



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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Author

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

Cover Images:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets US Vice President JD Vance in New Delhi on April 21, 2025. Source: PIB

Exercise Tiger Triumph Opening Ceremony Group Photograph on board INS Jalashwa at Visakhapatnam, April 01, 2025. Source: PIB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attends the 6th BIMSTEC Summit at Bangkok, Thailand on April 04, 2025. Source: PIB

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

April 2025

Abstract

India's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Thailand and Sri Lanka from April 03-05 and Saudi Arabia on April 22. In Thailand, he elevated bilateral relations to a strategic partnership and attend the 6th BIMSTEC Summit. The visit to Sri Lanka continued the upsurge in bilateral relations following the December 2024 visit of President Dissanayake to India. In Saudi Arabia, he expanded avenues for cooperation during the second meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council.

US Vice President JD Vance visited India from April 21-24. Other high profile visitors to India included the President of Chile from April 01-05, and Dubai's Crown Prince on April 08.

China's President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia from April 14-18. The "Liberation Day" tariffs imposed by President Trump on all nations provided the backdrop to his discussions.

Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba visited Vietnam and the Philippines from April 27-30. Trade and security issues dominated his discussions with counterpart leaders.

Mark Carney's Liberal Party won 169 of 343 seats in the Canadian general election on April 29, falling just short of an outright majority. Carney will lead a minority government and will have to depend on other parties to pass legislation.

The April edition of the IMF's World Economic Outlook was released on April 22. The Outlook projects global growth in 2025 dropping to 2.8%, from the 3.3% that was forecast in January 2025, on account of the tariff measures announced by the US and countermeasures by its trading partners. India remains the fastest growing major economy, with projections indicating it will grow by 6.2% in 2025 and 6.3% in 2026.

South Korea's constitutional court upheld the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-Yeol on April 04, formally dismissing him from office. An election to choose his successor has been scheduled on June 03, 2025.



South Korea's Cheongju District Court rendered a fresh judgement directing Japan to pay compensation to the plaintiff in a case brought by the family of a former comfort woman. Japan lodged a strong protest. The case has the potential to destabilise Japan-South Korea relations once again.

China strengthened its assertions in the East and South China Seas, carrying out military drills in the Taiwan Strait on April 02, expelling Japanese fishing vessels from the Senkaku Islands on April 05-06, expelling a Philippines ship from the Scarborough Shoal on April 20 and seizing the disputed Sandy Cay Reef in the South China Sea on April 27.

The fourth edition of the India-US tri-service exercise Tiger Triumph took place in the Bay of Bengal from April 01-12.

IOS Sagar, with 44 trainees from nine friendly Indian Ocean countries, set off on its voyage to the Southwestern Indian Ocean on April 05. The ship visited Dar-es-Salaam, Nacala and Port Louis during the month, and will call at Port Victoria before returning to India in May. Meanwhile, the inaugural edition of multinational Exercise AIKEYME was co-hosted by India and Tanzania at Dar-es-Salam from April 13-18.

The USN destroyer William P Lawrence transited the Taiwan Strait on April 23.



Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Thailand

Six years after visiting Thailand for the 16th ASEAN Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi returned to Bangkok for the 6th BIMSTEC Summit on April 03-04. It was his third visit to Bangkok. That his previous two visits were for a multilateral event (in November 2019) and to condole the death of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (in November 2016) speaks of the nature of India's relations with this immediate maritime neighbour.

The visit had two components: the BIMSTEC Summit and the bilateral component. The BIMSTEC Summit, themed "Prosperous, Resilient and Open BIMSTEC" focused on fostering collaboration among member states to address their shared security and developmental challenges¹. The leaders adopted the declaration of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit and the Bangkok Vision 2030, the first ever vision document of the organisation. The Summit saw the leaders signing an agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, and Memoranda of Understanding between BIMSTEC and IORA institutionalising their partnership, as well as between BIMSTEC and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, formalizing the partnership between the two organisations. The leaders adopted the Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC mechanisms, as also the report of the Eminent Persons Group on the future direction of BIMSTEC. They also endorsed the Joint Statement on the impact of the earthquake that struck Myanmar and Thailand on March 28th and reaffirmed their commitment to collaborate in regional disaster management. At the conclusion of the summit, Bangladesh assumed the Chairmanship of BIMSTEC.

In his statement at the Summit, PM Modi described BIMSTEC as the vital bridge between South and Southeast Asia and commended Prime Minister Shinawatra for her leadership in steering the organisation for the last three years. He called for continued expansion of the organisation's scope and enhancement of its institutional capacities and proposed that India host the first meeting of the Home Ministers' Mechanism. Observing that physical connectivity must go hand in hand with digital and energy connectivity for regional development, he appreciated that the BIMSTEC Energy Centre at Bengaluru had commenced operations and proposed that efforts towards achieving electric grid interconnection across the region be accelerated. He also proposed connectivity between India's United Payments Interface (UPI) and the payment systems of BIMSTEC member states, the establishment of a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and the holding of an annual BIMSTEC

¹ Thailand hosts the 6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok on 04 April 2025, April 05, 2025, <https://bimstec.org/event/247/thailand-hosts-the-6th-bimstec-summit-in-bangkok-on-04-april-2025->



Business Summit. Another proposal from him was the establishment of a Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre to focus on capacity building, research innovation and foster greater coordination in maritime policy.

At the bilateral level, the Prime Ministers of India and Thailand decided to elevate existing bilateral relations to a Strategic Partnership², based on a mutual commitment to strengthening relations for their and the region's continuing peace, stability and prosperity. The partnership will serve as a foundation for the two countries to chart a future-oriented and mutually beneficial path towards increasing opportunities and cooperation and jointly responding to common challenges. The leaders reaffirmed their shared interest in a free, open, transparent, rules-based, inclusive, prosperous and resilient Indo-Pacific region and reiterated their strong support for ASEAN centrality. They also reaffirmed their commitment to exploring concrete activities to implement the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and enhanced cooperation between the AOIP and the IPOI. Thailand agreed to co-lead the Maritime Ecology Pillar of the IPOI with Australia.

The India-Thailand strategic partnership rests on six pillars: strengthening political engagement through regular high level exchanges at the leadership and foreign ministers' levels as well as between senior officials; defence and security cooperation; economic, trade and investment cooperation; connectivity; socio-cultural, education and people-to-people exchanges; and regional, multilateral and international cooperation. Security cooperation is to be enhanced through regular dialogues and exchanges between respective security and law enforcement organisations. Collaboration between the defence sectors of the two countries is to be enhanced through exchanges involving defence technology, defence industry, research, training, exchanges, exercises and capacity building. Similarly, economic trade and investment cooperation is to be enhanced by regular meetings between the ministries of commerce and industry.

Connectivity of all modes such as physical, digital and financial between India and Thailand is to be enhanced, including by expediting the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its eastward extension, as well as the India, Myanmar and Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement. Maritime connectivity is to be enhanced through coastal shipping and port-to-port connections. The

² Joint Declaration on the Establishment of India-Thailand Strategic Partnership, April 04, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2118985>



civil aviation authorities of the two countries will engage in discussions to enhance air connectivity between the two countries.

