



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

JANUARY 2025

*Author*

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## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR Volume VI, Issue 1 January 2025

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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](mailto:lalit@dpg.org.in). To subscribe, please [click here](#).

### Cover Images:

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto at Hyderabad House, New Delhi on January 25, 2025. Source: PIB*

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspects Guard of Honour at the Commissioning Ceremony of IN ships Surat, Nilgiri and Vaghsheer. Source: PIB*

*US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Japan's Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi, Australia Foreign Minister Penny Wong and India's External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at the Department of State, Washington DC on January 21, 2025. Source: US State Department.*

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# INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

January 2025

## Abstract

Donald J. Trump was sworn in as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States on January 20. By the month's end, he had issued more than 65 executive orders to implement his agenda in matters as diverse as withdrawing the US from the WHO and the Paris Accords, designating the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation, and declaring national emergencies in on the Southern border and on Energy.

President Prabowo Subianto of Indonesia made a State Visit to India from January 23-26. He was the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day Parade.

In his first overseas visit after becoming Prime Minister, Japan's Shigeru Ishiba visited Malaysia and Indonesia from January 10-12.

Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka visited China from January 14-17, to commemorate the 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic ties.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Quad Ministerial Meeting took place in Washington DC on January 21, hours after the swearing in of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and looked forward to advancing the work of the Quad, as well as to preparing for the next Quad Leaders' Summit to be hosted by India.

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited the UAE from January 27-29. He was the Chief Guest at the inaugural Raisina Middle East Conference.

The outgoing Biden administration's National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan visited India on January 05-06. He participated in a iCET meeting with his counterpart Ajit Doval and called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Russia and Iran upgraded their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership on January 19. Japan and Laos upgraded their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership on January 21.



In a red-letter day for the Indian Navy, three frontline warships, IN ships Surat, Nilgiri and Vaghsheer, were commissioned at Mumbai on January 15.

The DRDO successfully conducted the ground test of a scramjet engine on January 21. India's Ministry of Defence signed a contract with Bharat Dynamics Limited on January 16 for the acquisition of Medium Range Surface to Air Missiles for the Indian Navy.

Multinational exercise La Perouse 2025, involving the participation of nine Indo-Pacific nations including India, took place in the approaches to the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits from January 16-24. In the South China Sea, the USS Carl Vinson CSG exercised with Philippine Navy ships on January 17-18.

INS Tushil, on her maiden voyage back to India, called at Dakar (Senegal), Lagos (Nigeria) and Walvis Bay (Namibia) during the month. She entered the Indian Ocean on January 29 and is expected to reach India by mid-February.



## The 47th US President

Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States on January 20. His inaugural address provided a glimpse of his priorities<sup>1</sup>. "From this day forward, our country will flourish and be respected again all over the world. We will be the envy of every nation, and we will not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of any longer. During every single day of the Trump administration, I will, very simply, put America first", he said.

He made no bones about his intent to bring about change in the way the government was run. "For many years, a radical and corrupt establishment has extracted power and wealth from our citizens while the pillars of our society lay broken and seemingly in complete disrepair", he said. "We now have a government that cannot manage even a simple crisis at home while, at the same time, stumbling into a continuing catalogue of catastrophic events abroad". He described his election as a mandate to completely and totally reverse a horrible betrayal that had taken place and give the people back their faith, their wealth, their democracy and their freedom.

He spelt out the many actions he said he would take. The first was declaring a national emergency at the Southern border of the US to halt illegal entry into the country, while beginning the process of returning millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came. Another was defeating record inflation and rapidly bringing down costs and prices. He said the inflation crisis was caused by massive overspending and escalating energy prices, which is why he would declare a national energy emergency and go into the 'drill, baby, drill' mode. He said he would end the Green New Deal and revoke the electric vehicle mandate, enabling the building of automobiles in the US at an unprecedented rate. He also said he would immediately begin the overhaul of the trade system to protect American workers and their families, and instead of taxing citizens to enrich other countries, he would tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich citizens.

He said he would sign an executive order to immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America. He also intended ending the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life, thereby forging a society that is colour blind and merit based. He intended building the strongest military the world had ever seen, while acting as a peacemaker and a unifier. He intended renaming

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<sup>1</sup> The Inaugural Address, January 20, 2025,  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/>



the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, and taking back the Panama Canal. The US would “once again consider itself a growing nation – one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations and carries our flag into new and beautiful horizons”. The US would also launch astronauts to plant the American flag on planet Mars.

In conclusion, he said “We will be a nation like no other, full of compassion, courage, and exceptionalism. Our power will stop all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent, and totally unpredictable”. America would be respected and admired again, including by people of religion, faith and goodwill.

Trump’s mandate is for disruption of the deep state and downsizing of a bureaucracy he sees as having stifled America. US foreign policy is likely to turn from the Wilsonian school towards the Hamiltonian, more realist than idealist. His vow to build the strongest military the world has ever seen and a comment that his administration would measure success ‘not just through the battles we win but also the wars that we end and perhaps the wars we never get into’ indicate that the US will avoid getting drawn into foreign conflicts, but also indicate a strengthening of deterrence. How this impacts the ongoing war in Ukraine, and China’s claims on Taiwan, remains to be seen.

