

# COMPARATIVE

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## CONNECTIONS

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL  
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

### INDIA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS

## INDIA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS: ACTING ACROSS THE INDO-PACIFIC, ACTUALLY AND VIRTUALLY

SATU LIMAYE, EAST-WEST CENTER

Despite the COVID-19 global pandemic, India's engagement with East Asia during 2020 remained reasonably active, both actually and virtually. India's external affairs minister, S. Jaishankar, took several opportunities to emphasize that the Indo-Pacific concept (i.e., the inclusion of India and the Indian Ocean region) has gained wider acceptance. In his opening remarks at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quad Ministerial Meeting, for example, he said "[i]t is a matter of satisfaction that the Indo-Pacific concept has gained increasingly wider acceptance." And he also repeatedly highlighted India's commitment to the concept, saying "The Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative that [India] tabled at the East Asia Summit [in 2019] is a development with considerable promise in that context." He pointedly highlighted India's actions at the frontier of the western Pacific, telling an [Indonesia-Australia convened town hall](#) that "[i]t is revealing that in the midst of a global health crisis, Indian diplomacy has actually put its Indo-Pacific approach into practice. We provided assistance to Solomon Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu and Palau for procurement of medical equipment and supplies to assist in their response to COVID-19." However, on two major counts—the decision by most regional countries to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP) without India (which had dropped out of the negotiations last year) and the confrontation-filled Sino-India relationship—India's East Asian relations were complicated rather than positive. Brighter spots included progress on the "Quad Consultations" (US, Japan, Australia, and India) and concomitant steady progress in bilateral security ties to Japan and Australia.

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## India & The Quad

The “Quad” grouping of countries met often in 2020; made meaningful in the context of China’s acutely negative bilateral relations with the United States, India, and Australia. In addition to two senior officials level meetings of the Quad in September and December, the main Quad event was only the second foreign ministers meeting, in-person, in Tokyo on Oct. 6. No dramatic initiatives were announced, however. The [September consultations](#) noted discussions of the “strategic implications of COVID-19 on the Indo-Pacific region” and agreement to “deepening practical cooperation on quality infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.” Special care was devoted to reassuring Southeast Asia/ASEAN of the Quad countries’ “strong support for ASEAN’s unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN-led regional architecture” and “full support for the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific.” The December senior officials’ videoconference added a reference to the “importance of enhancing the resilience of supply chains for an expeditious and sustainable global economic recovery.” Aside from Quad diplomacy, the 24<sup>th</sup> iteration of the naval Exercise Malabar occurred in November, significantly with [the participation](#) of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) for the first time since 2007. There was some excitement among commentators about the Quad being expanded to a “Plus” format on the basis of a March telephone meeting which included the four Quad countries and Vietnam, New Zealand, and South Korea. India’s Ministry of External Affairs’ release did not refer either to the “Quad” or to “Plus” and explicitly [drew attention](#) to the fact that the meeting was “initiated by US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun for discussions among some countries in the Indo-Pacific region on issues related to countering COVID-19.”

Concomitant with various Quad-related activities, India’s bilateral engagements with Australia and Japan also moved forward.

### India-Australia

The first important event was [the visit](#) of Australia’s Foreign Minister Marise Payne to Delhi in mid-January (prior to the global pandemic declaration) for consultations on the bilateral strategic partnership. Three key issues

were highlighted. First, both agreed on the need to “... prioritize the building of a strong multi-faceted trade and economic cooperation as well as cooperation in Defense and Security”; suggesting that there is an asymmetry in the progress in the two spheres of bilateral ties. Defense diplomacy during the year included [the visit](#) of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Ship HMAS Toowoomba to Mumbai in January to “further strengthen the good relations between India and Australia and underscore the shared interests in the maritime domain.”



