind Down of June 21, 2026 Authorisation for the Production, Delivery and Sale of Crude Oil, Petrochemical Products, and Petroleum Products of Iranian Origin, July 07, 2026, <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/936446/download?inline>

¹³³ US Forces Complete New Round of Retaliatory Strikes Against Iran, July 07, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4535772/us-forces-complete-new-round-of-retaliatory-strikes-against-iran/>

¹³⁴ Pragati Ratti, “India May have Stepped Back From Iran’s Chabahar Port, Yet the US Strike is a Setback”, July 09, 2026, <https://www.news18.com/explainers/india-may-have-stepped-back-from-irans-chabahar-port-yet-the-us-strike-is-a-setback-heres-why-ws-l-10199851.html>

¹³⁵ Steve Holland, Parisa Hafezi, Phil Stewart and Yomna Ehab, “Iran expands attacks on Gulf states after US strikes, says Strait of Hormuz closed”, July 12, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/iran-declares-strait-hormuz-closed-unauthorised-vessel-hit-2026-07-11/>

¹³⁶ US Forces to Resume Naval Blockade Against Iran, July 13, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4542098/us-forces-to-resume-naval-blockade-against-iran/>

¹³⁷ Donald J Trump, July 13, 2026, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116913091653271692>

¹³⁸ Seyed Abbas Aragchi, July 13, 2026, <https://x.com/araghchi/status/2076728062662557961?s=20>

¹³⁹ Donald J Trump, July 14, 2026, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116918941071241802>

¹⁴⁰ Countering Iran’s Exploitation of the Strait of Hormuz, July 29, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/07/countering-irans-exploitation-of-the-strait-of-hormuz/>

¹⁴¹ Parisa Hafezi, Samia Nakhoul and Jonathan Saul, “Iran tells Houthis to close Red Sea gateway if US hits power network, sources say”, July 16, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-tells-houthis-close-red-sea-gateway-if-us-hits-power-network-sources-say-2026-07-16/>

declared a maritime blockade on Saudi Arabia¹⁴² and followed up by targeting four Saudi oil tankers, attacking Saudi oil refineries and scaring several ships transiting the Red Sea into reversing course. Reports on July 29 indicated that the Houthis were contemplating charging fees for ships sailing in the Red Sea¹⁴³. The Houthi blockade threatens to disrupt Saudi exports through its Red Sea outlet, adding to pressure on global oil prices. As the month ended, traffic through the Strait of Hormuz comprised a handful of ships daily (as compared to the normal daily flow of around 140 ships before the war commenced), while traffic through the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb too had been adversely impacted.

Although negotiations between the US and Iran are still reported to be continuing, the prospects for progress appear dim. Meanwhile, Oman presented Iran with a plan to manage the Strait of Hormuz, including the collection of voluntary fees, on June 28¹⁴⁴. This was rejected by Iran on June 29¹⁴⁵. Iran has a strong incentive to retain the strategic trump card it has acquired through its ability to deny usage of the Strait of Hormuz, not just for export of hydrocarbons from the Gulf, but also to deny the US a military presence in the region.

The MoU of June 17 is, for all practical purposes, dead. Trump's ill-conceived and short-sighted war on Iran has provided the IRGC with strong economic leverage over the shipment of energy from the world's largest exporting area through its demonstrated ability to deny usage of the Strait of Hormuz. There is no clear pathway to reopening the waterway or bringing peace back to the region. Continued air strikes on Iranian targets are unlikely to deliver any results in the foreseeable future. Trump could escalate, but that will necessarily involve the deployment of ground troops, Iranian retaliation against Gulf states, the likelihood of significant American casualties and involvement in another 'forever' war, something for which there is no political appetite in the US. He could continue with economic measures including the blockade, but this is necessarily a slow-acting course of action and will involve considerable economic pain, not only for Iran, but also for the US and the rest of the world. He could claim victory and pull back, but that will be seen as capitulation, entailing political costs, leaving Iran's nuclear ambitions intact, accepting a Strait of Hormuz under Iranian control, and severely damaging US presence in the region and