## The Prabowo Subianto Visit to India

To commemorate 75 years of India-Indonesia relations, Indonesia’s President Prabowo Subianto made a State Visit to India from January 23-26, 2025. He was the Chief Guest at the Republic Day Parade, the fourth time an Indonesian President has had this honour<sup>2</sup>. A high-level delegation comprising ministers and senior government officials as well as a business delegation accompanied him. 352 Indonesian Armed Forces personnel including a marching contingent and a marching band participated in the Republic Day parade<sup>3</sup>.

India and Indonesia had adopted a shared vision of maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in 2018<sup>4</sup>. The vision envisaged cooperation across six pillars:

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<sup>2</sup> The other years when Indonesia’s President was Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade were 1950, 2011 and 2018.

<sup>3</sup> India-Indonesia Joint Statement on the State Visit of H.E. Prabowo Subianto, President of the Republic of Indonesia (23-26 January 2025), January 26, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38944/IndiaIndonesia\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_the\\_State\\_Visit\\_of\\_HE\\_Prabowo\\_Subianto\\_President\\_of\\_Republic\\_of\\_Indonesia\\_2326\\_January\\_2025](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38944/IndiaIndonesia_Joint_Statement_on_the_State_Visit_of_HE_Prabowo_Subianto_President_of_Republic_of_Indonesia_2326_January_2025)

<sup>4</sup> Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, May 30, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral->

enhancing trade and investment cooperation; promoting sustainable development of marine resources; expanding cooperation on disaster risk management; fostering tourism and cultural exchanges; promoting maritime safety and security; and strengthening academic, scientific and technological cooperation. Prime Minister Modi and President Prabowo held comprehensive discussions covering these areas, including political, defence and security, maritime economic, health and pharmaceuticals, food and energy security, digital transition, sustainable energy transition, blue economy as well as education and cultural cooperation. Discussions during the visit addressed all these pillars.

The two leaders reaffirmed that as maritime neighbours and comprehensive strategic partners, India and Indonesia must continue to deepen and broaden the defence cooperation relationship to a robust one. They agreed to hold the next Defence Ministers' Dialogue at an early date. They expressed satisfaction at the strategic and operational interaction between the two armed forces, including the over two decade long bilateral Coordinated Patrol<sup>5</sup>, bilateral exercises Garuda Shakti and Samudra Shakti, and multinational exercises Milan, Komodo, Tarang Shakti and Super Garuda Shield. President Prabowo expressed interest in strengthening cooperation in defence manufacturing capability, while India agreed to support the ongoing defence modernisation programmes of Indonesia through experience and expertise sharing. Prabowo welcomed India's interest in enhancing cooperation on maritime security, including its engagement with regional mechanisms to ensure the safety and security of sea lanes of communication. The leaders welcomed ongoing discussions on the White Shipping Information Exchange agreement and agreed to position an International Liaison Officer from Indonesia at the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram. The leaders welcomed renewal of the MoU on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation between the Coast Guards.

The leaders agreed to work together to prevent the spread of online radicalization and strengthen mechanisms to counter extremist ideologies. They expressed satisfaction that bilateral trade had reached a record high of USD 38.8 billion in 2022-23 (it however, dropped to USD 29.4 billion in 2023-

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[documents.htm?dtl/29933/Shared\\_Vision\\_of\\_IndiaIndonesia\\_Maritime\\_Cooperation\\_in\\_the\\_IndoPacific](https://www.cgimedan.gov.in/event_detail/?eventid=191)

<sup>5</sup> The 43<sup>rd</sup> edition of this was held December 10-18, 2024. See "43<sup>rd</sup> India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol", December 10, 2024, [https://www.cgimedan.gov.in/event\\_detail/?eventid=191](https://www.cgimedan.gov.in/event_detail/?eventid=191)





24<sup>6</sup>). The leaders agreed to the expedited conclusion of the ongoing review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) by 2025.

A notable mention in the joint statement was the welcome to ongoing cooperation under the India-Indonesia-Australia trilateral format, to address common challenges, exchange views and explore opportunities for collaboration including in the areas of maritime domain awareness, marine pollution and the blue economy, as also under the frameworks of the East Asia Summit (EAS), Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the Indian Ocean Rim association. Such trilateral cooperation has the potential to greatly increase security in all straits connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Documents signed during the visit include an MoU on Health Cooperation, renewal of the MoU on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation, an MoU in the field of Traditional Medicine Quality Assurance, an MoU in the field of Digital Development, and the cultural exchange program for the period 2025-2028<sup>7</sup>.

Although India and Indonesia are maritime neighbours (India's Indira Point and Indonesia's Sabang port are separated by just 190 Km of water) with a millennia long cultural, trade and people-to-people relationship and a shared colonial experience, the post-independence bilateral relationship has been lack-lustre. This began to change with India's Look East Policy of the 1990s, expanded to Act East in 2014. The two became strategic partners in 2005<sup>8</sup> and comprehensive strategic partners during the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Jakarta in 2018<sup>9</sup>. Leaders of the two countries have announced numerous initiatives to advance cooperation since then, but actual delivery on ground remains limited, in part because of the poor connectivity between India and Indonesia. Cooperation has advanced more on the multilateral front than on the bilateral.