Figure 1 Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne meets Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swarja in New Delhi. Photo: Asian News International

Second, and in the context of “balancing” defense-security ties with commercial ones, Australia “conveyed that that India could consider it as a stable, reliable, and trusted supplier of high-quality mineral resources to India and in this regard, both sides agreed to diversify and expand existing resources partnership.” Such a reference may partially reflect the pressures on Australian mineral resource imports from China given the downturn in relations, but may also reflect the fact that despite a change in Australian policy on providing uranium for India’s civilian nuclear program, apparently no major purchases have been made by India. Third, both countries “acknowledged that the growing threat of terrorism constituted a major threat to peace and security in the region ...” As a follow-up, in mid-December the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the India-Australia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism took place virtually.

Payne’s visit provided the basis for a June 2020 virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his counterpart Scott Morrison leading to a [joint statement](#)

announcing an upgrade of the “strategic partnership” to a “comprehensive strategic partnership,” including Australia’s support for India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). Several [joint declarations and MoUs](#) were also issued. Of particular importance to India-Australia defense and security ties were:

- [Joint Declaration](#) on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which covered a range of regional engagement issues;
- Arrangement concerning Mutual Logistics Support (MLSA); and
- Implementing Arrangement concerning cooperation in Defense Science and Technology to the MoU on Defense Cooperation.

All in all, India-Australia relations amidst a pandemic showed notable progress on the diplomatic and defense fronts.

## India-Japan Relations

India and Japan held two summit telephone talks between their prime ministers; the first on Sept. 10, at which then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzo explained that he would resign from his position. Both prime ministers expressed satisfaction with the significant enhancement of Japan-India relations, including efforts toward the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and the “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” between Japan and India. On Sept. 25 Modi held [another summit telephone](#) talk with Abe’s successor, Suga Yoshihide. Both prime ministers shared their view to continue to advance the “Special Strategic and Global Partnership.” Suga was reported to have stated that “he would like to promote cooperation in such multilateral mechanism[s] as Japan-Australia-India-US meetings and the United Nations as well as on issues related to North Korea, including the abductions issue.” Both countries look to 2022, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

India and Japan also maintained momentum in their bilateral defense and security ties. An important development was the [Sept. 9 signing](#) of the agreement between the government of Japan and the government of the Republic of India Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Indian Armed Forces (so-called "Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement" or ACSA) providing the legal and

operational basis for reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the two countries’ militaries, hence promoting closer cooperation between them. A Japan-India maritime exercise was [completed](#) over three days in late September, followed by the [quadrilateral Malabar exercise](#) held in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea in November 2020. Japan’s Air Self Defense Forces (JASDF) chief of staff, Gen. Izutsu Shunji, [visited India](#) in December for discussions “to further enhance cooperation and interoperability between the two Air Forces ... the scope for enhancement of joint exercises and training ... [and] strengthening collective response to HADR contingencies ...” In addition to air force to air force issues, Shunji also held talks with the chiefs of India’s navy and army as well as Chief of Defense Staff (CDS). The fact that this visit took place in person amid a pandemic symbolized the high priority the two countries accord to their defense relationship.

## India & South Korea

India-South Korea relations in 2020 also moved forward—with India continuing to seek opportunities for defense industrial cooperation with Korea. In January, South Korea’s Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering [was named](#) one of five companies shortlisted for India’s P-75I submarine project.

On Feb. 4, 2020 India’s Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and South Korea’s Minister of National Defense Jeong Kyeong-doo held a [ministerial defense dialogue](#) in Delhi. An All-India Radio report of the dialogue noted that Indian’s chief of defense staff, army chief and navy chief all attended. Singh’s tweets highlighted progress in defense engagements, commonalities between India’s Indo-Pacific vision and South Korea’s New Southern Policy, and mutual recognition of the unity and centrality of ASEAN. On defense cooperation Singh reportedly stated that “defense industry cooperation has been one of the most vibrant aspect of bilateral defense cooperation” and that the two countries exchanged a “road map” of defense industries cooperation. Minister Rajnath also reportedly invited South Korean companies to invest in India’s “defense corridors” which provide “an excellent opportunity for South Korean industries to establish their manufacturing units, benefit from the skilled and economical labor force, natural resources and tailored incentives.”

