



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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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 Image:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka at Hyderabad House, December 16, 2024. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in Kuwait on December 22, 2024. Source: PIB

Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh with dignitaries at the commissioning of INS Tushil in Kaliningrad, Russia on December 09, 2024. Source: PIB

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

December 2024

Abstract

South Korea plunged into political crisis following a short-lived declaration of martial law on December 3, followed by the impeachments of President Yoon Suk-yeol on December 14 and of acting President Han Duck-soo on December 27. Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok took over as the Acting President.

The US National Defense Authorisation Act 2025 was signed into law on December 23. The Act allocates about \$ 870 billion for the Department of Defense, including \$ 167.85 billion for procurement and \$ 295 billion for operations.

Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka made his first visit abroad to India from December 15-17. The visit resulted in a positive reset in bilateral relations and several measures to enhance the India-Sri Lanka partnership.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Kuwait from December 21-22. Kuwait became India's 37th strategic partner, and the fifth in the Gulf Region.

The fourth India-UAE Strategic Dialogue was held on December 12. The two sides discussed expansion of bilateral relations in defence, emerging technologies, nuclear energy, critical minerals and renewable energy, among other areas.

India-China relations saw initial steps towards normalisation following the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives on the Boundary Issue on December 18.

Australia-China trade relations were fully normalised on December 20, ending all bans imposed by China on Australia's exports in 2020.

Cambodia's former Prime Minister Hun Sen said on December 20 that Japan would be granted visiting rights to Ream Naval Base. A USN warship made its first visit to a Cambodian port since 2016 on December 16, signalling a thaw in Cambodia-US relations.

Quad Foreign Ministers issued a Joint Statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of Quad cooperation and committing to work together in responding to the future needs of the (Indo-Pacific) region.

The first Coast Guard training exercise among Quad countries will reportedly be held in January 2025.

On December 12, a Royal Australian Navy submariner became the first officer to be fully qualified by the USN to hold watch on a Virginia-class nuclear submarine. More than 100 Australian submariners are undergoing nuclear submarine training under the AUKUS Agreement.

The Australian Defence and Foreign Ministers met their British counterparts in London on December 16. The ministers recognised the inseparable nature of security and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions and took steps to enhance their bilateral relationship, including under AUKUS.

The Australia-Papua New Guinea bilateral security agreement entered into force on December 12. Australia also announced a package of support to grow the size and capability of the Solomon Islands Police Force on December 20.

Japan will provide Official Security Assistance (OSA) amounting to \$ 10.6 million for procurement of small boats and radars for the Philippines Navy and Air Force. Separately, Japan announced OSA assistance of \$ 7 million for coastal radars and associated infrastructure for Djibouti on December 25.

INS Tushil, the seventh Talwar-class frigate, was commissioned at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad on December 09. INS Nirdeshak, the second large survey vessel, was commissioned at Visakhapatnam on December 18. Mazagon Docks Limited delivered INS Surat and INS Nilgiri, respectively the fourth Vishakhapatnam-class destroyer and the first Nilgiri-class frigate, to the Indian Navy on December 20. The two ships will be commissioned in early 2025.

South Korea's Political Crisis

South Korea plunged into a political crisis on the night of December 3, following the declaration of martial law by President Yoon Suk-yeol. The declaration came after months of escalating tension and political gridlock between his administration and the National Assembly, in which the opposition Democratic Alliance had won 173 of the 300 Assembly seats in elections held in April 2024. Martial law was purportedly intended to protect the constitutional order from opposition parties, which Yoon described as pro-North Korean "anti-state forces"¹. The immediate trigger appeared to be an impeachment motion introduced by the opposition Democratic Party (DP) against top prosecutors and the Chief State Auditor, citing their mishandling of cases regarding the First Lady. Yoon dispatched military and police forces to the National Assembly to prevent it from convening and to arrest opposition leaders. However, most legislators were able to evade or break through the security cordon.

Less than three hours after martial law was declared, the National Assembly voted 190-0 to demand Yoon rescind his order. Shortly thereafter, the US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said that the Biden Administration was watching events in South Korea with grave concern and had every hope that any political disputes would be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law. The US Defense Department postponed scheduled a US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group Meeting and table-top exercise and said there have been no changes to the US force posture in South Korea. At around 4.30 AM on December 4, barely six hours after his declaration, Yoon lifted martial law. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken welcomed the action and said the US expected political disagreements would be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law.

That Yoon did not enjoy support of the US became abundantly clear in pronouncements during the next few days. On December 5, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan clarified that the US was not consulted in any way on Yoon's declaration of martial law, which had raised deep concerns. Deputy Secretary of State Campbell followed the same day by saying that Yoon had badly misjudged in declaring martial law. On December 06, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin cancelled a trip to South Korea, while Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed deep concern about the martial law declaration and welcomed its lifting. On December 7, Yoon apologized for the declaration and said it was for his People Power Party (PPP) to decide the length of his term and

¹ Why did South Korea's president declare martial law – and what now, December 04, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0lgw1pw5zpo>

how the government should be run. He narrowly survived an impeachment vote the same day – a two-thirds majority is required under Korean law to impeach the president.

On December 8, PPP Chairman Han Dong-hoon said that Yoon was no longer running the government and would eventually step down, and the Yoon's Prime Minister Han Duk-soo and the PPP were in charge of affairs². On December 9, Yoon's Defence Minister, who had resigned when martial law was lifted, was arrested. He later attempted suicide. The same day, the Justice Ministry barred Yoon from leaving South Korea, listing him as a criminal suspect on insurrection charges³. On December 14, a second impeachment motion was carried with 204 votes (12 members of Yoon's PPP and the entire opposition voted for the motion), stripping Yoon of his powers⁴. Over 70% of the Koreans polled supported the impeachment.

Prime Minister Han Duk-soo took over as the acting president. He too was impeached on December 27, after failing to appoint three justices to fill vacancies in the Constitutional Court, with 192 lawmakers voting in favour of impeaching him. The National Assembly Speaker ruled that a simple majority was sufficient to remove the Prime Minister and declared the motion for impeachment passed. The People's Power Party, however, filed a constitutional court petition on the grounds that a simple majority threshold was too low to impeach the acting president. Meanwhile, Han Duck-soo accepted the outcome and said he would wait for a decision from the Constitutional Court on the decision. The finance minister and Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok took over as the acting President⁵.