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, Export-Import Data Bank, Indonesia, <https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/iecmt.asp>

<sup>7</sup> List of Outcomes: State Visit of President of Indonesia to India (January 23-26, 2025), January 25, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2096278>

<sup>8</sup> Joint Declaration between the Republic of India and the Republic of Indonesia, November 23, 2005, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7067/Joint+Declaration+between+the+Republic+of+India+and+the+Republic+of+Indonesia>

<sup>9</sup> India-Indonesia Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia, May 30, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29932/IndiaIndonesia+Joint+Statement+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+Indonesia+May+30+2018>



Nevertheless Indonesia, by virtue of its size, geographic location as the fulcrum state between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and its dominant role in ASEAN remains of great importance to India and its Act East Policy. The visit of President Prabowo has indicated that opportunity exists for enhancing bilateral cooperation. It will be up to India's officials and diplomats to translate the vision of and goodwill between the leaders to actual delivery on ground.



## Ishiba's First Bilateral Overseas Visits

by Divya Rai

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba visited Malaysia and Indonesia from January 9 to 12, 2025. The trip marked his first bilateral engagement since taking office in October 2024<sup>10</sup>. The choice to travel to Indonesia and Malaysia was not unexpected. Japan aims for closer engagement with these two ASEAN countries, as it will strengthen Japan's economic, as well as strategic, interests in the region. Both Malaysia and Indonesia are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Malaysia is serving as the ASEAN chair in 2025, and Indonesia is the largest economy and a member of the G20 and, most recently, BRICS. Major outcomes from the visits were centred around cooperation in resource and infrastructure development, energy security, maritime security, and defence technology.

On January 10, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in Putrajaya. The discussion between two leaders was centred on enhancing economic cooperation, trade and investments across various sectors, particularly in rare earth minerals, semiconductors, energy security, and infrastructure development<sup>11</sup>. The leaders also exchanged views on the situation in the East and South China Sea, the Middle East, and Myanmar.

In defence and security cooperation, as part of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) agreement signed in 2023, both leaders welcomed the agreement between the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and the Japan Coast Guard in principle. Ishiba pledged to make progress on the provision of equipment for warning and surveillance activities, including rescue boats under Official Security Assistance (OSA). Both leaders also expressed their intent to enhance cooperation in cybersecurity.

Prime Minister Anwar highlighted Malaysia's aim to approach Japan for assistance in developing a non-radioactive rare earth element processing plant. The two nations also decided to keep a steady supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Malaysia in light of Japan's worries about energy security. They discussed collaboration on projects related to the biomass industry, ocean

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<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister's Office of Japan. "Press Conference by Prime Minister Ishiba Regarding His Upcoming Visit to Malaysia and Indonesia | Prime Minister's Office of Japan", January 9, 2025. <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/103/statement/202501/09kaiken.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. "Japan-Malaysia Summit Meeting", January 10, 2025. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sea2/my/pageite\\_000001\\_00001.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/my/pageite_000001_00001.html)



thermal energy conversion, carbon capture technology, and other green energy technologies. The leaders showed their commitment to promoting resource and infrastructure development through various pathways, particularly within the framework of the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) platform. Overall, Ishiba's visit hoped to maintain the momentum of his predecessor, Kishida Fumio, in expanding Japan's engagement in the region.

Following his visit to Malaysia, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto hosted Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba at the Bogor Presidential Palace on January 11, 2025. In addition to economic cooperation, defence collaboration dominated the discussion between the leaders. The signing of a note exchange on the Indonesian Navy receiving high-speed patrol boats from Japan's OSA program was a significant highlight of the talks<sup>12</sup>. The two leaders agreed to hold a Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting (2+2) later in the year. They welcomed the launch of defence consultations focused on maritime security, including cooperation on defence equipment and technology<sup>13</sup>. Ishiba reportedly also discussed plans to co-develop a warship for the Indonesian Navy, which was earlier stalled by former Indonesian President Jokowi, citing domestic issues. However, there is fresh vigour to advance defence partnerships under Prabowo's administration.

Furthermore, Japan expressed its intention to cooperate closely with Indonesia in the oil and gas sector. Both leaders also welcomed the agreement on coordinated financing by JBIC and other entities for the Muara Laboh geothermal power project under the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) platform. The two leaders confirmed the promotion of cooperation in resource and infrastructure development. Japan approved an additional 83.4 billion yen (approximately \$530 million) in low-interest loans for Indonesia for the ongoing development of the Patimban Port, a new international seaport located east of Jakarta. The loan agreement was signed just a day before the summit meeting between Ishiba and Prabowo on January 11, 2025<sup>14</sup>. Both leaders also exchanged views on Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and Indonesia's accession process to the OECD.