And the year closed with a Dec. 23 [digital video conference](#) between India's Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Riva Ganguly Das and South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun.

## India-China Relations

2020 was an *annus horribilis* in India-China bilateral relations. The Embassy of China in India lists [14 bilateral interactions](#) among key officials in the 70<sup>th</sup> year of the establishment of diplomatic relations, but from mid-year onwards Delhi and Beijing were dealing with each other about deaths of soldiers on a disputed border, disengagement from the border clash, and commercial de-coupling efforts by India—not forms of cooperation.



Figure 2 Satellite image of Galwan Valley. Photo: Planet Labs Inc via Reuters

The year started off amicably enough when a high-level Indian army delegation led by Northern Army Commander Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh [visited China](#) to exchange views with Gen. Han Weiguo, Commander of People's Liberation Army Ground Force, on measures to enhance peace and tranquility along the borders. But by June there were a series of what India labelled as Chinese transgressions across the line of actual control; leading to a [violent incident in the Galwan Valley](#) on June 15. Estimates vary but reportedly 20 Indian soldiers were killed and over 40 PLA soldiers were killed or injured. Many analysts noted that this was the first fatal clash between India and China since 1975. India and China each accused the other of transgressing the LAC and seeking to change the status quo. So serious was the situation that [Modi addressed the nation on June 17](#).

Throughout this period, India and China maintained official contacts and discussions including a telephone call between External Affairs Minister, Jaishankar and the State Councillor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi on the same day as Modi's speech to the nation. As public sentiment about China in India soured, on June 29 the Indian government banned 59 Chinese mobile apps citing data security and privacy concerns. Even amid these very acute tensions, the two governments sought an agreement to dis-engage and de-escalate. In an important joint press statement resulting from a [Sept. 10 meeting](#) between Jaishankar and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the two sides "agreed that the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side. They agreed therefore that the border troops of both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions." But according to an [official readout](#) of the Dec. 18 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, at the end of the year the two sides are still talking about "work[ing] towards early and complete disengagement of troops along the LAC in accordance with the existing bilateral agreements and protocols, and fully restor[ing] peace and tranquility." Given the low-levels to which the bilateral Sino-Indian relationship has sunk in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral relations, the prospects for an early settlement or even disengagement on the border seem bleak. Moreover, new issues keep arising, such as China's [alleged support](#) for Indian insurgents in the northeast, [establishment of villages](#) along the Bhutan-India border, and plans to build a [major new dam](#) on the upper Brahmaputra River, that complicate the maintenance of "peace and tranquility" beyond the border to bilateral relations generally.

## India & Southeast Asia

India-Southeast Asia relations in 2020 revolved around a number of leader-level bilateral telephone calls, India's interactions with ASEAN-led regional groupings such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus), East Asia Summit (EAS) and the India-ASEAN annual summit which was held online.

The [17th India-ASEAN Summit](#), co-chaired by Modi and Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, took place online on Nov. 12. In his

[remarks](#), Modi “underlined the centrality of ASEAN,” “underscored the importance of strengthening convergence between India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific,” announced the contribution of \$1 million to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, and “reiterated India’s offer of US\$1 billion Line of Credit to support ASEAN connectivity. A new [ASEAN-India Plan of Action](#) (2021-2025) also was adopted.

On the defense and security front, India’s Defense Minister Rajnath Singh [addressed](#) the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus hosted online by Vietnam. India also continued its work through East Asia Summit, cooperating with Australia and Indonesia on an [EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation](#) in February 2020. Another element of India’s security outreach to multiple Southeast Asian countries was the Indian Defense Industry Global Outreach for Collaborative Partnerships: Webinar and Expo for the purpose of achieving a defense export target of \$5 billion in the next five years. In 2020, such programs were held with Cambodia and Indonesia.