Thailand is an immediate maritime neighbour, with a coast of nearly 1100 Km in the Andaman Sea located at the mouth of the Malacca Strait. The maritime boundary has been delimited and there are no territorial issues to complicate relations. A bilateral defence cooperation MoU exists since 2012. It is also a founding member of ASEAN and that group's third largest economy, after Indonesia and Singapore. Its location makes it India's gateway to Southeast Asia. As such, India's relations with Thailand appear on a sound footing. Prime Minister Modi's visit was timely.

Prime Minister Modi Visits Sri Lanka

Four months after Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake met him in New Delhi on his first visit abroad, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reciprocated with his fourth visit to Sri Lanka, from April 04-06. The visit was indicative of the marked improvement in India-Sri Lanka relations, particularly since the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government demitted office in 2022.

As a small nation that is India's closest maritime neighbour, the India-Sri Lanka relationship is of great importance. Sri Lanka lies astride the densely trafficked East-West shipping lane connecting East Asia with Africa, Europe and the East Coast of the US. It possesses perhaps the finest and the fourth largest natural harbour in the world in Trincomalee, the region's largest container hub in Colombo, and the harbour closest to the shipping lane in Hambantota. It has, through its history, been colonised by Portugal, the Netherlands and England, obtaining independence only in 1948. An inimical Sri Lanka would pose a substantial challenge to India and its ocean policy, SAGAR.

The December 2024 visit by President Dissanayake had reset India-Sri Lanka relations³. A comprehensive joint statement issued at that time contained numerous steps to enhance the bilateral partnership across the political, developmental, financial, connectivity, energy, education, trade and investment, agricultural and defence cooperation domains⁴. The process of improvement of relations was continued during this visit. Modi became the first foreign Head of State or Head of Government to be hosted by President Dissanayake after he assumed office (Dissanayake had earlier chosen India as

³ Lalit Kapur, "Sri Lanka's President Visits India", Indo-Pacific Monitor December 2024, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5240.pdf

⁴ India-Sri Lanka Joint Statement: Fostering Partnerships for a Shared Future, December 16, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2084793>



his first overseas destination for a State Visit after assuming office)⁵. He was received on arrival by six Sri Lankan Cabinet Ministers, led by the Foreign Minister. A ceremonial welcome was accorded to him at Colombo's Independence Square, possibly for the first time ever to welcome a foreign Head of State or Head of Government. Seven agreements and Memoranda of Understanding were signed⁶. Sri Lanka conferred on the Prime Minister its highest honour for Heads of State and Heads of Government, the Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana award, the first time this was presented to an Indian. The leaders virtually inaugurated the construction of the Sampur solar power project, as also the recently completed temperature-controlled warehousing facility at Dambulla and a project for the supply of solar rooftop systems to nearly 5,000 religious institutions across Sri Lanka. India concluded the debt restructuring process with Sri Lanka, with the exchange of bilateral amendatory agreements on debt restructuring.

The two sides concluded an MOU on Defence Cooperation, signifying their shared commitment to regional security and stability. An MOU was concluded by the two sides on electricity grid interconnection. Another MOU was signed between India, Sri Lanka and the UAE to ensure Sri Lanka's energy security, provision of energy at affordable rates and possibly to contribute to Sri Lanka's coffers through export earnings generated by this project.

President Dissanayake reaffirmed that Sri Lankan territory will not be used or allowed to be used in any manner that is inimical or detrimental to India's interests; in fact, he went further to say that neither Sri Lanka's land nor the oceans around it would be allowed to be used in any manner inimical to India's security.

Given its proximity to India and its location astride trading routes critical to China, Sri Lanka is destined to remain the arena for India-China competition in the Indian Ocean. The outcomes of the recent Prime Ministerial visit indicate that the India-Sri Lanka relationship is on track and India possesses a favourable balance. Continued attention will, however, be required to cultivate the relationship and ensure Sri Lanka does not tilt towards China. Fortunately,

⁵ Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA on Prime Minister's Visit to Sri Lanka, April 05, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/39378/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_by_MEA_on_Prime_Ministers_visit_to_Sri_Lanka_April_05_2025

⁶ List of Outcomes: Visit of Prime Minister to Sri Lanka (April 04-06, 2025), April 05, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/39377/List_of_Outcomes_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Sri_Lanka_April_04_06_2025



India's diplomats are seized of the matter and have largely delivered in India's interests.



Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Saudi Arabia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reciprocated the historic visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia to India in September 2023 when he paid a State Visit to Saudi Arabia on April 22, 2025. That this was the Shri Modi's third bilateral visit to Saudi Arabia in less than a decade (his first one was in 2016) speaks of the priority India accords to relations with this country.

Prime Minister Modi was received by the Crown Prince at the Al-Salam Palace in Jeddah. Following a ceremonial welcome, he went into the palace for detailed bilateral discussions, as well as to co-chair the second meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council (SPC). The leaders discussed the full spectrum of bilateral relations, including the energy partnership, defence, trade, investments, technology, culture and people-to-people ties. They also discussed progress in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridors (IMEEC), describing it as a vision beneficial to everyone in the region and decided to expedite work on that. They further reviewed the progress of the SPC and expressed satisfaction at the work of its two committees, the Committee on Political, Security, Social and Cultural Cooperation and the Committee on Economy and Investment, along with their sub-groups⁷. They decided to expand the SPC by adding Ministerial Committees on Defence Cooperation, and on Tourism and Cultural Cooperation. Four MoUs were signed⁸: one each on cooperation in space, on health, on anti-doping measures in sports, and on posts and telegraphs.

Building on the endeavor of Saudi Arabia to invest in India in multiple areas including energy, petrochemicals, infrastructure, technology, fintech, digital infrastructure, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing and health, it was noted that the High-Level Task Force came to an understanding in multiple areas which will rapidly promote such investment flows. They noted the agreement in the High-Level Task Force to collaborate on establishing two refineries. The two sides affirmed their desire to complete negotiations on the Bilateral Investment Treaty at the earliest.

In energy, India agreed to work with Saudi Arabia to enhance the stability of global oil markets and to balance global energy market dynamics. The two sides emphasised the need to ensure security of supply for all energy sources

⁷ Joint Statement at the conclusion of the State Visit of Prime Minister to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (April 22, 2025), <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2123722>

⁸ List of Outcomes: State Visit of Prime Minister to Saudi Arabia, April 23, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2123660>



in global markets. They agreed on the importance of cooperation in several areas, including supply of crude oil and LPG, collaboration in India's Strategic Reserve Programme, joint projects across the refining and petrochemical sector, and enhancing the participation of companies on both sides in implementing their projects. They emphasised the importance of cooperation in green/clean hydrogen, including stimulating demand, developing hydrogen transport and storage technologies, exchanging expertise and experience to implement best practices.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at the steady growth of trade in recent years, with Indian being the second largest trading partner for Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia being India's fifth largest trading partner in 2023-24. Both sides agreed to further enhance cooperation to diversify their bilateral trade and reiterated their desire for commencing negotiations on the Indian-GCC FTA.