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. "Japan-Indonesia Summit Meeting", January 10, 2025. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sea2/id/pageite\\_000001\\_00758.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/id/pageite_000001_00758.html)

<sup>4</sup> Japan Ministry of Defence. "Japan-Indonesia Defense Ministerial Meeting", January 7, 2025. <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2025/01/77a4c2637353df287a88e86517def2744786cacc.html>

<sup>14</sup> The Mainichi. "Japan OKs 83 Bill. Yen in Extra Loans for New Indonesia Int'l Port," January 26, 2025. <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20250126/p2g/00m/0in/010000c>.

Considering China's assertive actions and the uncertainties surrounding US foreign policy under President Donald Trump, Japan continues to build its image as a partner of choice in Southeast Asia. Earlier in 2023, under Kishida's leadership, Japan inked the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) to establish security cooperation with the Philippines and a comprehensive strategic alliance with Vietnam. Ishiba's four-day visit to Malaysia and Indonesia emphasises Japan's attempt to strengthen ties within Southeast Asia. Furthermore, both Malaysia and Indonesia share maritime territorial disputes with China, similar to Japan's own concerns, which creates a common ground for enhanced defence cooperation. Thus, it is anticipated that this visit would result in increased defence engagement, frequent joint military exercises, and improved intelligence sharing, reflecting a collective response to regional security challenges.



## Sri Lanka Celebrates 68 Years of Diplomatic Ties with China

by Divya Rai

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake visited China from January 14 to 17, 2025 to commemorate the 68th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries<sup>15</sup>. During his trip, President Dissanayake engaged in discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, and Chairman Zhao Leji. The talks focused on deepening traditional friendships and advancing high-quality cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A total of 15 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were signed, covering diverse areas such as economic development, education, agriculture, tourism, media, and livelihood assistance<sup>16</sup>.

Two significant developments highlight a shift in investment strategies and economic collaboration between Sri Lanka and China. First is Sinopec's US\$3.7 billion investment in an export-orientated petroleum refinery in Hambantota<sup>17</sup>. The investment is the largest foreign direct investment in Sri Lanka's history. A substantial portion of the output of the refinery, which has a capacity of 200,000 barrels, is planned for export. Notably, this investment is indicative of a broader transformation in Chinese capital flows to Sri Lanka following recent debt crises. On the same line, Sinopec is pivoting towards equity-based infrastructure projects instead of the previously dominant loan-funded models. This change is largely a response to the financial constraints faced by countries like Sri Lanka, which are unable to borrow freely due to stringent International Monetary Fund (IMF) targets. Second, Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are more cautious approach to international investments and are adopting improved governance practices.

The other important outcome was the agreement to expedite the finalisation of a comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA) between Sri Lanka and China. China expressed its readiness to continue supporting Sri Lankan enterprises in establishing ties with relevant Chinese associations of importers and exporters in the tea, gem, and other industries. However, the major concern for Sri Lanka is that FTA may primarily benefit China by increasing its exports without

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<sup>15</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment & Tourism. "President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka Concludes State Visit to the People's Republic of China." <https://mfa.gov.lk/en/president-anura-kumara-disanayaka-concludes-state-visit-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka," n.d. [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202501/t20250116\\_11536637.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202501/t20250116_11536637.html).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



providing reciprocal advantages for Sri Lankan goods. Historically, FTAs have allowed China to enhance its export market while limiting the trading partner's access to Chinese markets.

In the joint statement, both parties agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Ocean Cooperation as part of a Blue Partnership. This MoU will facilitate the restart of such maritime research and the presence of Chinese research vessels in Sri Lankan waters. The resumption of maritime research activities comes at a time when China's presence in the Indian Ocean is under scrutiny. During Dissanayake's visit to India last year, he categorically stated that he "will not allow our land to be used in any way in a manner that is detrimental to the interests of India"<sup>18</sup>.

Following this visit, Dissanayake met with Qin Boyong, Vice Chairwoman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, in late December 2024, where discussions included the resumption of Chinese maritime research activities in the Indian Ocean<sup>19</sup>. This development raised diplomatic tensions, particularly concerning the potential for Chinese research vessels that could be involved in surveillance activities in the Indian Ocean. Previously, the Sri Lankan government had imposed a one-year moratorium on visits by foreign research vessels, which ended in late 2024. As of now, the Dissanayake administration has neither officially lifted nor extended this moratorium.

Both China and India have recognised Sri Lanka as a key partner in their regional strategies. As both nations increase their diplomatic and economic efforts, Sri Lanka faces the challenge of maintaining a delicate balance between these two major powers. The direction of Sri Lanka's foreign policy will depend on how India and China navigate their competition in the region. The outcomes of this geopolitical tug-of-war will significantly impact Sri Lanka's economic stability and political landscape.

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<sup>3</sup> The Hindu. "Won't Allow Sri Lankan Territory to Be Used Against India: President Dissanayake". December 17, 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/president-dissanayake-will-not-allow-sri-lankan-territory-to-be-used-against-india/article68993085.ece>.

<sup>4</sup> President's Office. "President Expresses Gratitude to China for Debt Restructuring Support and Economic Assistance". December 19, 2024. <https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/president-expresses-gratitude-to-china-for-debt-restructuring-support-and-economic-assistance/>.