¹⁴² Ismaeel Naar, "Houthis in Yemen Declare Red Sea Blockade on Saudi Arabia", July 20, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/20/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-saudi-arabia-red-sea-blockade.html>

¹⁴³ Jonathan Saul, Parisa Hafezi and Timour Achari, "Yemen's Houthis considering fees for ships sailing through Red Sea, sources say, July 29, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/yemens-houthis-considering-fees-ships-sailing-through-red-sea-sources-say-2026-07-29/>

¹⁴⁴ Timour Azhari and Parisa Hafezi, "Oman presents Iran with Gulf-backed plan for voluntary fees to use Hormuz", July 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/20/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-saudi-arabia-red-sea-blockade.html>

¹⁴⁵ Iran Rejects Omani Plan for Strait of Hormuz Management, July 29, 2026, <https://www.marinelink.com/news/iran-rejects-omani-plan-strait-hormuz-541592>



its reputation. For the present, the chances are that the present conflict will continue, disrupting energy and other trade with the Gulf region.

Two More Warships Inducted Into the Indian Navy

by

Divya Rai

Two ships were inducted into the Indian Navy (IN) in July. INS Mahendragiri (F38) was formally commissioned at Visakhapatnam on July 11, with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh presiding over the ceremony. On July 22, the second of the Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft was commissioned at Karwar, with the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, presiding.

Mahendragiri is the sixth Project 17A stealth frigate to be commissioned since January 2025¹⁴⁶, following Nilgiri, Udaygiri, Himgiri, Taragiri and Dunagiri. Four ships have been delivered by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), while two have been built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE). The last ship of the class is expected shortly. The short time frame within which the ships have been commissioned suppresses the reality that they have taken an average of more than six years to build. In comparison, Chinese shipyards take three years or so to deliver Type 054 frigates. Japanese shipyards also deliver a Mogami-class frigate in about three years.

Designed by the Warship Design Bureau and constructed at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited in Mumbai, Mahendragiri is designed to undertake the full range of maritime missions – air defence for the fleet, surface and sub-surface warfare, interdiction at sea, surveillance, and humanitarian or disaster-relief operations. With more than with over 75 percent indigenous content, the frigate displaces approximately 6,670 tonnes and can achieve speeds up to 28 knots. She features advanced stealth characteristics, a Combined Diesel or Gas propulsion system, an Integrated Platform Management System and advanced indigenous combat systems. The armament and sensor suite include supersonic anti-ship missiles, medium-range air-defence missiles, anti-submarine systems, and an embarked multi-role helicopter, complemented by stealth shaping, contemporary sensors, and a network-centric combat architecture.

¹⁴⁶ PIB Press Release. "Indian Navy to Induct Indigenous Stealth Frigate Mahendragiri Into The Eastern Fleet". July 10, 2026. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2283430®=48&lang=1>

A second commissioning followed shortly after¹⁴⁷. On 22 July 2026, the Navy inducted INS Malvan at Karwar – the second vessel in the Mahe-class series of indigenously designed Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft. Malvan carries forward the name and role of an earlier minesweeper retired in 2003, and it forms part of a broader programme comprising eight such craft under construction at Cochin Shipyard, out of sixteen planned for the Navy overall. Built with over 80 percent indigenous content, the vessel is intended to strengthen underwater surveillance, anti-submarine capability, mine warfare, and low-intensity maritime operations – functions that bear directly on coastal defence and littoral security¹⁴⁸.

Attention will now turn to what comes after this project. Project 17B, envisioned as the successor to the Nilgiri-class frigates, is billed as a substantial technological advance, the Navy intends to build six advanced stealth frigates, costing Rs 70,000 crore. Beyond improved stealth characteristics and sensors and multi-role functionality, the most consequential design change is an expanded Vertical Launch System, featuring 48 cells in place of the existing 32. The increase in missile capacity gives Project 17B frigates the depth needed to absorb successive attack waves. The ships will also feature the Indigenous Technology Cruise Missile (ITCM) and the BrahMos-NG supersonic cruise missile for surface-to-surface combat, supporting India's "Make in India" initiative by promoting locally developed defence technologies.¹⁴⁹

Notwithstanding this ambition, the Navy's modernisation drive remains constrained by procedural bottlenecks. Project 17B, along with the Next Generation Corvette programme and the Project 18 destroyer initiative, has obtained Acceptance of Necessity from the Defence Acquisition Council¹⁵⁰, but is yet to receive final approval from the Cabinet Committee on Security. Without that sanction, the process of contracting construction of the ships cannot begin.

