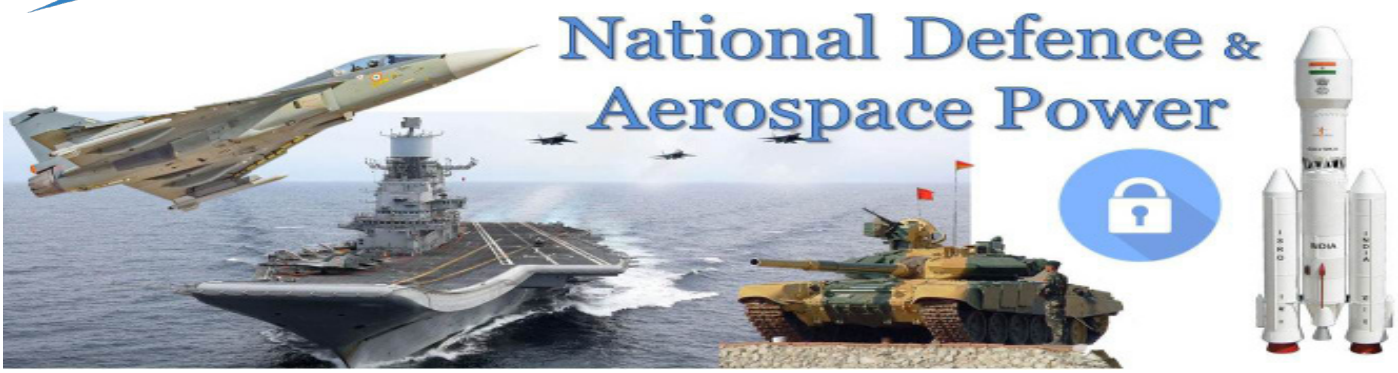
Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies ISSUE BRIEF

07/26

11 August 2026

ADVANCING INDIA'S PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Seychelles, Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand between June and July 2026, while Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi paid a visit to India in early July 2026. These visits were significant as they reinforced the Indo-Pacific as India's core area of geographical and geopolitical interest. These visits have been undertaken to shape India's operational battlespace within the Indo-Pacific by weaving the region together under common threads–defence cooperation, its subset maritime security cooperation, and defence industrial cooperation that have emerged as common elements within the existing bilateral dyads.

The Indo-Pacific comprises the Indian and Pacific Oceans–two sub-regions within the Indo-Pacific that are interconnected yet independent. However, despite this distinct character, it is within this maritime region that India has developed its own array of strategic partnerships. Anchored within the "existing 2+2 framework" that has come to define India's external engagements and India's renewed maritime policy of Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR), these visits have demonstrated the value India has come to attach to this key region.

This issue brief assesses the nature of these partnerships by examining the recent joint statements and hierarchising the visits based on the tangible outcomes achieved.

Australia

Prime Minister Modi visited Australia to attend the third edition of the Indo-Australia

Annual Summit, held on July 09, 2026.[1] The Australia partnership has remained anchored in the broader Indo-Pacific and addressed issues related to holistic security and defence. On this occasion, the "India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" attempted to broaden and deepen the contours of the partnership through a new joint declaration on defence and security cooperation, which is now supported by several working-level, defence, diplomatic, and intelligence engagements. India-Australia defence cooperation has grown through the conduct of key military exercises including AusInd naval exercises, Exercise Malabar among the Quad, Kakadu, and Exercise Talisman Sabre.[2] Interestingly, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is engaged in Exercise Pitch Black in Australia with leading international air forces building ties and giving a fillip to interoperability.[3]

"India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" attempted to broaden and deepen the contours of the partnership through a new joint declaration on defence and security cooperation.

However, maritime security cooperation has remained the epicentre of the partnership as both sides have "agreed to collaborate in areas of (maritime) information sharing, capability development, capacity building and operational coordination."[4] This collaboration was envisaged through the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Maritime Border Command and the Indian Coast Guard to support what was viewed as "a secure maritime environment."[5]

Both India and Australia simultaneously attempted to operationalise the Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (MLSA) by bringing the domain of space within its ambit. The leadership, while reiterating their support for India's Gaganyaan Human Space flight programme, has expressed support for the commissioning of a space tracking terminal on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.[6] This space tracking terminal could advance the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) for the region. India and Australia made a reference to the space partnership, including industry-to-industry collaboration, an area of engagement that has traditionally remained the reserve of the India-United States (US) bilateral under the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) and now the renamed Transforming the Relationship Using Strategic Technology (TRUST) programme.