## The Ninth Quad Ministerial Meeting

The Ninth Quad Ministerial Meeting took place in Washington DC on January 21, a day after Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the US and hours after Marco Rubio was sworn in as the US Secretary of State. Rubio's first engagements after being sworn in were bilateral interactions with his Quad counterparts, followed by the Quad meeting. It was Rubio's first Quad meeting, as it was for Takeshi Iwaya, Japan's foreign minister. This was the fifth Quad ministerial meeting for Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong. Only India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar had the distinction of having participated in all the nine Quad ministerial meetings that have taken place so far.

The joint statement issued by the foreign ministers was concise, running into only two brief paragraphs<sup>20</sup>. The ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to strengthening a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) where the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity are upheld and defended. They maintained their conviction that international law, economic opportunity, peace, stability, and security in all domains including the maritime domain underpin the development and prosperity of the peoples of the Indo-Pacific. They strongly opposed any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion. They committed to strengthening regional maritime, economic and technology security and resilient supply chains. They looked forward to advancing the work of the Quad and said they would meet together on a regular basis as they prepared for the next Quad Leaders' Summit hosted by India.

The status update on Quad activities that has hitherto formed part of joint statements<sup>21</sup> was conspicuous by its absence. No new initiatives were announced. There was no mention of Ukraine, North Korea, Myanmar or the Middle East. There was no ritual mention of ASEAN and its unity and centrality, as well as support for ASEAN-led regional architecture. Nor was there any mention of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) or the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

Notwithstanding the brief statement, there are some inferences that can be drawn. The use of the word 'defended' for the first time in the ministers'

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<sup>20</sup> Joint Statement by the Quad Foreign Ministers, January 21, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38931/Joint\\_Statement\\_by\\_the\\_Quad\\_Foreign\\_Ministers\\_January\\_21\\_2025](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38931/Joint_Statement_by_the_Quad_Foreign_Ministers_January_21_2025)

<sup>21</sup> See for example Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting Joint Statement, Tokyo, July 29, 2024, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100704619.pdf>





commitment to strengthening FOIP is worthy of notice. Even though the Quad partners participate together in Exercise Malabar, the stand has always been that the Quad has no military agenda. Commentators, however, have for long called for militarisation of the Quad. 'Defended' implies readiness to take military action to uphold the FOIP. More clarity on the circumstances under which such military action is contemplated may emerge as the ministers meet again prior to the Leaders' Summit.

Linked is the expansion of domains of cooperation from public goods like Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Climate Change, Health Security, Cyber Security, Critical and Emerging Technologies etc. to 'security in all domains including the maritime domain'. The implication is expansion in the Quad's areas of cooperation. The nature of this expansion will become clearer over time.

China's response to the Quad Ministerial was muted. China's spokesperson said, "Engaging in group politics and bloc confrontation will not bring lasting peace and security, and is not conducive to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and the world as a whole. China's activities in relevant waters are lawful, legitimate and completely justified. We hope that relevant parties will do more things that help enhance mutual trust and cooperation between countries"<sup>22</sup>.

There has been concern about whether President Trump will continue with the Quad initiative. It should be recalled that the previous Trump administration resuscitated the Quad after its demise in 2008, with meetings at the official level commencing in November 2017<sup>23</sup> and the first meeting at the ministerial level in September 2019<sup>24</sup>. Joe Biden may have elevated it to the Summit level, but the initiative was founded by the previous Trump Administration. The holding of the ministerial meeting a day after the inauguration of the new administration indicates that interest in the Quad remains strong. Trump's future direction for the Quad will become clear at the next summit, to be held in New Delhi.

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<sup>22</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on January 22, 2025, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202501/t20250122\\_11543056.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202501/t20250122_11543056.html)

<sup>23</sup> India-Australia-Japan-U.S. Consultations on Indo-Pacific, November 12, 2017, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dt/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS\\_Consultations\\_on\\_IndoPacific\\_November\\_12\\_2017](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dt/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_12_2017)

<sup>24</sup> Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Ministerial, September 26, 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e\\_001112.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e_001112.html)



## Three Frontline Ships Commissioned into the Indian Navy

January 15 was a red-letter day for the Indian Navy (IN). It marked the simultaneous commissioning of three frontline warships built by Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL), IN ships Surat and Nilgiri and the submarine Vaghsheer, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Naval Dockyard Mumbai. This was the first time in the Indian Navy's history that three indigenous blue water ships were commissioned on the same day.

INS Surat displaces 7400 tons, has a length of 163 metres (m), a beam of 17.4m and a draft of 6.5m. She is capable of speeds in excess of 30 knots and has a range of 8000 nautical miles (nm) at 18 knots. Her main armament comprises 16 Brahmos surface-to-surface missiles, 32 Barak-8 surface-to-air missiles, an Oto Melara 76mm gun, 4 AK-630M close-in-weapons systems (CIWS), 4 533 mm torpedo tubes and 2 RBU-6000 rocket launchers. She can embark and operate 2 HAL Dhruv or Seaking Mk 42B helicopters. She is the last ship of the Project 15B Visakhapatnam class of destroyers.