Yoon is also under criminal investigation for insurrection, a charge that overrides the president's usual immunity from prosecution. His impeachment has gone to South Korea's Constitutional Court for a trial, which must be decided within 180 days. The problem is that under South Korean law, at least six of the nine justices of the Constitutional Court must uphold the impeachment to oust the President from office. The court, however, has three vacancies in its strength. All six remaining judges would thus have to vote in

² A Sidelined Sitting President: South Korea's Leader Won't Run the Country, December 08, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/south-koreas-former-defense-minister-detained-over-martial-law-involvement-cb96e750>

³ Travel ban on S Korea president after martial law attempt, December 09, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwydj9k7jkgo>

⁴ South Korean MPs impeach president after martial law attempt, December 14, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c140xjv31lxo>

⁵ South Korean parliament votes to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo, December 27, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/27/asia/south-korea-impeachment-vote-acting-president-intl-hnk/index.html>

favour of impeachment for the decision to be upheld. The court started its proceedings on December 27.

If upheld by the court, Yoon will be ousted from office and elections must be held within 60 days. If the court overturns impeachment, he will be reinstated in office and the presidential election will be held as scheduled in March 2027. The timing of the court's verdict could be important: the DP's leader Lee Jae-myung, who had narrowly lost the presidential election in 2022, is accused of corruption, violating election laws and involvement in an illegal cash transfer to North Korea. He has appealed a November 2024 election law conviction that bars him from running for office.

Yoon has, during his term, brought South Korea in closer alignment with the US on North Korea, China, Japan and Ukraine. The opposition DP advocates substantially different policies, more balanced with regard to North Korea, China and Russia, and more critical of Japan's historical issues with South Korea. All in all, there is now greater uncertainty about South Korea's Indo-Pacific policies.

Sri Lanka's President Visits India

Three months after assuming office, Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka made his first visit abroad, to New Delhi, from December 15-17, 2025⁶. Dissanayaka's National People's Power coalition had won a landslide victory in Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections on November 14, winning 159 of the 225 seats. As such, Dissanayaka enjoys an unprecedented ability to shape his country's policies.

The comprehensive joint statement issued following the visit signalled the reset in India-Sri Lanka relations and contained numerous steps to enhance the bilateral partnership⁷. The leaders agreed to intensify political engagements at leadership and ministerial levels and underscored the importance of regular parliamentary exchanges to promote democratic values and share expertise on their institutional best practices. Acknowledging the positive and impactful role of India's development assistance to Sri Lanka, the leaders agreed to work together for timely completion of the Indian Housing Project, Three Islands Hybrid Renewable Energy Project and High Impact Community Development Projects across Sri Lanka. They also agreed to extend full support for timely

⁶ Visit of President of Sri Lanka to India (December 15-17, 2024),

https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38787/Visit_of_President_of_Sri_Lanka_to_India_December_1517_2024

⁷ India – Sri Lanka Joint Statement: Fostering Partnerships for a Shared Future, December 16, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2084793>

implementation of projects for the Indian Origin Tamil Community in the Eastern Province and solar electrification of religious places in Sri Lanka.

In training and capacity building, India agreed to organise the training of 1500 civil servants across Sri Lankan ministries and departments over a period of five years. The leaders committed to explore further training programmes for Sri Lankan officials in civil, defence and legal domains.

President Dissanayaka thanked Prime Minister Modi for India's support in stabilising the Sri Lankan economy during the 2022 financial crisis, including through emergency financing and forex support worth \$ 4 billion. The two leaders agreed on finalising the bilateral MoU on Debt Restructuring. They also agreed on a shift from debt-driven models towards investment led partnerships across different sectors. The leaders agreed to work for early resumption of the ferry service between Rameshwaram and Talaimannar, and to explore the possibility of jointly working on the rehabilitation of Kankesanthurai port in Sri Lanka.

On the energy development front, the leaders agreed to implement the solar power project in Sampur and further augment its capacity. They further committed to continuing discussions on the supply of LNG from India to Sri Lanka, the establishment of a high-capacity power grid interconnection between the two countries, cooperation between India, Sri Lanka and the UAE to implement a multi-product pipeline from India to Sri Lanka, and the joint development of offshore wind power potential in the Palk Straits. They further decided to support the development of Trincomalee as a regional energy and industrial hub.

On digitisation to improve governance, the two leaders agreed to expedite implementation of the Sri Lanka Unique Digital Identity project to improve the Sri Lanka government's delivery of services to the public, collaborate on avenues to roll out Digital Public Infrastructure in Sri Lanka with India's assistance, promote digital financial transactions by extending the use of UPI digital payments for the benefit of both countries, and to learn from India's Aadhaar platform, GeM portal, PM Gati Shakti digital platform, and digitised customs and other taxation procedures.

The leaders agreed to expand cooperation in research and development in sectors such as agriculture, aquaculture, digital economy and health, explore cooperation between educational institutions of both countries, and foster cooperation for the mentorship of Sri Lankan start-ups. Acknowledging that the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement had enhanced the trade partnership between the two countries, they agreed to continuing discussions on an

Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement, the bilateral Social Security Agreement, enhance local currency trade settlement between the two countries, and encourage investment in key sectors in Sri Lanka.

President Dissanayaka reiterated Sri Lanka's stated position of not allowing its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India as well as towards regional stability. Both leaders agreed to explore the possibility of concluding a framework agreement on defence cooperation, foster cooperation in hydrography, the provision of defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's capabilities, the intensification of cooperation through joint exercises, maritime surveillance, defence dialogues and exchanges. They further agreed to strengthen Sri Lanka's capabilities on disaster mitigation, relief and rehabilitation, as well as to enhance capacity building and training for Sri Lankan defence forces through tailormade training programmes wherever required.

Prime Minister Modi conveyed India's full support to Sri Lanka's chairmanship in the IORA⁸. President Dissanayaka sought early bilateral technical discussions pertaining to the establishment of the outer limits of Sri Lanka's Continental Shelf beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone.

As India's closest maritime neighbour and due to its geographic position astride East-West trade routes passing through the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is a critical partner for India. It is also a focal point of India's neighbourhood first policy, as well as India's Indian Ocean SAGAR policy. Coming early in the Dissanayaka administration's innings, the visit augurs well for India-Sri Lanka ties. There is, nevertheless considerable scope for enhancement of bilateral relations; Sri Lanka is not yet one of India's strategic partners. As connectivity between the two countries grows, one hopes this deficiency will be bridged.