India and Australia have attempted to build on the Australia-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, "as both sides welcomed the finalisation and signature of the Administrative Arrangement" that could facilitate Australian uranium exports to India.[7] This agreement is crucial, as it could enable the operationalisation of the Australia-India nuclear cooperation agreement signed in 2014.[8] Australia has maintained a stern policy of not allowing

uranium exports to non-members of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, growing convergences between India and Australia across different domains have facilitated a "change of heart," with Australia agreeing to supply uranium to India, giving a boost to India's nuclear ambitions. The operationalisation of this agreement could facilitate the operationalisation of the India-United States nuclear agreement that has remained non-operational since 2005.[9]

Japan has been an anchor of the Indo-Pacific from the beginning, with the idea of the 'Indo-Pacific' being introduced by former Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe in his speech to the Indian Parliament in 2007.

On defence industrial collaboration, India and Australia have remained committed to further engagement, as the leadership has welcomed progress in developing the MoU concerning the Provision of Defence Articles and Defence Services, and subsequent efforts to build connections between Indian and Australian defence affiliates.

Japan

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's official visit to India between July 01 and July 03, 2026[10] was crucial since Japan has been an anchor of the Indo-Pacific from the beginning, with the idea of the 'Indo-Pacific' being introduced by former Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe in his speech to the Indian Parliament in 2007. This visit reinforced this fact, as India and Japan re-emphasised the commonalities in their notional constructs of the Indo-Pacific, as seen in the revamped maritime policy of MAHASAGAR, and the revised version of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Similarly, the partnership was elevated to that of a Special Strategic and Global partnership, along the lines of the partnerships India shares with the US and France.

The visit illustrated the advanced operationalisation of the Japan-India Defence Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,[11] and the different bilateral agreements signed between the two countries, including the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). The India-Japan ACSA could enable improvements in maritime and aviation logistics, equipment maintenance and repair, and the cross-utilisation of both sea and airlift capability. The visit also demonstrated the growing strategic trust between partners, evident in mutual industrial coproduction efforts,, as seen through the co-production of the Unified Complex Radio Antenna (UNICORN) Mast for the Indian Navy (IN) and the sharing of the designs of the Mogami-class frigate by the Japanese side with India.[12] Other areas of cooperation have been reinforced: "joint and combined exercises, MDA using satellite capabilities, naval maintenance and MRO," have been given a push.

These developments are crucial since Japan has expressed its interest in building smart islands in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&N Islands), seafarer training and co-development of ports in India.[13] Incidentally, the A&N Islands are home to the tri-services command led by the Commander-in-Chief, Andaman and Nicobar Command, and the impact of these developments will be felt by all.

Since India intends to construct its own transhipment hub in Great Nicobar, the integrated development of the Sabang Port allows India to prepare for limited contingencies. At the same time, it enhances India's ISR capabilities along the straits that run through the Indo-Pacific.

Indonesia

Prime Minister Modi's state visit to Indonesia between July 06 and July 08 2026[14] was critical since the archipelagic nation sits at the edge of maritime chokepoints that govern the eastern flank of the Indo-Pacific and is home to major straits such as the Ombai-Wetar, Lombok, Makassar, et al. Incidentally, Chinese submarines can enter the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) via the Ombai-Wetar straits. Hence, both India and Indonesia have focused on maritime security with Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), search and rescue (SAR) and coastal surveillance within the joint statement. In addition, a new Indonesian International Liaison Officer (ILO) has been placed at the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) to advance cooperation on MDA.[15]

This visit has brought the focus back on the "integrated development" and potential operationalisation of the Sabang Port, which is located at a distance of 104 nautical miles from Indira Point, the southernmost point of India's territory located in Great Nicobar Island.[16] Sabang Port is likely to host cruise and marine-tourism facilities, and critical maritime industries such as shipbuilding and ship repair, thereby giving an impetus to Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) operations as well.

Since India intends to construct its own transhipment hub in Great Nicobar, the integrated development of the Sabang Port allows India to prepare for limited contingencies. At the same time, it enhances India's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities along the straits that run through the Indo-Pacific. Incidentally, India could assist Indonesia in building a civilian airport in Sabang to improve air-to-air connectivity with key airports in the A&N Islands, including Port Blair.