Noting with satisfaction the growth of their joint defence cooperation including the first ever Land Forces exercise SADA TANSEEQ, two rounds of the Naval Exercise AL MOHED AL HINDI, many high-level visits and training exchanges, the leaders welcomed outcomes of the 6th meeting of the Joint Committee on Defence Cooperation held in Riyadh in September 2024, and the initiation of staff-level talks between all three services. Both sides also agreed to enhance defence industry collaboration.

India expressed its appreciation to Saudi Arabia for the continuing welfare of around 2.7 million Indian nationals residing in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia welcomed Indian workers and said that due to many big developmental projects in the next few years, they are looking at increasing the number of Indian workers⁹.

As the energy rich Gulf's largest, wealthiest and most populous state, one housing the second-largest population of India's diaspora in the region, Saudi Arabia is of significant importance. It is good to see that India has been putting in the effort required to develop relations with this country and indeed the entire region. The Gulf has traditionally depended on the West (the US, UK and France) for its security. This is an area India will have to get into, and the newly constituted Ministerial Committee on Defence under the Strategic Partnership Council should be able to do much towards strengthening Saudi Arabia – India defence relations.

⁹ Transcript of Special briefing by MEA on Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia (April 22, 2025), https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/39439/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_by_MEA_on_Prime_Ministers_visit_to_Saudi_Arabia_April_22_2025





The Chilean Presidential Visit to India

Located at the Southern end of the Pacific coast of South America, Chile is about as far from India as a country can possibly get. The distance between Santiago and New Delhi is nearly 17,000 Km. Notwithstanding this distance, the President of Chile, Mr Gabriel Boric Font, paid a State Visit to India from April 1-5. The visit took him to New Delhi, Agra, Mumbai and Bengaluru. A delegation comprising five ministers, members of parliament, senior officials and business leaders accompanied him.

President Boric and Prime Minister Narendra Modi comprehensively reviewed bilateral relations across a range of sectors¹⁰, including trade and investment, health and pharmaceuticals, defence and security, infrastructure, mining and mineral resources, agriculture and food security, green energy, ICT, digitisation, innovation, disaster management, cooperation in science and technology, education, and people-to-people linkages. The two leaders agreed to continue regular exchanges at various levels to give further momentum to the bilateral relationship. Noting the positive effects generated by expansion of the India-Chile Preferential Trade Agreement of May 2017, the leaders emphasised the need for further strengthening of bilateral trade mechanisms to open up new opportunities for expansion of bilateral trade. They welcomed signing of the mutually agreed Terms of Reference and launch of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations for a balanced, ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement to achieve deeper economic integration. President Boric announced Chile's decision to grant a Multiple Entry Permit for Indian businesspersons. India already has in place a flexible visa regime, including an e-visa facility for Chilean travellers coming to India.

The leaders encouraged both sides to work together to explore substantial areas for bilateral defence cooperation, including capacity building and defence industrial cooperation. A formal defence cooperation agreement is already in place. India highlighted that Chile is accorded priority while offering training opportunities at the DSSC, NDC, NDA and HDMC, apart from slots for specialised courses in mountain warfare and peacekeeping operations. India expressed its desire to receive and train Chilean military personnel in areas of mutual interest.

¹⁰ India – Chile Joint Statement, April 01, 2025,
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2117396>



Among the documents signed during the visit were a Letter of Intent on Antarctica Cooperation¹¹, an India-Chile Cultural Exchange Programme, an MoU on disaster management and an MoU between copper producers of the two countries (Chile is among the world's leading producers of copper).

The distance factor, limited national capacities and the fact that Chile is located in a peaceful region limit opportunities for India and Chile to cooperate, particularly in geo-strategic matters. The population of people of Indian origin in Chile comprises just about 1800 NRIs and 2150 PIOs¹², in a nation of about 20 million people. India's total trade with Chile has been around \$ 2.6 billion for the last three years, with an adverse trade balance of around \$ 300 million¹³. Chile's top export partners are China (39% of its exports go to China), USA, Japan, South Korea and Brazil, while its top import partners are China (23%), USA, Brazil, Argentina and Germany. India accounts for less than 1% of Chile's exports or imports.

It is, therefore, in trade and investment, science and technology cooperation, multilateral cooperation and people-to-people matters that bilateral relations must develop. The visit of President Boric was intended to explore a presently low-level partner, but one with considerable potential. How much of that potential is realised will depend on progress in negotiating the bilateral CEPA, at a time when India is already occupied in negotiating trade agreements with the US, UK, EU and others.

US Vice-President JD Vance Visits India

US Vice-President JD Vance visited India with his family from April 21-24¹⁴. His visit schedule encompassed a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his official residence on April 21, a public speech at the Rajasthan International Centre in Jaipur, and cultural engagements, including visits to Akshardham in Delhi; Amer Fort, Jantar Mantar, the City Palace and Hawa Mahal in Jaipur on April 22; and to the Taj Mahal and Shilpgram in Agra on April 23.

¹¹ List of Outcomes: State visit of President of Chile to India, April 01, 2025,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2117424>

¹² Population of Overseas Indians, <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>

¹³ Department of Commerce Export Import Data Bank, Chile, <https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/iecmt.asp>

¹⁴ Visit of Vice President of the United States of America to India (April 21-24, 2025), April 16, 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?39423/Visit+of+Vice+President+of+the+United+States+of+America+to+India+April+21+24+2025>



The VP and his family were received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence on April 21¹⁵. The two leaders reviewed progress in various areas of bilateral cooperation. They welcomed significant progress in the negotiations for a mutually beneficial India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement. They also noted continued efforts towards enhancing cooperation in energy, defence, strategic technologies and other areas. The two leaders also exchanged views on various regional and global issues of mutual interest, and called for dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward.

Speaking at Jaipur the next day, Vice President Vance said, "I believe our nations have much to offer one another, and that's why we come to you as partners looking to strengthen our relationship"¹⁶. On trade, he said the US administration sought trade partners on the basis of fairness and of shared national interests. They wanted to build relationships with foreign partners who respect their workers, who don't suppress their wages to boost exports. They wanted partners who were committed to working with America to build things, not just allowing themselves to become conduits for transshipping other's goods. They wanted to partner with people and countries who recognise the need to come together and build a system of global trade that is balanced, open, stable and fair. He said he was encouraged by all the two nations were doing to double bilateral trade to \$ 500 billion by the end of the decade. He formally announced that the US and India had officially finalised the terms of reference for bilateral trade agreement negotiations.