Several programmes central to sustaining naval strength in the Indian Ocean remain at various approval stages, raising legitimate concerns about the timely replacement of ageing platforms, the Navy's overall force levels and utilisation of shipyard capability. As India seeks a more prominent role in the Indo-Pacific, addressing these

¹⁴⁷ PIB Press Release. "Indian Navy Commissions INS Malvan, The Second of The Mahe-Class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft" July 22, 2026. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2283586®=48&lang=2>

¹⁴⁸ PIB Press Release, "Indian Navy commissions Made-in-India advanced stealth frigate 'INS Mahendragiri' in Raksha Mantri's presence at Visakhapatnam. July 11, 2026. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2287788®=48&lang=1>

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Salerno-Garthwaite, "Seven Project 17 Bravo Frigates to Join Indian Naval Strength," Naval Technology, September 11, 2024, <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/seven-project-17-bravo-frigates-to-join-indian-naval-strength/>.

¹⁵⁰ Smruti Deshpande, "Defence Acquisition Council Gives Nod to Navy's Project 17 Bravo for 7 New State-of-the-Art Frigates," The Print, September 4, 2024, <https://theprint.in/defence/defence-acquisition-council-gives-nod-to-navys-project-17-bravo-for-7-new-state-of-the-art-frigates/2251943/>.

procedural delays will matter as much as the technological advances themselves. Swifter clearance of programmes like Project 17B and Project 18 would not only reinforce combat capability but also consolidate the domestic shipbuilding ecosystem – sustaining employment and deepening the technological self-reliance.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

SLBM Test by China. The PLA (Navy) announced that it had successfully carried out the test launch of a strategic missile by a submarine on July 06¹⁵¹. The SLBM, probably a JL-3¹⁵², was reportedly launched from the South China Sea and overflew the Philippines before landing in the Southern Pacific, between Nauru and Tonga¹⁵³. The launch was described as the first near full range test of a Chinese SLBM into international waters in the Pacific¹⁵⁴; it provided a demonstration of the sea-based leg of China's nuclear triad. The event occurred as Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his visit to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand.

Mauritius US ACSA Agreement. Mauritius and the US signed an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) to strengthen cooperation in defence and enhance institutional capacities between the two countries on July 16¹⁵⁵. Mauritius expects the agreement to provide a legal framework for logistical support, joint training, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, while enhancing the operational capabilities of the Mauritius Police Force and National Coast Guard. This is the 32nd ACSA the US has with African countries, and the second with Indian Ocean island states, after Sri Lanka.

GCAP. The GCAP Agency awarded a £4.6 billion contract to Edgewing, an industry joint venture established by BAE Systems, Leonardo, and Japan Aircraft Industrial Enhancement Co. Ltd. (JAIEC), to advance the next stage of the aircraft's design by establishing its key requirements and rigorous testing¹⁵⁶. Edgewing had earlier been

¹⁵¹ Chinese navy conducts test launch of strategic missile by submarine, July 06, 2026, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2025xb/H_251454/L_251456/16472015.html

¹⁵² Jesse Johnson, "Missile test marks a new phase in expansion of China's nuclear armed submarine force", July 06, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/07/07/asia-pacific/china-missile-nuclear-force-submarines-analysis/>

¹⁵³ Dzirhan Mahadzir, "China Tests Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile, Kicks Off Annual Exercise With Russia", July 06, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/07/06/china-tests-submarine-launched-ballistic-missile-kicks-off-annual-exercise-with-russia>

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Rogers, Bonny Lin and Leon Li, "China's SLBM Test Underscores Importance of a Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement", July 07, 2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-slbm-test-underscores-importance-ballistic-missile-launch-notification-agreement>

