

# India-Philippines Strategic Partnership

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## India-Philippines Strategic Partnership : Strengthening Defence, Maritime, and Digital Cooperation

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### Context

In **August 2025**, during the **state visit of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** to India, both nations signed a **Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership**. This agreement marks a significant step in enhancing bilateral cooperation, particularly in **defence, maritime security, space technology, and digital infrastructure**.

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### Introduction

India and the Philippines have maintained diplomatic relations since **1949**, making it one of the earliest bilateral partnerships in India's foreign policy history. Over time, the relationship has evolved into a multi-sectoral engagement. The recent upgrade to a **Strategic Partnership** reflects the growing convergence between the two maritime democracies in strategic, economic, and technological domains.

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### Key Features of the Strategic Partnership

#### Strategic Partnership Upgrade

- Formal elevation of ties to a **Strategic Partnership**, expanding collaboration across defence, economy, and regional security.
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### Defence and Maritime Cooperation

- **Terms of Reference (ToR)** signed for structured cooperation between **Armies, Navies, and Air Forces** of both countries.

- Separate ToR signed for **Coast Guard collaboration**, covering joint activities and maritime information sharing.
  - Indian naval ships participated in a naval exercise in the Philippines for the **first time**.
  - India's **hydrography ship** participated in joint engagements to support naval mapping and domain awareness.
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## Trade and Economic Engagement

- Formal negotiations launched for a **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)** to boost bilateral trade.
  - **Bilateral trade** stood at **USD 3.5 billion in 2023-24**.
  - India exports **pharmaceuticals, rice, electronics, engineering goods**.
  - Imports from the Philippines include **semiconductors, ores, machinery**.
  - **Indian FDI** in the Philippines reached **USD 5 billion**.
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## Connectivity and Tourism

- **Direct flights** between India and the Philippines expected to commence by the **end of 2025**.
  - India announced **one-year free e-tourist visa** for Filipino nationals starting **August 2025**.
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## Legal and Institutional Cooperation

- Signed **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty** in criminal matters.
- Signed **Treaty on Transfer of Sentenced Persons** to enhance consular and legal cooperation.

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## Digital and Space Cooperation

- India to assist in a **pilot project** for the **Philippines Sovereign Data Cloud**, enhancing digital public infrastructure.
- The Philippines invited to join the **Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** for maritime security coordination.
- **ISRO** to support satellite launches and capacity building in **weather and agricultural monitoring**.
- Collaboration with **PhilSA** highlights India's growing presence in the global space sector.

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## Regional and Global Outlook

- Both countries reaffirmed support for **freedom of navigation and overflight** in the **South China Sea**, in accordance with **UNCLOS 1982**.
- India reiterated the need for a **rules-based Indo-Pacific**, describing the South China Sea as a **global commons**.

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## Historical Background

- Diplomatic relations established in **1949**.
- In **2024**, the two countries celebrated **75 years of diplomatic ties**, with renewed focus on high-level exchanges and institutional dialogues.

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## Sectoral Cooperation Overview

### Defence and Security

- The Philippines became the **first foreign recipient** of the **BrahMos missile system** in

2024.

- Institutional mechanisms like **Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC)** and **Service-to-Service dialogues** were established.
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## Maritime Cooperation

- Conduct of **Track-1 Maritime Dialogue**.
  - Agreements on **hydrographic data sharing** and **coastal surveillance**.
  - Participation in multilateral exercises such as **ADMM-Plus**, **MILAN**, and **ASEAN-India maritime drills**.
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## Health and Education

- The Philippines was the **first ASEAN nation to approve Covaxin**.
  - Around **9,800 Indian students**, primarily in **medical studies**, are pursuing education in the Philippines.
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## Development and Fintech Cooperation

- India supported **Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)** in disaster management and agriculture.
  - Signed **MoU on fintech collaboration** to promote digital payments and inclusion.
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## Key Challenges

- **FDI imbalance**, with limited investment by the Philippines in India despite growing trade.
- **Delay in implementation** of several MoUs, including those in **hydrography**, **space**, and

**tourism.**

- **Geopolitical constraints**, with the Philippines balancing between **Chinese pressure** and alignment with **India, ASEAN, and the US**.
  - **Connectivity gaps**, with air links and people-to-people exchanges still under-utilised.
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## Significance of the Partnership

- Strengthens India's outreach under the **Act East Policy** by deepening ties with a key ASEAN member.
  - Supports **strategic balancing** in the **South China Sea**, enhancing regional stability.
  - Promotes **Indian defence exports** to Southeast Asia.
  - Reinforces India's role as a partner in **space, digital governance**, and **climate resilience**.
  - Enhances long-term goodwill through **diaspora and educational exchanges**.
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## Way Forward

- Finalise the **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)** to diversify and strengthen trade.
- Promote **defence co-production** in shipbuilding and missile systems under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** framework.
- Launch **joint satellite missions** focused on weather, disaster management, and agriculture.
- Institutionalise **Track 1.5 dialogues** involving think tanks and maritime experts.
- Leverage new air routes to promote **academic and medical tourism**, with mutual recognition of qualifications.

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## Conclusion

India-Philippines relations are entering a **new phase of substantive engagement**, driven by shared values, strategic interests, and a common vision for a **free and open Indo-Pacific**. With greater implementation and policy coordination, this partnership can evolve into a **key pillar of regional stability and mutual development**.



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