On defence, he said that the US-India COMPACT that President Trump and Prime Minister Modi announced in February would lay the foundation for even closer collaboration between the two countries. The two nations would co-produce many of the munitions and equipment they needed to deter foreign aggressors. The launching of the Joint Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA) would enable the US and India to develop the most state-of-the-art maritime systems. He pitched for India to buy fifth-generation F-35s to give the IAF the ability to defend India's air space and protect its people.

The VP's other pitch was on energy. Recognising that cheap, dependable energy was an essential part of making things and of economic independence, he believed India would benefit from expanding American energy exports. The US also wanted to help India explore its own resources, including offshore gas reserves and critical mineral supplies. He welcomed the Modi government's

¹⁵ Prime Minister hosts the US Vice President and family, April 21, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2123302>

¹⁶ Remarks by Vice President Vance on the US and India's Shared Economic Priorities, April 22, 2025, <https://in.usembassy.gov/vice-president-jd-vance-remarks-on-the-u-s-and-indias-shared-priorities/>



budget announcement to amend India's civil nuclear liability laws, which currently prevented US producers from exporting small modular reactors and building larger US-designed reactors in India.

Vice President Vance said he believed that if India and the US work together successfully, we would see a 21st century that is prosperous and peaceful. He added that if the two countries failed to work together successfully, the 21st century could be a very dark time for all of humanity.

The Vance visit, coming early in the Trump administration, is significant. His approach towards India has been so much softer than that of his approach during visits to Europe or Greenland. As the world changes around us, it is evident that the US is sincerely interested in working with India as a partner, and that provided India can set aside past experience, it has much to gain from improving bilateral relations.



Xi Jinping's State Visit to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia

by Divya Rai

Southeast Asia is the arena for strategic and diplomatic rivalry between China and the United States, particularly as economic tensions have escalated under President Trump's administration. The "Liberation Day" tariffs on regional economies ranged from 145% for China to 24% for Malaysia, 49% for Cambodia, 48% for Laos and 46% for Vietnam (46%). Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia from April 14 to 18, 2025, took place against this backdrop.

From April 14 to 15, Xi visited Vietnam as the first destination of his trip. His visit resulted in the signing of various bilateral cooperation agreements covering areas such as supply chain resilience, infrastructure, digital economy, and agriculture¹⁷.

The major outcome of the visit to Vietnam was signing of the Official Letter of Assistance for planning standard gauge railways, notably the Dong Dang–Hanoi and Mong Cai–Ha Long–Hai Phong lines. Both countries also committed to enhancing cooperation on road construction, including initiation of the road bridge project over the Red River at Bat Xat (Vietnam)–Ba Sai (China), and to accelerating cross-border infrastructure development at the Thanh Thuy (Vietnam)–Tianbao (China) international border gate¹⁸. The total investment for these projects is VNĐ 1.5 trillion (approximately US\$58.6 billion), with completion targeted before June 30, 2026¹⁹. These initiatives are part of a broader strategy to expedite the synchronisation of development plans between the two countries, specifically by aligning Vietnam's "Two Corridors, One Belt" framework with China's "Belt and Road" initiative. The focus is on fast-tracking infrastructure connections—railways, expressways, and border gate facilities—to boost economic integration and connectivity.

Amongst the key pillars of cooperation identified between China and Vietnam was trade and economic collaboration. To counter US tariffs impacting Vietnam, China and Vietnam will leverage the Regional Comprehensive

¹⁷ Government News-Vietnam. "Prime Minister Meets Top Chinese Leader Xi Jinping", April 15, 2025. <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/prime-minister-meets-top-chinese-leader-xi-jinping-111250415085041714.htm>.

¹⁸ Government News-Vietnam. "Viet Nam, China Sign Cooperation Documents on Railway and Road Transport", April 15, 2025. <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/viet-nam-china-sign-cooperation-documents-on-railway-and-road-transport-111250415112846027.htm>.

¹⁹ Vietnam news. "Construction Begins on \$58-million Việt Nam – China Cross-border Bridge," March 31, 2025. <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/1694948/construction-begins-on-58-million-viet-nam-china-cross-border-bridge.html>.



Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) to strengthen bilateral trade. The MoU on trade is set to enhance cooperation between the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Agreements to activate trade facilitation and e-commerce cooperation, enhance customs collaboration, promote key exports, and implement mutual recognition for "Authorised Economic Operator" (AEO) and "single window" cooperation were also reached²⁰.

In the field of science and technology, both sides will implement the Vietnam-China agreement on this cooperation by utilising the Joint Committee, deepening policy ties in science, technology, and innovation, including AI, semiconductors, and nuclear energy. Vietnam and China also plan to boost technological human resources, promote technology transfer, and encourage collaborative research projects and human resource exchanges between their research institutions and enterprises. Both nations will strengthen cooperation on agriculture and fisheries, aiming to finalise a fishery cooperation agreement for the Gulf of Tonkin, including maritime search and rescue cooperation²¹.

President Xi's visit to Vietnam marks a significant step in strengthening China-Vietnam economic ties with agreements signed focused on enhancing trade, infrastructure, and collaboration in emerging technologies.

Following Vietnam, Xi paid a state visit to Malaysia from April 15 to 17. He held bilateral talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim at the Prime Minister's residence in Putrajaya²². Highlighting the millennium-old friendship between the two nations, Xi put forward a three-point proposal to build a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future. First, adhering to strategic independence and high-level coordination, both countries exchanged notes on the establishment of a "2+2" Joint Foreign and Defence Dialogue. Second, Xi emphasised aligning China's modernisation with Malaysia's Ekonomi MADANI initiative to further improve the level and quality of China-Malaysia cooperation. The two countries signed 31 agreements, focusing on four key areas of the digital, green, blue, and tourism economies,

²⁰ VnExpress. "Vietnam, China issue joint statement" April 5, 2025.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/politics/vietnam-china-issue-joint-statement-4874469.html>

²¹ Ibid

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs-China. "Xi Jinping Meets with King of Malaysia His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim," April 16, 2025.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202504/t20250417_11595939.html.



with efforts aimed at enhancing integration across industrial, supply, value, data, and talent chains. They aim to upgrade traditional cooperation areas, promote two-way investment, advance rail-sea intermodal transport, enhance the "Two Countries, Twin Parks" program, and elevate Malaysia's key ports as hubs in the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor. Third, to deepen cultural and people-to-people exchanges, Xi called for promoting Confucian-Islamic civilisational dialogue, expanding tourism, youth and sub-national exchanges, and cooperation in culture, education, sports, film, and media to strengthen traditional friendship and mutual understanding. Among the most notable agreements was a mutual visa exemption arrangement for holders of both public affairs and ordinary passports to scale up tourism²³.

Both sides spoke highly of the increase in bilateral trade volume and committed to jointly implementing the Five-Year Programme for Economic and Trade Cooperation (2024–2028) to consolidate and expand trade. In 2023, bilateral trade reached US \$212 billion – nearly a thousandfold increase from the early days of diplomatic ties. The Malaysian side also welcomed Chinese enterprises to participate in the construction of Malaysia's 5G network exploring potential cooperation in the semiconductor industrial chain to the extent practicable to maintain the stability of industrial supply chains²⁴.