However, there was noticeable dissatisfaction with trade and investment relations. In a post-summit briefing, Indian officials noted that “review of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) has been long pending” and that the prime minister had called for an early review in speaking to his counterpart leaders. India’s official in charge of ASEAN responded to questions about the pace of completion of the review and India’s membership in RCEP tersely, saying only that “we did not join RCEP as it does not address the outstanding issues and concerns of India,” but reiterated interest in deepening trade with ASEAN member countries. But when pressed about Modi’s own reference to “diversification and resilience of supply chains” she referred to the prime minister’s articulation of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (“self-reliance” or “self-sufficiency”) which has been [criticized by some](#) as further distancing India from regional and global economic integration. Just a month earlier, speaking to a conference in India’s northeast, the minister of state for external affairs had been [much more blunt](#) about the state of India-ASEAN economic relations. Noting that ASEAN was India’s fourth-largest trade partner and accounts for about 18% of investment inflows into India since 2000, “we are long way from the target of US\$200 billion

by 2022” their leaders had set. He also emphasized that the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) has been “ordinately delayed” and a mid-August meeting of the 17th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers India Consultations only “instructed the senior officials to start the discussions to determine the scope of the review at the earliest to, inter-alia, make the AITIGA more user-friendly, simple and trade facilitative for businesses.”

India also continued interactions with sub-groups of ASEAN countries including such mechanisms as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the India-CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam) grouping. For example, in early December the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the India-CMLV Business Conclave was held at which India’s Minister of State for External Affairs [delivered an address](#) focusing on India’s assistance on COVID-19 as well as human capital development. Though such organizations are low-key, they do provide India with an engagement platform to some of the Southeast Asian countries that are overlooked and, when combined with eastern South Asian states, provide India with an opportunity to pursue niche forms of connectivity, commerce, and diplomacy.

Apart from an ASEAN-wide and sub-regional approach in Southeast Asia, India continued to pursue interactions bilaterally. Of these, relations with Vietnam, Myanmar, and the Philippines were active in 2020.

### India-Vietnam Relations

India and Vietnam continued high-level exchanges in 2020. Vietnam’s vice president’s [visit to India](#) in February was billed as “a step closer towards strengthening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership established in 2016 between the two countries.” It was also important for India’s wider diplomacy given Hanoi’s non-permanent membership of the UNSC in 2020-2021 and incoming chair of ASEAN. Concretely, joint direct flights between Delhi and Hanoi were inaugurated and an agreement was signed to open a Voice of Vietnam office in Delhi. Vice President Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh also visited Bodh Gaya, a key Buddhist pilgrimage site, as symbolizing cultural connections between the two countries.

The [two prime ministers](#) had a telephone conversation on April 13 to discuss the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. In August, the 17<sup>th</sup> Joint Commission Meeting co-chaired by the two Foreign Ministers. And Defense Minister Rajnath Singh held an online meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart in November.

But the most important high-level interaction was the virtual summit between the two prime ministers on Dec. 21 at which a [Joint Vision on Peace, Prosperity and People](#) to guide the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was issued as was a related plan of action for the 2021-2023 time period. Modi also flagged, in his [opening remarks](#), the fact that both countries would be serving as non-permanent members of the UNSC in 2021. Of the nine agreements announced in areas such as energy (petroleum, solar and nuclear), health and peacekeeping operations, three were in the area of defense cooperation including an “implementing agreement” for promoting defense industrial cooperation, an Indian \$5 million grant for Vietnam National Defense University’s Telecommunications University Army Software Park, and announcements related to utilizing India’s \$100 million defense line of credit to Vietnam for high speed guard boats (HSGB) for its Border Guard Command.