¹⁵⁵ Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement signed to promote cooperation in defence and enhance institutional capacities, July 17, 2026, <https://govmu.org/EN/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?n=Acquisition-and-Cross-Servicing-Agreement-signed-to-promote-cooperation-in-defence-and-enhance-institutional-c.aspx>

¹⁵⁶ Over £4 billion invested in next-generation fighter jet with new international contract, July 03, 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-4-billion-invested-in-next-generation-fighter-jet-with-new-international-contract>

awarded an initial £686 million contract in April 2026. Following the collapse of the FCAS, the GCAP is the world's only surviving multinational 6th generation fighter development programme. In a separate development, Canada joined the GCAP programme as an observer, with no commitment to fund development or purchase the aircraft¹⁵⁷.

Nuclear Debate in Japan. Following China's SLBM test, pressure for Japan to reconsider its nuclear posture intensified, with ruling coalition partner Japan Innovation Party (JIP) pushing for Tokyo to acquire at least eight SSNs as quickly as possible¹⁵⁸. The pressure is driven by increased security concerns about China and its military capability, as well as South Korean plans to build SSNs. Separately, Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi urged Japan to more actively debate the deterrent role of nuclear weapons in the country's defence policy without historical taboos in view of the harsher security environment¹⁵⁹. These developments come as Japan revises its three key national security documents, as part of Premier Takaichi's push to remove constraints on the Japanese military.

Japan to Seek New Defence Bureau. Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said he would seek to revise the organisation of the Ministry of Defence by adding a new bureau to the existing five: the secretariat and bureaus for defence policy, defence buildup planning, personnel and education, and policies for regional cooperation¹⁶⁰. The new Bureau for Defence Cooperation is expected to handle transfer of defence equipment following Japan's revision of its export guidelines, as well as negotiation of ACSA agreements.

Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The Quad Foreign Ministers met in Manila on July 22 on the sidelines of the ASEAN and EAS Foreign Ministers' Meeting¹⁶¹. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening a free and open Indo-Pacific and unwavering support for ASEAN unity and centrality. They also discussed opportunities to strengthen support for implementation of the AOIP through their shared priorities of maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and

¹⁵⁷ Quadrilateral Joint Statement on Canada becoming an observer to GCAP, July 21, 2026, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2026/07/quadrilateral-joint-statement-on-canada-becoming-an-observer-to-gcap.html>

¹⁵⁸ JIP's submarine proposal tests Japan's nuclear red lines, July 09, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/07/09/japan/politics/maehara-interview/>

¹⁵⁹ Japan Breaks 70-Year Nuclear Taboo: Koizumi Warns Tokyo 'Cannot Avoid' Nuclear Weapons Debate Amid China, North Korea Threat, July 20, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/japan-nuclear-weapons-debate-koizumi-non-nuclear-principles-2026/>

¹⁶⁰ As Japan's security ties grow, defense chief pushes for international bureau, July 15, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/07/15/japan/politics/koizumi-defense-ministry-international-bureau/>

¹⁶¹ Joint Press Release on Cooperation with ASEAN by the Quad Foreign Ministers, July 22, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41494/Joint_Press_Release_on_Cooperation_with_ASEAN_by_the_Quad_Foreign_Ministers

security, critical and emerging technologies, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response. Secretary Rubio said that the Quad remains a priority, and the Foreign Ministers would meet again later this year¹⁶².

Eastern Fleet Southeast Asian Deployment. IN Ships Udaygiri, Shakti and Kavaratti completed their annual Southeast Asia deployment with a visit to Singapore from July 01-05¹⁶³. They had earlier visited Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and Sattahip in Thailand.

DAC Accords AON for Proposals Worth ₹52,000 Crores. The Defence Acquisition Council accorded Acceptance of Necessity for proposals valued at ₹52,000 Crores on July 03¹⁶⁴. These include procurement of a Multi Influence Ground Mine, Naval Shipborne Unmanned Aerial System and the setting up of a Land-based Testing Facility for Electric Propulsion Systems.