Malaysia, with its neutral diplomacy and chairmanship of ASEAN in 2025, stands out as a key partner in China's regional ambitions. Both nations advocated for inclusive economic globalisation and WTO rule evolution, rejecting unilateral trade restrictions. They emphasised peaceful South China Sea dispute resolution via consultations under international law, including UNCLOS. Reaffirming ASEAN centrality, they supported ASEAN-led mechanisms for regional peace, stability, and development. China welcomed Malaysia as a BRICS partner. Malaysia also joined China's GSI and GDI reinforcing China's regional influence. The visit to Malaysia not only reaffirms China's commitment but also reflects a strategic recalibration of regional alliances amid global economic fragmentation. As China seeks to diversify its partnerships and routes, Malaysia's strategic position as a trade and logistics hub becomes ever more valuable.

President Xi Jinping's final visit was to Cambodia from April 17–18, 2025, marking a significant deepening of the "ironclad" friendship and

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs-China. "President Xi Jinping Holds Talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim," April 16, 2025.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202504/t20250417_11595680.html.

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs-China. "Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and Malaysia on Building a High-level Strategic China-Malaysia Community with a Shared Future," n.d. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202504/t20250417_11595814.html.



comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Cambodia. This was Xi's second state visit to Cambodia in nine years and his first since Prime Minister Hun Manet's government took office²⁵. A total of 37 cooperation documents were signed, covering a wide spectrum of sectors, including investment, trade, education, finance, information technology, youth affairs, agriculture, health, water resources, tourism, and women's affairs.

A major outcome was the establishment of a "2+2" strategic dialogue mechanism, involving regular consultations between the foreign and defence ministers of both countries. This new framework is designed to deepen security cooperation, expand military-to-military exchanges, and enhance coordination on law enforcement and cybercrime, including joint efforts to combat online gambling and fraud. Both sides also agreed to implement the "Outline of the Jointly Promoted Cooperation Plan for the Construction of the Belt and Road Initiative", with a focus on fast-tracking the development of the "Industrial Development Corridor" and the "Fish and Rice Corridor"²⁶. The visit also saw the announcement of a public-private partnership contract to fund Cambodia's ambitious US \$1.156 billion Funan Techo Canal project. The 151-kilometre canal, which will link a branch of the Mekong River to Phnom Penh in the Gulf of Thailand, is structured as a joint venture with 51% Cambodian and 49% Chinese ownership—marking China's most visible backing of a project to date²⁷.

Cambodia faces the highest reciprocal tariff rates from Washington. The joint statement highlighted the opposition of the two countries to unilateralism and trade protectionism, pledging to work together for peace, stability, and progress.

China has been strongly increasing its influence in the region over the past decade by exercising its substantial economic leverage. The visit was largely focused on enhancing bilateral trade and economic partnership, opposing unilateralism and protectionism, and upholding the multilateral trading

²⁵ The State Council- China. "Xi's Southeast Asia Visit Deepens Shared Commitment to Neighbourhood Amity, Cooperation," n.d. http://english.www.gov.cn/news/202504/20/content_WS6804447dc6d0868f4e8f1e6e.html.

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation – Cambodia. "Joint Statement Between the Kingdom of Cambodia and the People's Republic of China on Building an All-weather Cambodia-China Community with a Shared Future in the New Era and Implementing the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative", April 18, 2025. <https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/posts/2025-04-18-Press-Release-Joint-Statement-between-The-Kingdom-of-Cambodia-and-The-People-s-Republic-of-China-on-Building-an-Al-19-59-27>.

²⁷ Khmer Times. "Cambodia, China seal \$1.1B deal on Funan Techo Canal with 51-49% ownership", April 21, 2025. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501672019/cambodia-china-seal-1-1b-deal-on-ftc-with-51-49-ownership/>

system. With Trump's tariffs threatening the region's export-orientated economies, whose largest market is generally the United States, Beijing is now presenting itself as a source of stability.

Exercise Tiger Triumph 2025

The decision to create a new tri-services exercise between the militaries of India and the US was taken at the inaugural 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue between the two sides in September 2018²⁸. The first edition of the exercise, named Tiger Triumph, took place at Visakhapatnam, with a beaching exercise at Kakinada, in November 2019. Following iterations in October 2022 and March 2024, the fourth edition of the exercise took place at Visakhapatnam, with a beaching at Kakinada, from April 01-12²⁹.

The exercise was conducted in two parts: a harbour phase from April 01-07, during which the two sides planned for the execution of various training events at sea, as well as further refinement of procedures established during previous editions of the exercise. The harbour phase also included Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEE) on special operations, emergency medical response procedures, and operations across the air, maritime, cyber and space domains. This phase also encompassed the first ever SMEE with US and Indian industry partners, government representatives and operators focused on applying cutting-edge autonomous capabilities to address critical operational needs. As such, it advanced the US-India Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA) announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump on February 13³⁰. A sea phase from April 08-12 enabled the two forces to train together for maritime, amphibious and HADR operations through a Joint Combined Command and Control Centre. This phase culminated in the beach landing at Kakinada, including the establishment of a Joint Combined Humanitarian Relief and Medical Response Camp there. The exercise included a space element, incorporating satellite technology to enhance force awareness in operational planning and execution.

Participating units from India included IN ships Jalashwa, Mumbai, Gharial and Deepak, along with a P-8I, MH-60R helicopters and Hawk aircraft. The

²⁸ Joint Statement on the Inaugural India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, September 06, 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30358/Joint_Statement_on_the_Inaugural_IndiaUS_2432_Ministerial_Dialogue

²⁹ US Joins India to Launch Exercise Tiger Triumph 2025, April 01, 2025, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/4140526/us-joins-india-to-launch-exercise-tiger-triumph-2025/>

³⁰ India-US Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister of India to US, February 14, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2103037>



Army was represented by an Infantry Battalion group, including mechanised forces. The IAF contributed C-130 aircraft and Mi-17 V5 helicopters. Special operations forces from all three services also took part. The US side was represented by USS Comstock, a dock landing ship; USS Ralph Johnson, a destroyer; and P-8A Poseidon aircraft from the US Navy; C-130 aircraft from the USAF; an army platoon, a medical platoon, a civil-military operations centre, and a Multi-Domain Task Force Combined Information Effects Fusion Cell. A total of nearly 3000 personnel took part in the exercise aimed at further enhancing interoperability and practicing joint domain operations during a large-scale HADR scenario. 1000 of them participated in beaching operations at Kakinada on April 11.

An amphibious operation is considered amongst the most complex of military operations. Exercises such as Tiger Triumph enable India to draw on the vast institutional experience of the US in conducting such operations, hone its own capability and get exposed to new ideas. The exercise symbolises the growing synergy and interoperability between the armed forces of the two countries.