⁸ Statement to the Media by the President of Sri Lanka during the State Visit to India, 16 December 2024, <https://www.president.gov.lk/statement-to-the-media-by-the-president-of-sri-lanka-during-the-state-visit-to-india-16-december-2024/>

Modi's Landmark Visit to Kuwait Paves the Way for a Strategic Partnership

by Divya Rai

At the invitation of Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Kuwait on December 21-22, 2024⁹. This marks the first time in 43 years that an Indian Prime Minister has travelled to Kuwait, with the last visit made in 1981 by Indira Gandhi. A major highlight of the visit was the elevation of their relationship to a strategic partnership¹⁰.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held discussions to strengthen bilateral ties across various sectors with Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah¹¹. They emphasised cooperation across multiple sectors such as trade, investment, defence, security, technology, and cultural exchanges, highlighting the potential for further growth in bilateral relations. Both leaders emphasised the potential for further growth and diversification in bilateral trade, which currently stands at approximately \$10.47 billion, and acknowledged that trade has been an enduring link between India and Kuwait.

India and Kuwait formally established diplomatic ties in 1961, but their relationship dates back much further, rooted in significant pre-oil maritime trade. Historically, wooden dhows from Kuwait carried pearls and Arabian horses to India in exchange for wood, cereals, clothes, and spices.

Energy has been the crucial pillar of the bilateral relationship, with Kuwait being one of India's top suppliers of crude oil and LPG. During the fiscal year 2023-24, Kuwait was the 6th largest crude supplier and 4th largest supplier of petroleum gas to India. Kuwait has also met about 3.5% of India's total energy needs¹². Both leaders recognised there is immense potential for further collaboration, which could transform their traditional buyer-seller relationship

⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Prime Minister meets with Crown Prince of Kuwait," December 22, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38862/Prime_Minister_meets_with_Crown_Prince_of_Kuwait.

¹⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Joint Statement: Official visit of Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India to Kuwait (December 21-22, 2024)", December 22, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38866>

¹¹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Prime Minister meets Prime Minister of Kuwait," December 22, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38864/Prime_Minister_meets_Prime_Minister_of_Kuwait.

¹² Embassy of India- Kuwait, "Bilateral Brief on India-Kuwait Economic and Commercial Relations". <https://indembkwt.gov.in/india-kuwait-trade-and-economic-relation.php#:~:text=During%20FY%202023%2D24%2C%20Kuwait%20was%20the%206th,has%20significant%20presence%20in%20Kuwait%20since%201980>.

into a comprehensive partnership. For instance, India-Kuwait collaboration in petrochemical industry creates opportunities for co-investments. It will also facilitate technology exchange. Especially, India's petrochemical industry is set to reach \$300 billion by 2025, which aligns well with Kuwait's ambitious petrochemical vision outlined in its 2024 strategy.

In addition to the conventional hydrocarbons trade, Kuwait is keen to invest in India's energy sector. Acknowledging India's growing market, both sides recognised that there exist a plethora of new areas of cooperation, including the entire value chain of oil and gas, as well as efforts in low-carbon solutions such as petrochemical industries, green hydrogen, biofuels, and carbon capture technologies.

During the visit, both leaders welcomed the recent establishment of a Joint Commission on Cooperation (JCC) between India and Kuwait. They also agreed to set up new Joint Working Groups (JWGs) focused on areas such as trade, investment, education and skill development, science and technology, security and counter-terrorism, agriculture, and culture, in addition to the existing JWGs.

In the context of defence cooperation, both India and Kuwait welcomed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that establishes a framework to strengthen bilateral defence ties. This agreement will facilitate joint military exercises, training of defence personnel, coastal defence, maritime safety, and the joint development and production of defence equipment. The MoU will institutionalise their defence relationship and pave the way for deeper cooperation in defence and security¹³.

The Indian side welcomed Kuwait's decision to become a member of the International Solar Alliance (ISA). The Indian side also appreciated Kuwait's active role in the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). Further enhancing people-to-people contacts and strengthening cultural cooperation, both sides appreciated the renewal of the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for 2025-2029.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kuwait follows a series of significant meetings between Indian and Kuwaiti leaders in 2024.

¹³ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Joint Statement: Official visit of Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India to Kuwait (December 21-22, 2024)", December 22, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38866>

Date	Meetings
August 18	External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar official state visit to Kuwait ¹⁴
September 8-9	Indian and Kuwait Foreign Ministers met at First India-GCC Strategic Dialogue Committee in Riyadh ¹⁵
September 24	PM Modi met with Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during the UNGA ¹⁶
December 3-4	Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya travelled to India ¹⁷

These interactions laid a solid foundation for Modi's visit. The visit will also lay the foundation for regional stability and promote a more dynamic relationship between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which Kuwait is a key member. One of the great diplomatic successes of India has been the moderate approach towards the Arab states, especially amidst ongoing conflicts in the region. This landmark visit is expected to strengthen India's West Asia policy by consolidating existing partnerships and opening new avenues for collaboration.

¹⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Visit of External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar to Kuwait (August 18, 2024)". https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38178/Visit_of_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_to_Kuwait_August_18_2024.

¹⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Visit of EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar to Saudi Arabia for the India-GCC Joint Ministerial Meeting for Strategic Dialogue," September 8, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38279/Visit_of_EAM_Dr_S_Jaishankar_to_Saudi_Arabia_for_the_IndiaGCC_Joint_Ministerial_Meeting_for_Strategic_Dialogue.

¹⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Prime Minister meets with Crown Prince of Kuwait", September 22, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38334/Prime+Minister+meets+with+Crown+Prince+of+Kuwait>.

¹⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Visit of H.E. Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait", December 3, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38672/Visit+of+HE+Abdullah+Ali+AlYahya+Minister+of+Foreign+Affairs+of+the+State+of+Kuwait>.

Australia–UK Ministerial Consultations

Australia's Defence and Foreign Ministers, Richard Marles and Penny Wong, met their British counterparts David Lammy and John Healey in London on December 16 for the bi-annual Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations (AUKMIN) on London. A Joint Statement was issued on the occasion¹⁸.