JS Takanami Visits Mumbai. JS Takanami, the lead ship of Japan's Takanami-class destroyers, presently deployed in the Western Indian Ocean, visited Mumbai for Operational Turn Round from July 05-07. The ship carried out a PASSEX with INS Surat on leaving harbour¹⁶⁵. JMSDF ships have increasingly been operating in the Arabian Sea.

Australia Fiji Agreements. Australia and Fiji entered into the Vuvale (meaning family) Union¹⁶⁶ Treaty and the Vietacini Treaty¹⁶⁷ (Ocean of Peace Alliance) during Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to Fiji on July 06. The former commits both sides to partner each other in strengthening prosperity and resilience, enhancing cultural and people connections, advancing climate security and cultivating and sustaining a culture of peace. The latter commits both sides to mutual defence. New Zealand announced its intention of engaging with Australia and Fiji to join the Ocean of Peace Alliance¹⁶⁸.

Small Modular Reactors. Foreign Ministers of the US, Japan and South Korea agreed to cooperate to establish a framework for accelerating small modular reactor (SMR)

¹⁶² Secretary Marco Rubio, July 22, 2026, <https://x.com/SecRubio/status/2079783293709332658>

¹⁶³ Indian Naval Ships Conclude Successful Visit to Singapore, July 05, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2281318®=48&lang=1>

¹⁶⁴ DAC approves capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 52,000 crore to enhance combat readiness of Defence Forces, July 03, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2280728®=48&lang=1>

¹⁶⁵ United News of India, July 08, 2026, <https://x.com/uniindianews/status/2074844854455288140>

¹⁶⁶ Fiji - Australia Vuvale Union, July 06, 2026, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/fiji/fiji-australia-vuvale-union>

¹⁶⁷ Ocean of Peace Alliance (Vietacini Treaty), July 06, 2026, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/fiji/ocean-peace-alliance-veitacini-treaty>

¹⁶⁸ NZ to explore joining Fiji-Australia defence alliance, July 09, 2026, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-explore-joining-fiji-australia-defence-alliance>

deployment in other countries, with an initial focus on the Indo-Pacific¹⁶⁹. China is presently the world leader in the field, with its Linglong One reactor being the world's first land-based SMR to pass the International Atomic Energy Agency's safety review¹⁷⁰. US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation comes as China plans to capture a sizable share of the nuclear market in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia by targeting developing nations. India plans to develop and operationalise at least five SMRs by 2033¹⁷¹ and has enacted the SHANTI Act to open up the nuclear energy sector to private participation.

Pukpuk Treaty Enters Into Force. Australia and Papua New Guinea announced the entry into force of the bilateral mutual defence treaty (Pukpuk Treaty) at a summit meeting of their leaders on July 08¹⁷². A joint statement covering the security partnership and economic cooperation formed part of the outcomes¹⁷³.

South China Sea Arbitral Award. The governments of Australia, Canada, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Philippines, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom and the United States came together in a joint statement on the tenth anniversary of the South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal Award on July 11¹⁷⁴. The statement reaffirms the shared commitment to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable, rules-based and anchored in international law and that the Tribunal's award is final, legally-binding and definitive. China responded by declaring its sovereignty over South China Sea islands, describing the South China Sea as one of the safest sea lanes in the world, and reiterating its position on the arbitration¹⁷⁵.

India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue. The 8th India Japan Defence Policy Dialogue, co-chaired by Defence Secretary Shri RK Singh and Japan's Vice Minister of Defence for International Affairs Kano Koji took place in Tokyo on July 13¹⁷⁶. Both sides

¹⁶⁹ The United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea Sign a Trilateral Memorandum of Cooperation on Small Modular Reactor Deployments in Other Countries, July 07, 2026,

¹⁷⁰ Jane Nakano and Yu-Hsuan Yeh, "China's Nuclear Energy Priorities Under Its 15th Five-Year Plan", May 11, 2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-nuclear-energy-priorities-under-its-15th-five-year-plan>

¹⁷¹ Parliament Question: Nuclear Energy Mission for Viksit Bharat, July 22, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2287710®=48&lang=1>

¹⁷² Alliance with Papua New Guinea enters into force, July 08, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/alliance-papua-new-guinea-enters-force>