INS Nilgiri displaces 6670 tons, has a length of 149m, a beam of 17.8m and a draft of 5.2m. She is capable of speeds in excess of 32 knots and has a range of 5500 nm at 16-18 knots. Her armament is similar to INS Surat, except that she carries 8 Brahmos missiles, has 2 AK-630M CIWS and operates one helicopter. She is the first ship of the new Nilgiri-class of frigates, four of which are being built by MDL and three by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) Kolkata. The old Nilgiri class of six ships were built by MDL and saw service from 1972-2013. The first INS Nilgiri was decommissioned in 1996.

INS Vaghsheer is the last of the Kalvari-class submarines of Project 75. She displaces 1775 tons submerged and has a length of 67.5m, a beam of 6.2m and a draft of 5.8m. She can do up to 11 knots on surface or 20 knots submerged and has a range of 6500nm at 8 knots. Her weapons include torpedoes, Exocet anti-ship missiles and/or mines. The previous INS Vaghsheer was commissioned in 1974 and served till 1997.

Speaking at the commissioning ceremony<sup>25</sup>, Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that this was the first time a destroyer, a frigate and a submarine were commissioned together and expressed pride in the fact that all three platforms were made in India. He said, "India considers the defence and security of this entire region as its responsibility". He noted, "it is important that territorial

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<sup>25</sup> English rendering of PM's speech at Commissioning of INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer, January 15, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2093024>



waters are protected, freedom of navigation is ensured, and trade supply lines and sea routes are secure. We have to protect this entire region from terrorism, arms and drug smuggling. Therefore, it is important today that we become global partners in making the seas safe and prosperous, we work to increase the efficiency of logistics and for the shipping industry". He expressed happiness at India having emerged as the first responder in the entire Indian Ocean Region.

Indigenous ship construction has indeed come a long way since MDL built the first INS Nilgiri between 1966 and 1972. 33 ships and seven submarines have been inducted into the IN in the last ten years alone. Of these, 39 have been built in Indian shipyards, the exception being INS Tushil which was built in Russia and commissioned in December 2024. 60 platforms of various sizes are under construction.

There are, however, some shortcomings that need correction. First, the specialised submarine building line has been idle since INS Vaghsheer commenced sea trials in May 2023, awaiting orders for construction of new submarines. An order to build three more Kalvari-class submarines is expected shortly. However, idling of a production line built at considerable cost does not speak well of the efficiency of higher-level decision making in the Government.

Similarly, INS Surat is the last of the destroyers on order. The next generation of IN destroyers, Project 18, is still on the drawing board, with orders not likely to be placed for the next 3-5 years. Moreover, India's destroyers are the only ones amongst modern navies in the world that lack a ballistic missile defence capability. It is hoped that the DRDO can deliver this capability by the time construction of Project 18 ships begins.

Notwithstanding these limitations, there is much to be lauded in India's ship design and building achievements. These achievements should spur India's shipyards to reach greater heights.

## Other Indo-Pacific Developments

US Commitment to the Indo-Pacific. A press release from then President Joseph Biden spelt out the United States' enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific<sup>26</sup>. The vision was of an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, one that is

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<sup>26</sup> Press Release – The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific Region, January 10, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-the-united-states-enduring-commitment-the-indo-pacific-region>

connected, one that is prosperous, one that is stable and secure, and one that is resilient. The release listed steps the Biden Administration had taken to meet these objectives. Among them is taking the US-India relationship to new heights, including through Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US and President Biden's visit to New Delhi for the G-20 Leaders' Summit.

Mozambique President. Daniel Chapo of the ruling FRELIMO party was sworn in as the President of Mozambique on January 15<sup>27</sup>. According to official election results as validated by the constitutional court, Chapo won over 65% of the popular vote in elections held on October 09, 2024. His nearest rival, Venâncio Mondlane of the PODEMOS party received just over 24% of the popular vote. Mondlane however alleged election fraud and boycotted the swearing in ceremony.

State Visit of President of Singapore to India. Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the President of Singapore, paid a State Visit to India from January 14-18<sup>28</sup>. The objective was to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of bilateral ties between India and Singapore.

Re-designating the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. President Donald Trump set in motion the process to redesignate Ansar Allah (the Houthis) as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by Executive Order on January 22, 2025<sup>29</sup>. The process is to be completed within 45 days of the order. The Biden administration had removed the Houthis from this list in February 2021.