The ministers "recognised" the inseparable nature of security and prosperity of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions and committed to working together to shape a world characterised by adherence to rules and norms, rather than power or coercion. They condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demanded that Russia withdraw its troops from Ukraine's territory. Sharing deep concern about the role of third countries in enabling Russia's war against Ukraine, they urged China to step up efforts to prevent its companies from supporting Russia's invasion and its defence industrial base through the supply of critical components. They also strongly condemned DPRK support for Russia's war through the supply of munitions, arms and other materiel, and agreed that the deployment of DPRK troops to Russia was an alarming escalation, with impacts for the security of the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions.

The ministers expressed serious concern about the intensification of dangerous and destabilising behaviour by China's vessels towards Philippine and Vietnamese vessels and crew in the South China Sea. Calling for adherence to international law, particularly UNCLOS, to ensure peace and security in the South China Sea, they reaffirmed that the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal decision is final and binding on the parties. They also emphasised that any Code of Conduct on the South China Sea must fully accord with international law, not prejudice the rights or interests of other states under international law, and not undermine the existing inclusive regional architecture. Underscoring the critical importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, they emphasised that differences should be resolved peacefully and not through the threat or use of force or coercion. They committed to working together to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations, as a member where statehood is not a prerequisite, or as an observer or guest where it is.

The ministers agreed that UK's engagement in the Indo-Pacific was important to strategic balance in the region. Reaffirming their commitment to ASEAN

¹⁸ Statement on Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations, 17 December 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-12-17/statement-australia-uk-ministerial-consultations-aukmin>

centrality, they committed to deepening and diversifying economic ties with Southeast Asian countries. They reiterated their deep concern at the deteriorating political and security situation and the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and supported enhanced cooperation between ASEAN and the UN in addressing the Myanmar crisis.

The ministers agreed to continue enhancing interoperability with the militaries of the Pacific through engagement in bilateral and regional exercises. The Royal Navy (RN) will offer tailored maritime training support at the request of Pacific Island partners, using the expertise of the RN's forward deployed Offshore Patrol Vessel crews. They agreed to formalise the UK-Australia Maritime Security dialogue, to be held annually, and committed to future hydrographic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. They also reiterated their commitment to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as the premier ministerial-level forum in the Indian Ocean Region and to exploring opportunities to collaborate in IORA.

The ministers reaffirmed their enduring commitment to the AUKUS partnership. They welcomed the considerable progress made by all AUKUS partners to support Australia's acquisition of an SSN, including work underway to deliver SSN-AUKUS, which both Australia and UK will build and operate. They reaffirmed UK's commitment to increase SSN port visits to Australia from 2026 and to the establishment of a rotational presence of an UK Astute class submarine as part of Submarine Rotational Force-West at HMAS Stirling. They further acknowledged efforts to support the growth and resilience of the submarine industrial bases of both their countries. On Pillar II of AUKUS, the ministers acknowledged the strengthening of undersea warfare capabilities and maritime autonomy, as well as progress in quantum technologies, cyber capabilities, hypersonics and counter-hypersonics, artificial intelligence and electronic warfare. They noted ongoing consultations with Japan, Canada, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea to identify possibilities for collaboration on advanced capabilities projects under AUKUS Pillar II.

The ministers welcomed the commitment to further enhancing UK-Australia strategic underwater warfare capability in addition to AUKUS. Australia welcomed the UK's decision to transfer system knowledge and information on the S2087 towed array sonar for the first time with another nation. This will further enhance the interoperability and interchangeability of the UK and Australia's Type 26 and Hunter Class Frigate programmes. They further welcomed the confirmation by the UK of an ongoing contribution to the Combined Intelligence Centre-Australia. They agreed to explore enhanced collaboration on Land Mobility Platforms, including opportunities for shared

production and sustainment. They also agreed to work more closely together on defence innovation, including the leveraging their respective expertise in quantum.

Acknowledging significant levels of exercise activity throughout 2024, they committed to retaining a regular tempo of UK participation in major Australian hosted multi-national exercises in the years ahead. They announced US-Australia integration in the 2025 deployment of the UK-led multi-national Carrier Strike Group (CSG) in the Indo-Pacific, which will see interaction and support from Royal Australian Navy units, aircraft from the Royal Australian Air Force, alongside support from space and cyber components. The CSG will participate in Exercise TALISMAN SABRE, the deployment will include the first ever Australian port visit by a Queen Elizabeth-class carrier.

As linkages between Euro-Atlantic theatre and the Indo-Pacific grow, Australia has become among the foremost Indo-Pacific partners of Euro-Atlantic nations. These include the UK, France, Germany and Italy, all of whom have deployed their ships and aircraft to the Indo-Pacific in recent years. The trend has continued notwithstanding the July 2024 change of government in the UK. The recent AUKMIN consultations reinforce this trend. However, the distance separating the two countries, coupled with the fact that both are middle powers, will limit the bandwidth of their cooperation. Australia's security will remain underpinned by its alliance with the US, with the UK and other European countries offering limited support.

The Commissioning of INS Tushil

Speaking at the Navy Day Press Conference on December 2, 2024, the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), Admiral DK Tripathi said that 62 ships and one submarine were under construction at various shipyards for the Indian Navy¹⁹. All except two of these ships were being built in India. The first of the two ships ordered on shipyards abroad, INS Tushil, was commissioned into the Indian Navy by the Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad on December 09²⁰. The commissioning ceremony was also attended by the Russian Deputy Minister of Defence Mr. Alexander Vasilyevich Fomin, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Federation Navy Admiral Aleksandr Alekseyevich Moiseyev and India's CNS Admiral DK Tripathi, among others.

¹⁹ Live: Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi Press Conference, December 02, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSnK3roji0Y>

²⁰ INS Tushil, latest multi role stealth guided missile frigate, commissioned into the Indian Navy in the presence of Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh in Russia, December 09, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2082369>

INS Tushil is the seventh Talwar-class frigate of the Indian Navy and the first ship of Batch III. The first batch of three ships (Talwar, Trishul and Tabar) were contracted for in 1997, built by the Baltiysky Zavod Shipyard in St Petersburg and delivered in 2002-03. A second batch of three ships (Teg, Tarkash and Trikand) was ordered in July 2006, built by the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad and delivered in 2012-13. The third batch of two ships (Tushil and Tamala) was ordered in October 2018; the first ship of the batch has just been delivered, while the second is expected to follow a few months later. A fourth batch of two ships (the Triput class) was ordered to be built indigenously under license by Goa Shipyard in November 2018. These ships are expected to be delivered in 2026-27.