Indonesia has emerged as a key importer of military technology from India. India's export of the supersonic BrahMos cruise missile, especially its anti-ship version that has

a range of 300 kilometres, is critical,[17] since this missile is difficult to intercept, making it a credible weapon of choice during combat.[18] Indonesia has signed an Air-to-Air Missile Agreement with India[19] and has agreed to acquire the Astra Mk 1beyond visual range (BVR) missile, an indigenously built missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).[20] These missiles are in the process of being integrated with the IAF's Sukhoi-30 MKI fleet and the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk 1A. This missile is the likely counter for the Chinese-made PL-15 missile that was used in combat during the May 2025 India-Pakistan skirmishes.[21]

Seychelles

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Seychelles between June 27 and June 29, 2026 was crucial since the island nation is situated within the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR), which is a part of the south-western edge of the Indo-Pacific.[22] The visit came close on the heels of the visit of the Seychellois counterpart and the conduct of Exercise LAMITIYE 2026, which saw the participation of the Indian tri-services. The IAF participated with its transport aircraft C-130 while the IN fielded a Talwar-class frigate INS Trikand, and the Indian Army was represented by the Assam Regiment.[23]

India gave the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) class Fast Patrol Boat PS Lespwar to the Seychelles Coast Guard. The fast boat could assist Seychelles in areas such as maritime surveillance, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) patrol, SAR and coastal security.[24] Incidentally, India's IFC-IOR and Seychelles Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCoC) have already signed an MoU to enable data and information exchange and MDA.[25] Seychelles' recent decision to join the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC), a security arrangement in the IOR, could facilitate the creation of a more conclusive Common Operating Picture (COP) for the region if cooperation on MDA is given an impetus.

New Zealand

Prime Minister Modi paid an official visit to New Zealand July 10-11, 2026. This visit was critical as it was the first visit of a sitting Indian Prime Minister to New Zealand in 40 years.[26]

India and New Zealand have "share(d) interests in the Indo-Pacific" and have committing themselves to a "free, open, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific." Simultaneously, they elevated their partnership to a "strategic partnership."[27] The two nations concluded MLSA and the "Maritime Cooperation Arrangement" (MCA), an implementing agreement on cooperation in matters of hydrography and nautical cartography. New Zealand has chosen

to broaden and deepen its engagement with India by choosing "Maritime Security" as the operational pillar under the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI).[28]

LSAs could enable the mutual berthing and maintenance of warships, military aircraft, and troops during port exercises, and enable potential transits. This could entail advancing the Master Ship Repair Agreements with partners in the IOR, such as Maldives and Sri Lanka, along the lines of the MSRAs signed with the United States.

The two sides reiterated their commitment to operational coordination under the Combined Task Force (CTF-150) in 2025, where India was the deputy commander and New Zealand was the commander. These are significant developments considering the convergences on display between the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and the IN. For instance, partners from the CMF have recently collaborated with the IN to improve operational skills as part of Operation Southern Readiness.[28]

Moving Forward

The June-July 2026 visits are crucial to assess Indian preparedness for incoming conflicts. They enable the implementation of existing agreements, especially the logistics support agreements (LSAs) that India has signed with partners including Japan and Australia. The LSAs could enable the mutual berthing and maintenance of warships, military aircraft, and troops during port exercises, and enable potential transits. This could entail advancing the Master Ship Repair Agreements (MSRAs) with partners in the IOR, such as Maldives and Sri Lanka, along the lines of the MSRAs signed with the United States.[29] Similarly, air-to-air refuelling agreements could be signed with partners along the lines of the agreement signed with Australia.[30]

Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) and Air Domain Awareness (ADA) should be developed to ensure an effective COP. A common data-linking network could be developed for critical infrastructure located on the islands: ships, aircraft, Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems (AEWACs) could ensure deterrence. Finally, the Quad Maritime Surveillance initiative and the Quad Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative could be leveraged to access a nuanced COP.[31] The IAF could increase its presence in the IOR by deploying the Su-30 MKI and the Rafale. It can increase air power projection in the Bay of Bengal by building and strengthening Air Defence (AD) systems in the A&N Islands. Similarly, placing a permanent squadron of the Sukhoi-30s could advance India's offensive capabilities in the IOR. India could leverage these agreements by furthering its missile MRO capabilities. Since India is becoming an exporter of missile technology, it could build robust infrastructure to provide maintenance and repair facilities

for missiles to foreign buyers.

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