Other Developments Impacting the Indo-Pacific

Canadian Elections. General elections in Canada on April 28 brought Prime Minister Mark Carney back to power. Carney's Liberal Party won 169 of the 343 seats in the Canadian House of Commons, marginally short of an outright majority. The opposition Conservative Party won 144 seats. Other parties won 30 seats. Carney will lead a minority government, depending on the support of other parliamentarians to pass legislation.

Visit to India by Crown Prince of Dubai. Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the Crown Prince of Dubai and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the UAE visited India on April 08, 2025. He met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed with him how to further strengthen the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, especially in the areas of trade, investments, defence, energy, technology, education, sports and people-to-people ties³¹. The visiting leader also met the defence minister Shri Rajnath Singh, with both sides acknowledging that defence cooperation needs to be scaled up to match the progress made in other areas such as trade

³¹ Prime Minister receives the Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the UAE, April 08, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2120067>

and business³². They identified training exchanges as one of the key areas of defence cooperation.

Ishiba Visit to Vietnam and Philippines. Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba visited Vietnam and the Philippines from April 27-30. In Vietnam, he deepened ties across five key pillars: political relations; economic cooperation and human resources connectivity; defence and security; science, technology and green transformation; and collaboration at multilateral forums³³. In the Philippines, the first visit by a Japanese Prime Minister to the country in 25 years, he agreed to negotiate an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement and expanded cooperation across the security, economy and regional and international cooperation domains³⁴.

Upholding Impeachment of South Korean President. Four months after South Korea's President Yoon Suk-Yeol declared a short-lived martial law and plunged South Korea into a political crisis and was subsequently impeached³⁵, South Korea's constitutional court unanimously upheld his impeachment on April 04, thus formally dismissing him from office³⁶. The court described the President's action as a "grave betrayal of the people's trust" and said his major illegal acts, including failure to meet the substantive requirements for declaring martial law, failure to meet procedural requirements, interference with the authority of the National Assembly, violation of judicial independence and infringement of political freedoms and constitutional order were serious violations of the constitution. A general election to choose his successor has been scheduled on June 03, 2025³⁷.

NATO-Japan Meeting. Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte in Tokyo on April 09³⁸. The two sides reiterated their firm belief that Japan and NATO share strategic interests and recognise

³² Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh holds meeting with Crown Prince of Dubai and UAE Deputy PM and Defence Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in New Delhi, April 08, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2120093>

³³ Japanese PM wraps up official visit to Vietnam, April 29, 2025, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/japanese-pm-wraps-up-official-visit-to-vietnam-post318367.vnp>

³⁴ Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting (Summary), April 29, 2025, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/103/diplomatic/202504/29philippines.html>

³⁵ See Lalit Kapur, "South Korea's Political Crisis", Indo-Pacific Monitor December 2024, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5240.pdf

³⁶ South Korea's impeached president is removed from office, four months after declaring martial law, April 04, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/03/asia/yoon-impeachment-verdict-south-korea-intl-hnk/index.html>

³⁷ South Korea to hold presidential election on 3 June, April 08, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd7ve4qnlw9o>

³⁸ Meeting Between Prime Minister Ishiba and NATO Secretary General Rutte (Summary), April 10, 2025, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/103/diplomatic/202504/09nato.html>



their partnership is of strategic importance for the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. They said the National Security Strategy of Japan and the Strategic Concept of NATO underscore the importance of cooperation between their regions, based on the goals of the 2023-2026 Japan-NATO Individually Tailored Partnership Programme³⁹. They identified strengthening defence industrial cooperation as a shared priority, welcomed steps forward on cyber defence cooperation and the first ever international disaster relief operation by the JASDF in cooperation with NATO in Türkiye following the earthquake in March 2023. Prime Minister Ishiba expressed his intention that Japan will continue to play a leading role in deepening cooperation between NATO and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan Protests South Korean Court Judgement. South Korea's Cheongju District Court followed the precedent of the Seoul District Court and Seoul High Court in rendering a judgement directing Japan to pay compensation to a plaintiff in the case brought forward by the family of a former comfort woman⁴⁰. Japan strongly protested the judgement as clearly contrary to international law and agreements between the two countries and urged South Korea to take appropriate measures to remedy the status of its breaches of international law. Japan's stand is that the issue of comfort women was settled completely and fully with the Agreement on the Settlement of the Problem concerning property and claims and on the economic cooperation between Japan and South Korea of 1965. The case has the potential to once again roil relations between South Korea and Japan.

US Japan ROK Foreign Ministers Trilateral. The Foreign Ministers of the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) met in Brussels on April 3⁴¹. The ministers emphasised the importance of NATO's cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners to ensure the ability to swiftly respond to security developments and challenges in both the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. The US reiterated its commitment to the defence of Japan and the ROK, including the extended nuclear deterrence. The ministers strongly opposed unlawful maritime claims or any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the Indo-Pacific, including in the South China Sea and emphasised their commitment to ensuring international law, as reflected in

³⁹ Joint Statement H.E. Mr Ishiba Shigeru, Prime Minister of Japan and H.E. Mr Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General, April 09, 2025, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000168837.pdf>

⁴⁰ Regarding the Judgement of the Cheongju District Court of the Republic of Korea in the Lawsuit Filed by a Bereaved Family of a Former Comfort woman (Statement by Foreign Minister IWAYA Takeshi), April 25, 2025, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_01212.html

⁴¹ Joint Statement on the Trilateral United States Japan Republic of Korea Meeting in Brussels, April 03, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-trilateral-united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-meeting-in-brussels/>



UNCLOS, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea, prevails. They also emphasised the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and expressed concern about the recent military drills around Taiwan, calling for an end to further destabilising actions. They reaffirmed their commitment to the complete denuclearisation of North Korea and expressed concern about that country's cooperation with Russia.

IOS Sagar. To mark the 10th anniversary of the SAGAR initiative and the National Maritime Day, Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh flagged off INS Sunayna as IOS Sagar from Karwar on April 05⁴². The ship, with 44 naval personnel from nine friendly countries (Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka & Tanzania) embarked, is to provide afloat training to personnel from these countries who have obtained theoretical training from various professional training schools in Kochi, thereby demonstrating India's commitment to capacity-building and sharing its resources for regional security. IOS Sagar visited Dar-es-Salam (Tanzania) from April 12-15⁴³, Nacala (Mozambique) from April 17-20⁴⁴, and Port Louis (Mauritius) from April 26-29⁴⁵. On departure from each port, the ship carried out joint EEZ surveillance with maritime forces of the country concerned. The ship's last port of call before returning to India will be Port Victoria, in the Seychelles.