Tushil is designed for blue water operations in all dimensions of maritime warfare: surface, air, underwater and electro-magnetic. She displaces about 4100 tons at full load, has a length of 125m, a beam of 15.2m, and a draught of 4.5m. Her Zorya-Mashproekt propulsion plant gives her a top speed of 32 knots and a range of nearly 9000 Km at 14 knots. Her main armament comprises 8 Brahmos land-attack and anti-ship supersonic cruise missiles, 24 Shtil-1 Surface-to-Air Missiles with a maximum range of 42 Km, 8 Igla-1E short-range Surface-to-Air Missiles, a 100mm naval gun, 2 AK-630 Close In Weapon Systems, 1 RBU-6000 anti-submarine rocket launcher and two twin 533 mm torpedo tubes. The ship carries one Ka-28/Ka-31/HAL Dhruv helicopter.

Tushil commenced her maiden voyage back to India on December 17²¹. This will take her through the Baltic Sea, North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea on her way home. En route, she has already visited London and Casablanca, and will visit various ports and exercise with the navies of the concerned countries. She is expected to arrive in India in January 2025.

The induction of Tushil into the Indian Navy (IN) brings the strength of destroyers and frigates to 25 (two more, Surat and Nilgiri, have been delivered to the IN, but are not yet commissioned). This number is well below the more than 140 destroyers and frigates in the US Navy and the 97 such ships in the PLA Navy. Japan comes third with over 45 ships of this type. It is, however, more than the 24 such vessels with the Russian Navy, the 22 with the French Navy and the 14 with the Royal Navy. These ships are employed as escorts for aircraft carrier battle groups and as surface action groups in wartime. In

²¹ INS Tushil commenced her passage to India, December 19, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2086133>

peacetime, apart from training, they are employed for largely constabulary duties and showing the flag missions.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

Lobito Trans-Africa Corridor Summit. Leaders from Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, Tanzania and the US met in Angola on December 04 for the Lobito Trans-Africa Corridor Summit²². They expressed satisfaction at progress on the corridor, which will connect Lobito in Angola with Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, in the process enhancing access to critical minerals needed for the clean energy transition while strengthening food security, boosting regional trade and empowering communities along the corridor.

Nauru-Australia Partnership. Nauru & Australia announced elevation of bilateral relationship to an integrated economic, social and security partnership by signing the Nauru-Australia Treaty on December 09²³. Australia will provide Nauru A\$ 100 million (\$ 62.4 million) in direct budget support over five years to further strengthen Nauru's economic security and resilience. The Commonwealth Bank of Australia will also start banking services in Nauru from 2025. Australia has further committed to remaining Nauru's primary security partner by providing A\$ 40 million (\$ 25 million) in new investments to support Nauru's policing and security needs.

India – UAE Dialogue. The 4th India-UAE Strategic Dialogue was held on December 12, followed by the 15th meeting of the India-UAE Joint Commission on December 13²⁴. The two events were co-chaired by India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and UAE's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. The two sides discussed the expansion of the bilateral strategic partnership in areas including defence, emerging technologies, nuclear energy, polar research, critical minerals and renewable energy, among others. They also took stock of all facets of the existing bilateral relationship and expressed satisfaction on progress under various initiatives.

²² Readout of the Lobito Trans-Africa Corridor Summit, December 04, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/12/04/readout-of-the-lobito-trans-africa-corridor-summit/>

²³ Nauru-Australia Treaty, December 09, 2024, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/nauru-australia-treaty>

²⁴ 4th India-UAE Strategic Dialogue and 15th India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting, December 13, 2024, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38786/4th_IndiaUAE_Strategic_Dialogue_and_15th_IndiaUAE_Joint_Commission_Meeting

Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement Comes into Force. Prime Ministers Anthony Albanese of Australia and James Marape of Papua New Guinea announced the entry into force of the Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement on December 12²⁵. The legally binding agreement ensures consultation on security-related developments and allows the two countries to work together more closely for regional security. It was signed in December 2023 and encompasses cooperation in defence, police, law and justice, national security, border, maritime and aviation security, critical infrastructure, cyber security, HADR, climate change, health security, biosecurity, peacekeeping operations and information exchange, among other areas²⁶.

Philippines-Japan RAA. The Philippine Senate unanimously ratified the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) with Japan on December 16, 2024. The RAA was signed on July 8, 2024 and is a significant military cooperation pact aimed at facilitating reciprocal access and cooperation between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Armed Forces of the Philippines²⁷.

India-China Relations. India-China relations took a significant step towards normalisation following the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives of India and China on December 18²⁸. The representatives provided direction for “cross-border cooperation and exchanges including resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, data sharing on trans-border rivers and border trade”.

Japan-South Korea Relations. In a telephonic conversation between Japan’s Prime Minister Ishiba and South Korea’s Acting President and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo on December 19, the leaders concurred on the trajectory of Japan-South Korea relations remaining unchanged²⁹. They agreed on continuing preparations for initiatives for the 60th anniversary of normalisation

²⁵ Entry into force of the Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement, December 12, 2024, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/entry-force-australia-papua-new-guinea-bilateral-security-agreement>

²⁶ Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement, December 07, 2023, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/papua-new-guinea/australia-papua-new-guinea-bilateral-security-agreement>

²⁷ Department of National Defense- Philippines, “Statement on the Senate concurrence on PH-Japan RAA”, December 17, 2024. <https://www.dnd.gov.ph/Release/2024-12-17/2299/Statement-on-the-Senate-concurrence-on-PH-Japan-RAA/>

²⁸ 23rd Meeting of Special Representatives of India and China, December 18, 2024, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38805/23rd_Meeting_of_the_Special_Representatives_of_India_and_China

²⁹ Telephone Talks between Prime Minister Ishiba and Acting President and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo of the Republic of Korea (Summary), December 19, 2024, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/103/diplomatic/202412/_00004.html

of Japan-ROK relations next year, as well as on continuing close coordination, including on policies toward North Korea, between Japan, ROK and the US.