### India-Myanmar Relations

The most important event of the year was the state visit of Myanmar’s U Win Myint President to India in late February. A 29-paragraph India-Myanmar [joint statement](#) was issued. Of particular importance was the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph (the first substantive bilateral issue in the joint statement) reiterating “... mutual respect for the already-demarcated portion of the boundary between the two countries and affirm[ing] their commitments to settle pending issues through the existing bilateral mechanisms, such as the Joint Boundary Working Group Meeting.” The focus on managing border and cross-border activity was also referenced again in the section on defense and security in which “[b]oth sides reiterated their commitment to peace and stability along the border areas in order to promote the prosperity of the local people, the two countries and the region. They reiterated their commitment of not allowing any negative elements to use their respective soil for hostile activities against the other side.” The high

priority given to this issue is explained by India’s ongoing concerns about the use of Myanmar territory by ethnic insurgents in India’s northeast and a more recent uptick in Indian allegations that China is supporting these insurgents via the provision of arms; something China has denied and which some experts on the area say is also unlikely. Direct defense cooperation was also referenced.



Figure 3 Myanmar President U Win Myint meets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. Photo: Myanmar News Agency

[Additional areas of cooperation](#) on defense and security flowing from the July 2019 MoU on Defense Cooperation included in the joint statement included “positive momentum” in defense visits and exchanges, “capacity building of the Myanmar Defense Services,” and “enhanced maritime cooperation” including “the signing of an MoU on Maritime Security Cooperation (MSC), conduct of a first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) in September 2019 and commencement of exchange of white shipping data, as important steps in the area.”

Earlier in the year, India’s chief of navy staff had [paid a visit](#) to Myanmar during which a range of navy and maritime interactions were highlighted including Myanmar Navy’s participation in the Indian-led Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and related activities as well as bilateral cooperation via staff talks, the joint working group meeting on maritime cooperation and other operational interactions which include port visits, coordinated patrols, bilateral exercises, training, and hydrography. In addition, both the navies also interact during maritime activities such as Admiral’s Cup, Goa Maritime Conclave and Exercise MILAN.

Oct. 1, India and Myanmar held the [19<sup>th</sup> round of Foreign Office Consultations](#), virtually. The Indian delegation was led by Foreign Secretary Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla and the Myanmar

delegation was led by Permanent Secretary U Soe Han. Interestingly, the official readout of these consultations does not refer to defense and security at all.

Just three days later, India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla [traveled to Myanmar](#) along with Chief of Army Staff General M.M. Naravane for bilateral discussions on a range of issues. While much of the visit was reportedly focused on connectivity, commercial ties, and development, the unusual joint visit of a foreign secretary with the chief of army staff clearly had security and defense elements. According to a summary of the visit provided by India's Ministry of External Affairs, "[t]he two sides discussed maintenance of security and stability in their border areas and reiterated their mutual commitment not to allow their respective territories to be used for activities inimical to each other. The Indian side expressed their appreciation to Myanmar for handing over of 22 cadres of Indian Insurgent Groups to India."

### **India-Philippines Relations**

In early June, Modi exchanged a [telephone call](#) with President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines in which "[t]he leaders shared their satisfaction at the progress seen in recent years in all aspects of the bilateral relationship, including defense cooperation. Modi emphasized that India sees the Philippines as a vital partner in the Indo-Pacific Region." Another important event was the virtual 4<sup>th</sup> India-Philippines Joint Commission meeting in November. Of the eight-point press release of the meeting, the first substantive issue of bilateral cooperation highlighted (after COVID-19) was agreement to "further strengthen defense engagement and maritime cooperation between the two countries, especially in military training and education, capacity building, regular good-will visits, and procurement of defense equipment. They agreed to enhance cooperation in the area of counter-terrorism with information exchange between concerned agencies and support in terms of specialized training needs." Analysts in India and the Philippines [have noted](#) that there are ongoing discussions and possibly even some training on weapons systems such as the Brahmos missile system.