Russia Iran Relations. Russia and Iran upgraded their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership on January 19. The treaty is designed to govern relations between Russia and Iran for the next 20 years and includes 47 articles that outline extensive collaboration in multiple areas such as military cooperation, exchange of military and expert delegations, port calls by military ships and vessels, technology, cybersecurity, peaceful nuclear energy, and combating organised crime<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Mozambique's Chapo sworn in as president after disputed election, January 15, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mozambiques-chapo-sworn-president-after-disputed-election-2025-01-15/>

<sup>28</sup> State Visit of the President of Singapore to India (January 14-18, 2025), January 16, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38920/State\\_Visit\\_of\\_President\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Singapore\\_to\\_India\\_January\\_1418\\_2025](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38920/State_Visit_of_President_of_the_Republic_of_Singapore_to_India_January_1418_2025)

<sup>29</sup> Designation of Ansar Allah as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation, January 22, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/designation-of-ansar-allah-as-a-foreign-terrorist-organization/>

<sup>30</sup> Government of The Islamic Republic of Iran, Iran-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement", January 17, 2025. <https://irangov.ir/detail/456479>

### Japan – Laos Relations Upgraded to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Relations between Japan and Laos were upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership during the visit of Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone to Japan on January 21<sup>31</sup>. Areas of cooperation identified by the joint statement encompass political and security cooperation, economic and social cooperation, trade and investment, people to people ties and cultural exchanges, human resource development, and regional and international cooperation<sup>32</sup>.

### EAM Meets US Secretary of State Rubio.

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar met the new US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington DC on January 21, 2025<sup>33</sup>. The meeting was Secretary Rubio's first meeting with a foreign counterpart after being sworn in. The two discussed regional issues and opportunities to further deepen the U.S.-India relationship, in particular on critical and emerging technologies, defense cooperation, energy, and on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Secretary Rubio emphasised the Trump Administration's desire to work with India to advance economic ties and address concerns related to irregular migration.

### Visit of EAM to the UAE.

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited the UAE on an official trip from January 27-29, 2025<sup>34</sup>. During his visit, he met the President of UAE, the crown princes of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and his counterpart the foreign minister of UAE. He was the Chief Guest at the Raisina Middle East Conference in Abu Dhabi on January 28 and delivered the keynote address at the opening session of the event. He also participated in India's Republic Day celebrations organised in Abu Dhabi on January 27.

### Bangla Desh Foreign Affairs Adviser Visits China.

From January 20-24, Bangladesh's adviser for Foreign Affairs, Md Touhid Hossain, visited China at the invitation of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. This marks Touhid's first official bilateral trip since the formation of the interim government in

<sup>31</sup> Japan-Laos Summit Meeting and Working Dinner (Summary), January 21, 2025, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/103/diplomatic/202501/21laos.html>

<sup>32</sup> Joint Statement on Upgrading to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership on the Occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan-the Lao PDR Diplomatic Relations, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000165160.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, January 21, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-rubios-meeting-with-indian-external-affairs-minister-jaishankar/>

<sup>34</sup> Visit of External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar to the United Arab Emirates (January 27-29, 2025), January 29, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38957/Visit\\_of\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_Arab\\_Emirates\\_January\\_2729\\_2025](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38957/Visit_of_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_to_the_United_Arab_Emirates_January_2729_2025)



Bangladesh. The visit reviewed ongoing projects and potential new initiatives in trade and investment and cultural exchanges as both nations commemorate 50 years of diplomatic relations. Besides the formal meetings, Touhid interacted with senior leaders of the Communist Party of China and engaged with business communities in Shanghai to promote investment opportunities in Bangladesh<sup>35</sup>.

US NSA Jake Sullivan Visits India. US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval in New Delhi on January 6<sup>36</sup>. The two NSAs reviewed progress in their dialogue, including in fields such as defence, cyber and maritime security. Mr Sullivan briefed his India counterpart on updates by the Biden administration to US missile export control policies that would boost commercial space cooperation with India. He also announced US steps to delist Indian nuclear entities, thus promoting civil nuclear cooperation and clean energy supply chains. Dialogue between the two NSAs has resulted in increased space technology cooperation, deepened defence innovation and industrial cooperation, built a clean energy and critical minerals partnership, promoted a strategic semiconductor supply chain partnership, built collaboration around AI, advanced computing and Quantum, and bridged the people, talent and innovation bases<sup>37</sup>.

Visit of Foreign Secretary to China. India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Beijing on January 26-27 for a meeting of the Foreign Secretary-Vice Foreign Minister mechanism between India and China<sup>38</sup>. The two sides agreed to resume the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra in the summer of 2025. They also agreed to take appropriate measures to further promote and facilitate people-to-people exchanges, including media and think tank interactions. They further agreed in principle to resume direct air services between the two countries.

DRDO Conducts Scramjet Engine Ground Test. DRDO successfully demonstrated an active cooled Scramjet Combustor engine ground test for 120

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<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs-China. "Adviser for Foreign Affairs of the Interim Government of Bangladesh Touhid Hossain to Visit China", January 17, 2025.

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xw/wsrc/202501/t20250117\\_11537444.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/wsrc/202501/t20250117_11537444.html)

<sup>36</sup> Joint Press Release: National Security Adviser meets with the National Security Adviser of the United States of America, January 06, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38891/Joint\\_Press\\_Release\\_National\\_Security\\_Adviser\\_meets\\_with\\_the\\_National\\_Security\\_Adviser\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_of\\_America](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38891/Joint_Press_Release_National_Security_Adviser_meets_with_the_National_Security_Adviser_of_the_United_States_of_America)

<sup>37</sup> Fact Sheet: The United States and India Committed to Strengthening Strategic Technology Partnership, January 06, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fact-sheet-the-united-states-and-india-committed-strengthening-strategic-technology>

<sup>38</sup> Visit of Foreign Secretary to China, January 27, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38946/Visit\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Secretary\\_to\\_China](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38946/Visit_of_Foreign_Secretary_to_China)

seconds on January 21, 2025<sup>39</sup>. The test marks a crucial milestone in developing next-generation hypersonic missiles, with the potential to bypass existing air defence systems and deliver rapid and high-impact strikes.