Australia–Solomon Islands Agreement. Australia will provide a package of support to grow the size and capability of the Solomon Islands Police Force, as announced by a joint statement by the leaders of the two countries on December 20³⁰. The announcement reflects Australia's role as the Solomon Islands' security partner of choice.

US Country Reports on Terrorism. The US Department of State issued the 2023 Country Reports on Terrorism on December 12³¹. The report finds that despite key counterterrorism successes, terrorist groups around the world remained resilient and determined. Iran remained the leading state sponsor of terrorism, facilitating a wide range of terrorist and other illicit activities in the US and globally. Al Qa'ida and its affiliates remained resilient and determined, acting primarily in West Africa and the Middle East. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) maintained an enduring global enterprise, promoting a large-scale terrorism campaign across the Middle East, Africa and in Asia. State sponsors of terrorism were identified as Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran and Syria. Terrorist safe havens in South Asia were Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Quad Joint Statement. Quad Foreign Ministers on December 31 commemorated the 20th anniversary of Quad cooperation in a joint statement³².

Quad Coast Guard Exercise. A media report indicates that the Quad nations, comprising India, Japan, Australia and the US will conduct their first joint Coast Guard training exercise in early January 2025³³. Another exercise involving the Philippines, Japan and the US will take place in March 2025.

Australian Submariner Awarded US Dolphins. Lt Cdr James became the first Royal Australian Navy submariner to qualify for the US Navy's Dolphins on

³⁰ Joint Statement, December 20, 2024, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-1>

³¹ Country Reports on Terrorism 2023, December 12, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2023/>

³² Joint Statement from the Quad Foreign Ministers Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Quad Cooperation, December 31, 2024, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38875/Joint_Statement_from_the_Quad_Foreign_Ministers_Commemoating_the_20th_Anniversary_of_Quad_Cooperation

³³ Quad nations to conduct 1st joint coast guard training in January, December 17, 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/Quad-nations-to-conduct-1st-joint-coast-guard-training-in-January>

December 12³⁴. The officer earned the Dolphins on board USS Vermont (SSN 792) during a deployment to the US Seventh Fleet area of operations. The award is a significant milestone in the AUKUS partnership. The report indicates that more than 100 Australian officers are currently in the US submarine training pipeline or assigned to Virginia-class submarines.

Cambodia to Grant Visit Rights to Ream to Japan. Cambodia's former Prime Minister Hun Sen said on December 20 that Japan would be granted visitation rights to Ream Naval Base³⁵, where two Chinese warships have been a near constant presence throughout the year. Cambodia has denied reports of a secret deal with China to station its forces at the base.

NDAA 2025 Passed by Congress. The US Senate voted 85-14 to pass the \$895 billion National Defense Authorisation Bill on December 18³⁶, sending it to the White House where it is expected to be signed into law. The House of Representatives had earlier passed the bill on December 11 by 281-140 votes. The bill covers purchase of ships, aircraft and weapons as well as provisions to boost competitiveness with China and Russia. It authorises a 14.5% pay hike for the lowest rank troops, as well as 4.5% for the rest of the force, apart from substantial allocations for military housing, schools and childcare centres.

NDAA 2025 signed into Law. President Joe Biden signed the US National Defense Authorisation Act 2025 into law on December 23³⁷. The Act appropriates about \$ 870 billion for the Department of Defence, including \$ 167.85 billion for procurement, \$ 143.77 billion for Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation; \$ 294.46 billion for Operations and Maintenance; \$ 182.75 billion for military personnel; \$ 43.5 billion for other authorisations and \$ 17.5 billion for military construction. The Act approves funding for the USN to buy six battle force ships, including one Virginia class submarine, one San Antonio Class ATD, one Medium Landing Ship and three Arleigh Burke class destroyers. Allocation for the Department of Defense is about \$ 28.5 billion higher than in NDAA 2024.

³⁴ For First Time, Australian Submariner Earns US Dolphins, December 17, 2024, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/4006712/for-first-time-australian-submariner-earns-us-dolphins/>

³⁵ Cambodia to grant Japan visitation rights to China-linked naval base, December 21, 2024, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/12/21/japan/japan-cambodia-naval-base-china/>

³⁶ Defense bill passes Congress despite transgender provision, December 19, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/majority-us-senate-backs-massive-defense-bill-voting-continues-2024-12-18/>

³⁷ Press Release: Bill Signed: HR 5009, December 23, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation/2024/12/23/press-release-bill-signed-h-r-5009/>

Japan's Defence Budget. Japan's cabinet approved a record 8.7 trillion yen (\$55 billion) defence budget bill, as part of the 115.54 trillion yen (\$732 billion) national budget for FY 2025³⁸. The amount is higher than 8.54 trillion yen Japan's Ministry of Defense had sought in September 2024³⁹. The additional amount is to replace Japan's defense communications satellite; the current one is scheduled to deactivate in 2030. The request includes acquisition of stand-off weapons capability, expenses related to two Aegis destroyers under construction, the building of three new frigates and one Taigei class submarine, and acquisition of two MQ-9B UAVs. The budget proposal now goes to the Diet, where the minority government may face difficulty in getting the bill passed.

Australia-China Trade Relations. Trade relations between Australia and China normalised, with China lifting suspensions on two Australian meat processing establishments on December 03⁴⁰, paving the way for full resumption of red meat exports to China. This was followed on December 20 by China notifying Australia that full resumption of live lobster trade can recommence⁴¹. The resolution of lobster trade marks the end of all impediments imposed by China in 2020. At its peak, these included impediments on wine, barley, coal, cotton, timber logs, copper ores and concentrates and red meat worth about \$ 20 billion per annum.

Japan's Security Assistance for the Philippines. Japan will transfer small boats and radars worth \$ 10.6 million to the Philippines Navy and Air Force under an Official Security Assistance grant intended to strengthen Manila's capabilities in the South China Sea and Luzon Strait⁴². The agreement for this was signed on December 05. The Philippines became the first country to receive assistance under the OSA grant scheme in 2023.