### **Conclusion**

The year of 2020 will make history, mostly due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, not for India-East Asia relations. Still, India maintained ties throughout the region in a very difficult year. India's decision not to join RCEP is generally assessed as a failure in its economic integration with East Asia. On the other hand, it will be worth watching to see how quickly and fully RCEP is ratified and goes into effect, and with what results for the region. India's relations with China plummeted, but were matched in diplomatic downturn, if not deaths, by China's relations with the US, Australia, and Japan. It will be worth watching if 2021 creates a new calibration in China's relations with major Indo-Pacific countries, including India. And there are new variables likely to shape the Indo-Pacific in the year ahead too; most importantly perhaps, the new Biden administration. With India slated to take up a [non-permanent seat](#) on the UN Security Council in 2021 it will be most important to observe if US and Indian cooperation, including via the Quad, will keep apace in the year ahead.

# CHRONOLOGY OF INDIA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS

## JANUARY – DECEMBER 2020

**Jan. 6–9, 2020:** A high-level Indian army delegation led by Northern Army Commander Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh [visits](#) China to exchange views with Gen. Han Weiguo, Commander of People's Liberation Army Ground Force, on measures to enhance peace and tranquility along their borders.

**Jan. 10, 2020:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar [meets](#) with Mongolian delegation for the [inaugural](#) Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Executive Program for Leadership and Policy Training.

**Jan. 15–16, 2020:** Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne visits New Delhi for consultations on the bilateral Strategic Partnership.

**Feb. 4, 2020:** India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and South Korea's Minister of National Defense Jeong Kyeong-doo conduct a ministerial defense dialogue in Delhi.

**Feb. 11–13, 2020:** Vietnam's Vice President Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh travels to Delhi for meetings with India's president, vice president, and prime minister.

**Feb. 17–20, 2020:** India's chief of navy staff, Adm. Karambir Singh, [visits](#) Myanmar for bilateral discussions with Admiral Tin Aung San, Commander in Chief of the Myanmar Navy and Commander in Chief of Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and other Myanmar officials.

**Feb. 25–28, 2020:** New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters visits India for official consultations.

**Feb. 26–29, 2020:** President of Myanmar U Win Myint makes a state visit to India.

**April 23, 2020:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi [speaks](#) by phone with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore regarding responses to COVID-19 and “[b]oth leaders stressed the importance of the India–Singapore Strategic Partnership in the present context.”

**April 28, 2020:** Modi [speaks](#) by telephone to President Jokowi Widodo of Indonesia regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and “underlined the fact that Indonesia is an important maritime partner in India’s extended neighborhood.”

**May 1, 2020:** Modi [speaks](#) by phone with Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha during which he says Thailand “is a valued maritime partner in India’s extended neighborhood, with ethnic and ancient cultural links.”

**May 8, 2020:** India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh [conducts](#) a telephone conversation with Japan's Minister of Defense Kono Taro. The two ministers “conveyed their commitment to take forward the initiatives of bilateral security cooperation under the framework of the India–Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership.”

**May 26, 2020:** India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Australia's Minister of Defense Linda Reynolds consult by phone.

**June 4, 2020:** Modi and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison [hold](#) a Leaders' Virtual Summit and issue a Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia among other declarations and agreements.

**June 9, 2020:** Modi [speaks](#) by phone to President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines during which “[t]he leaders shared their satisfaction at the progress seen in recent years in all aspects of the bilateral relationship, including defense cooperation. Prime Minister Modi emphasized that India sees the Philippines as a vital partner in the Indo–Pacific Region.”



**June 12, 2020:** Modi [speaks](#) by phone to Laos Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, primarily regarding the COVID-19 pandemic during which he highlights the historic and cultural links between the two countries including support for a World Heritage site and the Lao prime minister thanks India for supporting Lao's development programs and capacity building for scholarships. Modi describes Laos as a "valued partner in India's extended neighborhood."

**Aug. 29, 2020:** India's Minister of Commerce and Industry & Railways. Piyush Goyal, and Vietnam's Minister of Industry and Trade Tran Tuan Anh co-chaired a virtual meeting of the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-India Economic Ministers Consultations primarily regarding the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGIA).