MoD Contracts MRSAMs for the Indian Navy. The Ministry of Defence signed a Rs 2960 crore (about \$ 342 million) contract with Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) for Medium Range Surface to Air Missiles for the Indian Navy on January 16. The MRSAM system is a high response, quick reaction vertically launched supersonic missile with a range of 70 Km, designed to neutralise missiles, aircraft, guided bombs and helicopters. It is standard fit on multiple IN ships and will equip the majority of future platforms.

Multinational Exercise La Perouse. Multinational exercise La Perouse, centred on the French Charles de Gaulle CSG, took place in the approaches to the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits from January 16-24<sup>40</sup>. Ships from Australia, Canada, France, India, Malaysia, Singapore, the US and UK participated in the exercise, while Indonesia provided a land base for Atlantic 2 Maritime Patrol Aircraft.

Maritime Cooperation Activity in the South China Sea. The USS Carl Vinson CSG and Philippine Navy ships Andres Bonifacio and Antonio Luna participated in a maritime cooperation exercise in the South China Sea on January 17-18<sup>41</sup>.

FNS Charles de Gaulle CSG visits India. The French carrier strike group centred on FNS Charles de Gaulle visited India from January 03-09. FNS Charles de Gaulle visited Goa, while FNS Forbin and FNS Alsace visited Kochi<sup>42</sup>. On leaving harbour, the French CSG exercised with INS Mormugao as well as India Sukhoi and Jaguar fighter aircraft<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> DRDO Conducts Scramjet Engine Ground Test, January 21, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2094886>

<sup>40</sup> US and Allied Forces Conduct La Perouse 2025, January 27, 2025, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/4042173/us-and-allied-forces-conduct-la-perouse-2025/>

<sup>41</sup> Philippines, US Partner in Maritime Cooperative activity in South China Sea, January 18, 2025, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/4033889/philippines-us-partner-in-maritime-cooperative-activity-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>42</sup> French Carrier Strike Group visits India to Strengthen Naval Ties and Enhance Interoperability, January 05, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2090373>

<sup>43</sup> French Carrier Strike Group Conducts Air-sea Manoeuvres with the Indian Navy, January 13, 2025, <https://in.ambafrance.org/French-carrier-strike-group-conducts-air-sea-manoevres-with-the-Indian-Navy>

Combined Maritime Forces CTF 151. Cmde Sohail Azmie from Pakistan assumed command of Combined Maritime Forces CTF 151 on January 22<sup>44</sup>. This marks the 11<sup>th</sup> time a Pakistani officer has assumed command of CTF 151, which patrols the Internationally Recognised Transit Corridor.

Commissioning of China's First Type 054B Frigate. China's first Type 054B frigate, the Luohe, was officially commissioned into the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy) during a ceremony held at a military port in Qingdao, Shandong Province on January 22. This advanced warship, designated hull number "545," has a displacement of approximately 5,000 tonnes and represents a significant advancement in China's naval capabilities. Measuring about 147 meters in length and 18 meters in beam, the frigate is larger than its predecessor, the Type 054A. The Type 054B frigate is expected to replace smaller Type 056 corvettes for coastal operations while complementing larger Type 055 destroyers in far-seas missions.

INS Tushil. INS Tushil, on her maiden passage from Kaliningrad to India, routed via Dakar (Senegal)<sup>45</sup>, Lagos (Nigeria)<sup>46</sup>, and Walvis Bay (Namibia)<sup>47</sup>. She entered the Indian Ocean on January 29, exercising with the South African Navy<sup>48</sup>. She can be expected to reach India in the second week of February 2025.

INSV Tarini. INSV Tarini departed Lyttleton, New Zealand, on January 04<sup>49</sup>. Her next port of call will be Port Stanley, in the Falklands, 5600 nm away.

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<sup>44</sup> Pakistan Assumes Command of Combined Maritime Forces' Combined Task Force 151, January 22, 2025, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/4035814/pakistan-assumes-command-of-combined-maritime-forces-combined-task-force-151/>

<sup>45</sup> INS Tushil completes visit to Dakar, Senegal, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2090966>

<sup>46</sup> INS Tushil at Lagos, Nigeria for OTR <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2092626>

<sup>47</sup> INS Tushil at Walvis Bay, Namibia for OTR <https://x.com/indiannavy/status/1882016321489018999/photo/2>

<sup>48</sup> <https://x.com/indiannavy/status/1884595207255273902>

<sup>49</sup> Navika Sagar Parikrama II – INSV Tarini Departs from Lyttleton, January 04, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2090132>





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