³⁸ Japan Cabinet Oks record defense budget as it pushes strike-back capability to deter regional threat, December 27, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/japan-military-budget-us-australia-china-f82c70bd6f5cbfc184f15cf17f2fde21>

³⁹ Japan Ministry of Defense Unveils Record High FY 2025 Budget Request, September 04, 2024, <https://news.usni.org/2024/09/04/japan-ministry-of-defense-unveils-record-high-fy-2025-budget-request>

⁴⁰ Final Chinese trade impediments on red meat establishments lifted, December 03, 2024, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/final-chinese-trade-impediments-red-meat-establishments-lifted>

⁴¹ Effective Immediately – Live Rock Lobster to China to restart, December 20, 2024, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/effective-immediately-live-rock-lobster-china-restart>

⁴² Japan to Transfer Coastal Radars, Small Boats to Philippine Military in Latest Defense Aid Package, December 05, 2024, <https://news.usni.org/2024/12/05/japan-to-transfer-coastal-radars-small-boats-to-philippine-military-in-latest-defense-aid-package>

Japan's OSA for Djibouti. Japan extended Official Security Assistance (OSA) amounting to ¥1.1 billion (about \$ 7 million) for coastal radars and associated infrastructure to Djibouti on December 25. The radars will enhance Djibouti's monitoring and surveillance capabilities in the Red Sea region.

Australia–New Zealand Defence Relations. The Defence Ministers of Australia and New Zealand decided to increasingly integrate the 'Anzac' force in a joint statement on December 06, 2024⁴³. The two countries will be more prepared, exercised and ready to combine their military forces, thus contributing to the strategic balance and deterring actions inimical to their interests. The ministers announced five shared defence objectives: contributing to collective security and maintenance of the global rules-based order; effectiveness in combined operations; enhanced interoperability; supporting Pacific sovereign security; and effective defence industry collaboration. The ministers also welcomed the Quad's commitment to an open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific and the practical contributions the Quad was making to issues of importance to the countries of the region⁴⁴.

United States-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Maritime Dialogue. Japan hosted the inaugural US-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Maritime Dialogue in Tokyo on December 10⁴⁵. The Dialogue fulfils a commitment made during the first US-Japan-Philippines Summit in April 2024, in the White House. Representatives of the three countries discussed repeated harassment and blocking of Philippine vessels operating within the Philippines EEZ by Chinese Coast Guard ships and maritime militia. They reaffirmed their commitment to upholding international law, as reflected in the 1982 UNCLOS, in the South China Sea.

Inaugural India-Philippines Maritime Dialogue. The inaugural India-Philippines Maritime Dialogue was conducted in Manila on December 13⁴⁶. The two sides discussed ways to enhance maritime cooperation in further strengthening a conducive environment for mutual growth and global well-

⁴³ Australia-New Zealand Joint Statement on Closer Defence Relations, December 06, 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-12-06/australia-new-zealand-joint-statement-closer-defence-relations>

⁴⁴ Joint Statement on Australia-New Zealand Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultation (ANZMIN), December 06, 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-12-06/joint-statement-australia-new-zealand-foreign-and-defence-ministerial-consultations-anzmin>

⁴⁵ The Inaugural United States-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Maritime Dialogue, December 10, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/the-inaugural-united-states-japan-philippines-trilateral-maritime-dialogue/>

⁴⁶ Inaugural India-Philippines Maritime Dialogue, Manila, December 13, 2024, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38767/Inaugural_IndiaPhilippines_Maritime_Dialogue_Manila

being. They agreed to share best practices and partner in maritime capacity building initiatives.

China-Japan Foreign Ministers Meeting. In the first visit to China by a Japanese Foreign Minister in 20 months, Takeshi Iwaya visited Beijing on December 25 and met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, Premier Li Qiang and other dignitaries⁴⁷. The two Foreign Ministers confirmed that they would hold a high-level economic dialogue when Wang Yi visits Japan at the earliest appropriate time next year. They concurred on holding the Japan-China Security Dialogue, and on the early resumption of Japan-China Press Secretary Consultations. Minister Iwaya expressed Japan's serious concern about the situation in the East China Sea, including the Senkaku Islands, as well as the situation in the South China Sea. Japan also announced a series of measures intended to make the travel of Chinese citizens to Japan easier.

India-Philippines Coast Guards Meeting. Representatives of the Indian and Philippines Coast Guards conducted their second bilateral meeting at New Delhi on December 09⁴⁸. The two had signed an MoU in 2023 towards ensuring a secure and pollution free maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific.

India-Malaysia Joint Exercise. The 4th edition of the India-Malaysia Joint Exercise Harimau Shakti was conducted at the Bentong Camp, Pahang District, Malaysia from December 2-15⁴⁹. The exercise focused on joint counter-insurgency operations in a jungle environment under Chapter VII of a UN mandate.

Germany Concludes Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024. The German Navy successfully concluded its Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024 (IPD24) on December 8, featuring the frigate Baden-Württemberg (F222) and the auxiliary vessel Frankfurt am Main (A1412). The deployment which began on May 8, 2024, spanned seven months and encompassed circumnavigation of the world, covering approximately 45,000 nautical miles. It included participation in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise in Hawaii. It also included a passage through the Taiwan Strait to Manila and visits to ports such as Jakarta,

⁴⁷ Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Lunch, December 25, 2024, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/pageite_000001_00718.html

⁴⁸ ICG conducts second bilateral meeting with Philippine Coast Guard as part of the ongoing cooperation framework, December 09, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2082382>

⁴⁹ India-Malaysia Joint Military Exercise Harimau Shakti Commences in Bentong Camp, Malaysia, December 02, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2079649>

Singapore, and Port Klang in Malaysia, as well as joint exercises with the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean⁵⁰.

Freedom of Navigation Operation. USS Prebble conducted a Freedom of Navigation Operation in the South China Sea near the Spratley Islands on December 06⁵¹. The operation challenges restrictions imposed on innocent passage by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, requiring warships to obtain prior permission or advance notification of passage through their territorial sea.

HMAS Brisbane Fires Tomahawk Missile. HMAS Brisbane conducted the firing of a Tomahawk missile on December 09, becoming the first Australian ship to be equipped with a 2500 Km land attack capability⁵². Australia joins the US and the UK as the only nations to possess Tomahawk missiles, which will be deployed on its Hobart and Hunter class ships, as well as future Virginia class submarines.

CNS Visit to Indonesia. Admiral DK Tripathi, India's Chief of the Naval Staff, visited Indonesia from December 15-18⁵³. He met his counterpart, the Indonesian Navy Chief, as well as the defence minister and the Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces. Discussions encompassed a broad spectrum of defence cooperation areas, particularly maritime security, joint training initiatives, and exploring avenues for further strengthening the operational collaboration between the two navies.