¹⁷³ Australia-Papua New Guinea Leaders' Meeting 2026, July 08, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-papua-new-guinea-leaders-meeting-2026>

¹⁷⁴ Joint Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of the Philippines-China South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal Award, July 11, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/07/joint-statement-on-the-tenth-anniversary-of-the-philippines-china-south-china-sea-arbitral-tribunal-award/>

¹⁷⁵ Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on Certain Countries' Playing up of the "South China Sea Arbitration Award" 10 years After Its Issuance, July 12, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/wjbxw/202607/t20260712_11980357.html

¹⁷⁶ Defence Secretary and Japanese Vice Minister of Defence for International Affairs co-chair 8th India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue in Tokyo, July 13, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2284070®=48&lang=1>

expressed satisfaction with the growing convergence between India and Japan on regional and global security issues and agreed to continue working closely in the Indo-Pacific. They reiterated their commitment to promoting a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific region founded on respect for international law.

India – UK CETA. The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Agreement on Social Security entered into force on July 15¹⁷⁷. The agreement is expected to raise bilateral trade by £25.5 billion from the current level of around £48 billion.

Operation Southern Readiness 26-2. India hosted Operation Southern Readiness, a four day training engagement under the aegis of Combined Task Force 154 (CTF 154) in Kochi from July 20-23. CTF 154 is presently led by the Indian Navy. The engagement brought together 254 participants from 26 countries, supported by 74 facilitators and four international organisations. The exercise marks an important milestone in the growing engagement between the Indian Navy and the CMF.

Exercise Pitch Black. Exercise Pitch Black, Australia's premier international air combat exercise, commenced in Darwin on July 20¹⁷⁸. India is participating in the exercise with Rafale aircraft, along with about 100 aircraft from 21 countries¹⁷⁹.

China's Carries out Live Firing Within Japan's Claimed EEZ. A PLA (Navy) destroyer, the Kaifeng, carried out a live firing using machine guns about 180 Km southwest of Okinotori Island, claimed by Japan as its southernmost territory, on July 19, leading to a protest from Japan¹⁸⁰. China responded by pointing out that Okinotori is a rock and not an island, and is thus not entitled to an EEZ under UNCLOS. It observed that Japan's claim of an EEZ around Okinotori violates international law¹⁸¹. Notably, South Korea and Taiwan both adopt the position that Okinotori does not meet the definition of an island under UNCLOS.

China Philippines Clash in South China Sea Islands. China and the Philippines clashed at the Second Thomas Shoal and the Scarborough Shoal during the week commencing July 20. On July 20, a China Coast Guard boat approached the grounded BRP Sierra Madre to film the ship. The Philippines two inflatable dinghies to escort

¹⁷⁷ India-UK CETA and Agreement on Social Security Enter into Force, July 15, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2285085®=48&lang=1>

¹⁷⁸ Exercise Pitch Black officially takes off, July 20, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-07-20/exercise-pitch-black-officially-takes-off>

¹⁷⁹ Exercise Pitch Black participants, <https://www.airforce.gov.au/our-work/exercises/exercise-pitch-black/exercise-pitch-black-2026-participants>

¹⁸⁰ Japan Protests Chinese Destroyer's Live-fire Drill Near Disputed Reef, July 22, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/07/22/japan-protests-chinese-destroyers-live-fire-drill-near-disputed-reef>

¹⁸¹ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference on July 21, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202607/t20260721_11989141.html



the Chinese boat away, whereupon the Chinese vessel rammed one of the Filipino boats and physically assaulted its personnel, causing injury to two of them. On July 23 and 24, China's Coast Guard was reported to have fired water cannon at Filipino vessels in the Scarborough Shoal¹⁸². China, on the other hand, claimed that the Filipino vessels had entered the shoal illegally and its Coast Guard responded with the utmost restraint. The incidents occurred as ASEAN Foreign Ministers met at Manila on July 22.

¹⁸² Philippines, China trade accusations after fresh South China Sea confrontation, July 25, 2026, <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines-china-trade-accusations-after-fresh-south-china-sea-confrontation-1.500619712>



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