AIKEYME. The inaugural edition of the large-scale multilateral exercise AIKEYME (Africa India Key Maritime Engagement) took place at Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania from April 13-18⁴⁶. The exercise included participation from Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa, alongside the co-hosts India and Tanzania. IN ships Chennai and Kesari arrived Dar-es-Salam on April 10 and 11 respectively for the exercise, which aims to develop collaborative solutions to common regional challenges. Tanzania's Minister of Defence and National Service reaffirmed Tanzania's commitment to hosting future editions of AIKEYME and detailed the

⁴² Raksha Mantri flags-off INS Sunayna as Indian Ocean Ship SAGAR from Karwar with 44 personnel of nine friendly nations of Indian Ocean Region, April 05, 2025,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2119246>

⁴³ IOS Sagar Makes First Port Call at Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, April 13, 2025,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2121381>

⁴⁴ INS Sunayna (IOS SAGAR) Arrives in Mozambique Under SAGAR mission to Strengthen Maritime Ties, April 18, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2122722>

⁴⁵ IOS SAGAR in Port Louis Mauritius, April 27, 2025,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2124711>

⁴⁶ Africa India Key Maritime Engagement 2025, April 12, 2025,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2121218>



collaborative framework for regional maritime security, emphasising innovation and information sharing⁴⁷.

Quad Partners Statement on Myanmar Earthquake. Quad partners extended their deepest sympathies and condolences to the people of Myanmar and Thailand following the earthquake that struck central Myanmar on March 28⁴⁸. Affirming the Quad's commitment to working together in response to natural disasters and broader challenges to regional stability and security, they noted that they had so far committed humanitarian assistance estimated to have a combined value of over \$ 20 million.

Sanctions for Undermining Hong Kong's Autonomy. The US State Department imposed financial sanctions on six Hong Kong officials for engaging in actions or policies that threaten to further erode the autonomy of Hong Kong in contravention of China's commitments, and in connection with acts of transnational repression⁴⁹.

PLA Drills Around Taiwan. China launched "Strait Thunder 2025A", a military exercise in the middle and southern sea areas of the Taiwan Strait on April 02⁵⁰. The exercise focused on sea-air combat readiness patrols, battlefield dominance, strikes on sea and ground targets, blockades of key areas and sea routes and other tactics, in order to assess the forces' joint operational capabilities. It included the Shandong Carrier Task Group simulating striking ground and maritime targets in Taiwan⁵¹. The PLA Eastern Theatre Command described the exercise as a "just and necessary action" to defend national sovereignty and maintain national unity. In a response, the US State Department described China's military activities and rhetoric towards Taiwan as only serving "to exacerbate tensions and put the region's security and the world's prosperity at risk", while reinforcing the enduring US commitment to

⁴⁷ Harbour phase of Indian Navy's maiden initiative 'Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement exercise' inaugurated by Minister of Defence and National Service of Tanzania & Raksha Rajya Mantri onboard INS Chennai at Dar es Salaam, April 13, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2121495>

⁴⁸ Joint Statement by the Quad Partners on Myanmar Earthquake Response, April 03, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-by-the-quad-partners-on-myanmar-earthquake-response/>

⁴⁹ US Sanctions six Individuals for Undermining Hong Kong's Autonomy, March 31, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-sanctions-six-individuals-for-undermining-hong-kongs-autonomy/>

⁵⁰ Chinese military launches "Strait Thunder 2025A" in the middle and southern sea areas of Taiwan Strait, April 02, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16378459.html

⁵¹ Shandong Aircraft Carrier Task Group simulates striking ground and maritime targets in areas to the East of Taiwan Island, April 2, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16378540.html

allies and partners, including Taiwan⁵². G7 foreign ministers also expressed deep concern about China's provocative actions⁵³.

China Expels Japanese Fishing Vessels from Senkaku Islands. China's Coast Guard reported having expelled a Japanese fishing vessel that had illegally entered the territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao (Senkaku Islands) on April 5-6⁵⁴. A China Coast Guard fleet reported patrolling the waters of the islands on April 7⁵⁵. China also said it would continue carrying out such law enforcement operations to safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

China Expels Philippine Ship from Scarborough Shoal. China reported expelling the Philippines BRP Apolinario Mabini (a corvette) that had intruded into the waters of the Scarborough Shoal on April 20⁵⁶. It warned the Philippines to immediately cease infringement and provocation, or bear the consequences.

China Enforces its Jurisdiction Over Sandy Cay Reef. China effectively seized the disputed Sandy Cay Reef (called Tiexian Jiao by China) on April 27 when its Coast Guard unfurled the Chinese flag on the reef. The reef is claimed by China, Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines, and is just 3 Km from Thitu Island, which houses Philippine military facilities, including a runway. China warned the Philippines to stop infringements on the Sandy Cay Reef⁵⁷.

JMSDF Warships Visit Cambodia's Ream Naval Base. Two JMSDF warships, JS Bungo and JS Etajima, became the first foreign warships to visit the renovated Ream Naval Base on April 19⁵⁸. Western media has long reported the existence of a secret agreement that allows China to use the base in return for its

⁵² Response to China's Military Exercise Near Taiwan, April 01, 2025,

<https://www.state.gov/response-to-chinas-military-exercise-near-taiwan/>

⁵³ G7 Foreign Ministers Statement on China's Large-Scale Military Drills around Taiwan, April 6, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-on-chinas-large-scale-military-drills-around-taiwan/>

⁵⁴ Japanese fishing vessel expelled for unlawfully entering water of China's Diaoyu Dao, April 06, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16379075.html

⁵⁵ China Coast Guard Fleet Patrols Around Diaoyu Dao, April 07, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16379199.html

⁵⁶ Chinese Navy expels Philippine corvette for illegally intruding into territorial waters of China's Huangyan Dao, April 20, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16381730.html

⁵⁷ China warns Philippines to stop infringements on Tiexian Jiao, April 27, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16383255.html

⁵⁸ MSDF ships make port call at China-linked Cambodian base, April 19, 2025, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/04/19/japan/msdf-ships-cambodia/>



assistance, while the Cambodian government has denied such a deal. The ships were in Ream till April 22.

Russia Seeks Air Base in Indonesia. Janes reported on April 14 that Indonesia has received a request from Moscow seeking permission for Russian Aerospace Forces aircraft to be based at Manuhua Air Force Base in Biak, in the Indonesian province of Papua⁵⁹. Australia and Indonesia denied the report, while the Kremlin said there was a lot of fake news around⁶⁰. Russia and Indonesia had conducted a joint naval exercise in November 2024. As a non-aligned country, Indonesia may not grant a base, but usage of the facility by Russian aircraft is possible.

ISEAS State of South East Asia Survey. The annual ISEAS State of South East Asia Survey Report 2025 was published on April 03⁶¹. The survey provides a perspective of the view of ASEAN decision-makers and decision-influencers about various geopolitical issues. Climate change is now considered the region's top challenge, with unemployment and prospects for a recession, as well as rising economic tensions among major powers as other pressing concerns. More than half the respondents rank aggressive behaviour by China in the South China Sea as their primary geopolitical concern. China, however, remains the most influential economic and political-strategic power in the region and is considered the most strategically relevant to ASEAN. However, if forced to choose, the US has become the prevailing geopolitical choice. Trust levels in India have risen, and a little over a third of the respondents now have confidence in India's ability to contribute to global peace, security, prosperity and governance. The older ASEAN members (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand) still lack faith in India's ability to contribute.