USN Port Call in Cambodia. In the first visit by a USN warship to Cambodia since 2016, USS Savannah visited Sihanoukville commencing December 16⁵⁴. The visit signals a thaw in US-Cambodia relations.

⁵⁰ Federal Ministry of Defense- Germany, "Return of the "Frankfurt am Main" after circumnavigation of the world", December 8, 2024.

<https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/marine/aktuelles/heimkehr-weltumrundung-einsatzgruppenversorger-5866560>

⁵¹ 7th Fleet Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation, December 06, 2024,

<https://www.c7f.navy.mil/media/news/display/article/3986981/7th-fleet-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation/>

⁵² Navy conducts successful firing of Tomahawk cruise missile, December 10, 2024,

<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2024-12-10/navy-conducts-successful-firing-tomahawk-cruise-missile>

⁵³ Strengthening Maritime Ties – Adm Dinesh K Tripathi, Chief of the Naval Staff, Embarks on an Official Visit to Indonesia, December 14, 2024,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2084438>

⁵⁴ USS Savannah Arrives in Sihanoukville, Cambodia After Eight Years, December 16, 2024,

<https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/4002593/uss-savannah-arrives-in-sihanoukville-cambodia-after-eight-years/>

SLINEX-24. The 20th edition of the bilateral India-Sri Lanka Exercise (SLINEX) was conducted off Visakhapatnam from December 17-20⁵⁵. The first two days comprised a harbour phase, while the last two were the sea phase.

MH-60R Helicopter Support Equipment for India. The US State Department approved the Foreign Military Sale to India of MH-60R Helicopter equipment and follow-on support and related equipment at an estimated cost of \$ 1.17 billion on December 02⁵⁶. The proposed sale will enhance India's capability to deter current and future threats by upgrading anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

DAC Accords AON for Capital Acquisition. On December 03, the Defence Acquisition Council accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AON) for capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 21,772 crores (about \$ 2.57 billion) for the procurement of 31 new waterjet Fast Attack Craft and 120 Fast Interceptor Craft for the Indian Navy⁵⁷, an electronic warfare suite for Su-30 MKI aircraft, six Advanced Light Helicopters for the Coast Guard, and overhaul of T-72 and T-90 tanks, BMP and engines of Sukhoi fighter aircraft.

Hypersonic Missile Successfully Tested by the US. The US reported the completion of a successful end-to-end flight test of a conventional hypersonic missile from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Florida on December 12⁵⁸. This is the second successful flight test of the missile during this year.

Next Generation Missile Vessel. Steel cutting for India's first Next Generation Missile Vessel took place at Cochin Shipyard on December 16⁵⁹. The vessels, which are expected to enter service commencing 2027, will displace about 1440 tons, be 89 metres long and have a beam of 12 metres. The vessels will have CODAG propulsion, will operate in the anti-surface warfare role, and 8 Brahmos missiles as well as 32 vertically-launched short range surface-to-air missiles.

⁵⁵ Sri Lanka-India Exercise-24 (SLINEX-24), December 16, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2084913>

⁵⁶ India – MH-60R Multi-Mission Helicopter Equipment and Follow-on Support, December 02, 2024, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/india-mh-60r-multi-mission-helicopter-equipment-and-follow-support>

⁵⁷ DAC Approves 05 capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 21,772 Crores to augment defence preparedness, December 03, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2080155>

⁵⁸ Army and Navy Successfully Test Conventional Hypersonic Missile, December 12, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3999835/army-and-navy-successfully-test-conventional-hypersonic-missile/>

⁵⁹ Steel Cutting of First Next Generation Missile Vessel (NGMV) for Indian Navy at Cochin Shipyard Limited, Kochi, December 16, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2084901>

Keel Laying of Sixth Ship of ASW SWC Project. The keel-laying of the sixth CSL-built ship of the ASW Shallow Water Craft Project took place at Cochin Shipyard on December 17, 2024. 16 ships of the class are being built, eight each by GRSE Kolkata and CSL Kochi. The first ship is expected to enter service in 2025.

Keel Laying of Third Cadet Training Ship. The keel-laying ceremony of the third cadet training ship took place at L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, on December 30⁶⁰. The ships are expected to enter service in 2026.

INS Nirdeshak Commissioned. INS Nirdeshak, the second large survey vessel built by GRSE, was commissioned in Visakhapatnam on December 18⁶¹.

Coast Guard FPV and NGOPV. The plate-cutting ceremony of the first of 14 Fast Patrol Vessels and the first of six Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels being built for the Coast Guard at MDL Mumbai took place on December 19⁶². The vessels will strengthen the Coast Guard's ability to meet demands of coastal security.

Upgrade of Kalvari Class Submarines. The Ministry of Defence signed two contracts to upgrade the capabilities of Kalvari-class submarines on December 30⁶³. The first with MDL worth Rs 1990 crores (about \$ 232 million), is for construction of an Air Independent Propulsion Plug for the DRDO-AIP system and its integration on the submarines. The second with Naval Group France worth Rs 877 crores (about \$102 million), is for integration of the Electronic Heavy Weight Torpedo on the submarines.

Delivery of Surat and Nilgiri. Mazagon Docks Limited, Mumbai, delivered Yard 12707 (Surat), the fourth Visakhapatnam class destroyer and Yard 12561 (Nilgiri), the first Nilgiri class frigate, to the Indian Navy on December 20⁶⁴. The two ships will be commissioned in early 2025.

⁶⁰ Keel Laying of Third Cadet Training Ship (Yard 18005), December 30, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2088960>

⁶¹ Raksha Rajya Mantri Presides over Commissioning of Indian Navy's 2nd State of the Art Survey Vessel INS Nirdeshak, December 18, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2085722>

⁶² Plate Cutting Ceremony for first of 14 FPV and first of six NGOPV being constructed by MDL for ICG held in Mumbai, December 19, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2086046>

⁶³ MoD Inks Rs 1990 crores contract with MDL for construction of Air Independent Propulsion Plug for DRDO-AIP system and its integration to enhance endurance of conventional submarines, December 30, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2088874>

⁶⁴ Yard 12707 (Surat) and Yard 12561 (Nilgiri) Delivered to Indian Navy, December 20, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2086668>



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