**Sept. 10, 2020:** Modi and outgoing Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [conduct](#) a 30-minute Summit Telephone Talk.

**Sept. 25, 2020:** Modi and Japan's new Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide [conduct](#) a 25-minute Summit Telephone Talk.

**Sept. 25, 2020:** Senior officials of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States confer by video as part of ongoing quadrilateral consultations.

**Sept. 25, 2020:** Senior Ministry of Defense officials from India and senior army leaders from Cambodia [participate](#) in a webinar intended to boost India's defense exports to achieve an export target of \$5 billion in the next five years.

**Oct. 1, 2020:** India and Myanmar, led respectively by Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Permanent Secretary U Soe Han, [hold](#) the 19<sup>th</sup> round of Foreign Office Consultations virtually.

**Oct. 4-5, 2020:** India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla [travels](#) to Myanmar along with India's Chief of Army Staff General M.M. Naravane for bilateral discussions on a range of issues.

**Oct. 7, 2020:** India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar [participates](#) in the 13<sup>th</sup> Japan-India Foreign Ministers Strategic Dialogue.

**Oct. 7, 2020:** Jaishankar [travels](#) to Tokyo, Japan for individual bilateral consultations with his Japanese, American, and Australian counterparts as well as for 2<sup>nd</sup> Quad Ministerial Meeting. Later in December, the Trump administration [confers](#) "Legion of Merit" awards to Modi, Abe, and Morrison.

**Oct. 26-27, 2020:** The 3<sup>rd</sup> India-United States 2 + 2 Meeting is held in person in India. The most important of the five agreements [signed](#) during the visit was the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) which provides the legal framework for exchanging geospatial data.

**Nov. 12, 2020:** Modi and Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc [co-chair](#) the 17<sup>th</sup> India-ASEAN Summit online.

**Nov. 17, 2020:** Modi [speaks](#) virtually at the 12<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit (Virtual)

**Nov. 17, 2020:** India's Ministry of Defense's Department of Defense Production [organizes](#) a bilateral webinar and expo with Indonesia on Indian Defense Industry Global Outreach for Collaborative Partnerships as part of a series of such interactions with friendly foreign countries in order to boost defense exports and achieve defense export target of \$5 billion in the next five years.

**Nov. 30, 2020:** India's Vice President Muppavarapu Venkaiah Naidu chairs the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the SCO Council of Heads of Government (which includes China and Russia).

**Dec. 3, 2020:** India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and Mongolia's Chief Cabinet Secretary L Oyun-Erdene [co-chair](#) the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the India-Mongolia Joint Committee on Cooperation.

**Dec. 3, 2020:** Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan speaks to the 6<sup>th</sup> India-CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) Business Conclave.

**Dec. 8, 2020:** India's External Affairs Ministry Secretary (East) Ms. Riva Ganguly Das addresses the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group.

**Dec. 10, 2020:** India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh [addresses](#) the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus hosted online by Vietnam.

**Dec. 10, 2020:** India's Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Riva Ganguly Das conducts a virtual meeting with Stanley Loh, second permanent secretary of Singapore.

**Dec. 18, 2020:** India-Australia-Japan-United States, or "Quad," Senior Officials Consultations [take place](#) via video conference.

**Dec. 21, 2020:** Modi and Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc hold a virtual summit in which they "provide guidance for the future development of India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership."

**Dec. 21, 2020:** India's Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Ms. Riva Ganguly Das delivers the Keynote Address at the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of BIMSTEC Network Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT).

**Dec. 22, 2020:** India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh [holds](#) a telephone call with his Japanese counterpart and both ministers "welcomed the successful conduct of JIMEX 2020, MALABAR 2020 and also the recent successful visit of Chief of Staff, JASDF to India."

**Dec. 23, 2020:** India's Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Ms Riva Ganguly Das and South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun [conduct](#) a digital video conference. India continues to seek opportunities for defense industrial cooperation with Korea. In January 2020 South Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering [was named](#) one of five companies shortlist for India's P-75I submarine project.