IMF World Economic Outlook April 2025. The IMF's World Economic Outlook April 2025 was released on April 22. The outlook projects global growth in 2025 dropping from 3.3% envisaged in January to 2.8%, on account of the new tariff measures announced by the US and countermeasures by its trading partners. The projection for 2026 is similarly down from 3.3% to 3.0%. Growth in advanced economies is expected to reduce to 1.4% in 2025 and 1.5% in 2026. On the other hand, emerging markets and developing economies are expected to

⁵⁹ Indonesia mulls options after Russia seeks access to air force base, April 14, 2025, <https://www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news/air/indonesia-mulls-options-after-russia-seeks-access-to-air-force-base>

⁶⁰ Russia Eyes Air Base on Doorstep of US Ally: Report, April 16, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-news-eyes-pacific-air-base-indonesia-near-us-ally-australia-report-2060323>

⁶¹ The State of Southeast Asia 2025 Survey Report, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-State-of-SEA-2025-1.pdf>



grow by 3.7% and 3.9% respectively in these two years. India retains its status of the world's fastest growing major economy, with expectations that it will grow by 6.2% in 2025 and 6.3% in 2026. The corresponding figures for China are 4.0% growth in both years.

Sale of F-16 Aircraft to the Philippines. The US State Department notified Congress of the possible Foreign Military Sale of 20 F-16 C/D Block 70/72 aircraft along with associated spares and equipment to the Philippines for an estimated cost of \$ 5.58 billion on April 01⁶².

US ASEAN Dialogue. The US and ASEAN held the 37th Annual US-ASEAN Dialogue on April 22 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, to discuss ongoing cooperation under their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership⁶³. The US side reiterated its support for Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN. It highlighted that the US remains the top source of FDI for the ASEAN region and stressed President Trump's goal of establishing greater fairness and reciprocity in the trade relationship. Highlighting the close US coordination with ASEAN to facilitate Myanmar's path to an actual democracy in line with the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, it called for Myanmar's military regime to immediately end violence against its people, release those unjustly detained and allow unhindered humanitarian access to those in need. The US side also expressed the need to uphold freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea in the South China Sea.

Taiwan Strait Transit. The USN destroyer USS William P Lawrence transited the Taiwan Strait on April 23⁶⁴. China claimed that its Eastern Theatre Command sent navy and air force units to track and monitor the transit and "dealt with it in accordance with law".

India Flight Tests Army Version of Medium Range Surface to Air Missile. The DRDO and Indian Army successfully conducted four flight tests of the Army version of the Medium-Range Surface to Air Missile on April 3⁶⁵. This vehicle or ship launched missile is a high response, quick reaction, vertically launched

⁶² Philippines – F-16 Aircraft, April 01, 2025, <https://www.dsca.mil/Congressional-Notification-Archive/Article/4142323/philippines-f-16-aircraft>

⁶³ The 37th Annual US-ASEAN Dialogue, April 22, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/the-37th-annual-u-s-asean-dialogue/>

⁶⁴ Chinese military slams US warship's transit through Taiwan Strait, April 24, 2025, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16382693.html

⁶⁵ DRDO and Indian Army conduct four successful flight-tests of Army Version of Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile, April 04, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2118918>



supersonic missile designed to neutralise a range of aerial threats. It has a range of 70 Km.

Port Calls by IN Ships. INS Sahyadri, mission deployed in the Central Indian Ocean, made a port call at Colombo from April 07-09 for Operational Turn Around (OTR)⁶⁶. INS Trikanth, mission deployed in the Western Indian Ocean, made a port call at Duqm for OTR on April 10⁶⁷.

Egyptian Navy Assumes Command of CTF 153. The Egyptian Navy assumed command of the Combined Maritime Forces Combined Task Force 153 from the Royal Australian Navy on April 09⁶⁸. The Task Force is responsible for maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Keel Laying of Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels. The keel of the third of the Indian Navy's Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels was laid at GRSE Kolkata on April 11⁶⁹, while the keel of the fourth vessel of the class was laid at GRSE Kolkata on April 24⁷⁰. 11 ships of the class are to be built, with Goa Shipyard as the lead shipyard constructing seven and GRSE Kolkata building the remaining four. The NG OPVs will have an approximate tonnage of 3000 tons and are designed for coastal defence and surveillance, search and rescue operations, protection of offshore assets and anti-piracy missions.

India's Laser Weapon Shoots Down Drone. India successfully tested a futuristic weapon using a high-powered laser-based directed energy to shoot down a drone on April 13⁷¹. The test is the first stage of building an effective counter to drones and other aerial targets using high-powered lasers.

Japan's Indo-Pacific Deployment 2025. The JMSDF announced that it would conduct its Indo-Pacific deployment 2025 from April 21 to November 21⁷². Units being deployed will visit Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Malaysia, Marshall, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Oman, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tonga,

⁶⁶ <https://x.com/indiannavy/status/1909168463106486755>

⁶⁷ <https://x.com/indiannavy/status/1910337990578029049>

⁶⁸ Egyptian Navy Assumes Command of CMF's Red Sea Task Force, April 09, 2025, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/4150141/egyptian-navy-assumes-command-of-cmfs-red-sea-task-force/>

⁶⁹ Keel Laying of Third Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (Yard 3039), April 11, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2121084>

⁷⁰ Keel Laying of Fourth Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (Yard 3040), April 25, 2025.

⁷¹ India's First Futuristic "Star Wars" Laser Weapon Shoots Down Drone Swarm, April 13, 2025, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-first-futuristic-star-wars-drdo-laser-weapon-shoots-down-drone-swarm-8155390>

⁷² Indo-Pacific Deployment 2025, April 15, 2025, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202504/20250415en.pdf>



Tuvalu, United States of America and Vanuatu. They will participate in nine major exercises, including Malabar 2025.

Navika Sagar Parikrama. Having completed the fourth leg of its round-the-world voyage, INSV Tarini entered Cape Town, South Africa on April 01⁷³. After completing scheduled maintenance and repairs, she departed for the final leg of her voyage, to Goa, on April 15⁷⁴.

Exercise Desert Flag 10. IAF Mig-29 and Jaguar aircraft arrived at Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE on April 20, to participate in Exercise Desert Flag-10 from April 21 to May 08⁷⁵. Air Force contingents from Australia, Bahrain, France, Germany, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea, Turkey, UAE, United Kingdom, and the United States are participating in the exercise in addition to the Indian Air Force.

⁷³ Navika Sagar Parikrama II: Tarini Enters Cape Town, South Africa, April 01, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2117120>

⁷⁴ INSV Tarini Flagged off from Cape Town for the Final Leg of the Navika Sagar Parikrama II Expedition, April 15, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2121885>

⁷⁵ Indian Air Force Participates in Multinational Exercise Desert Flag-10 in UAE, April 20, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2123037>



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