

India-Philippines Strategic Partnership: Defence, Trade, and Maritime Cooperation

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India-Philippines Strategic Partnership Latest News

- India and the Philippines have elevated their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership during President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s maiden visit to India, focusing on defence, maritime cooperation, and trade.

Historical Background

- India and the Philippines established diplomatic relations in 1949.
- Over the decades, their engagement has evolved steadily, shaped by shared democratic values, anti-colonial legacies, and an increasing convergence in geopolitical interests.
- India's **"Look East"** and now **"Act East"** policy has progressively deepened engagement with Southeast Asian countries, with the Philippines playing an increasingly central role.

Trade and Economic Ties

- India and the Philippines signed a Trade Agreement in 1979, but significant bilateral trade growth began after the late 1990s, spurred by India's Look East Policy and the 2009 India-**ASEAN** Trade in Goods Agreement.
- Bilateral trade crossed the **USD 3 billion mark for the first time in 2022-23** and reached **USD 3.53 billion in 2023-24**, with India enjoying a trade surplus.
- Major Indian exports include **engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automotive parts, and rice**, while key imports from the Philippines include **semiconductors, electrical machinery, ores, and food industry residues**.
- The Philippines accounts for nearly **20% of Indian pharma exports to ASEAN**.

Development Cooperation

- India has offered several capacity-building and training programmes to the Philippines under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme**.
- Both countries cooperate in areas such as disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and now increasingly in digital infrastructure, with India offering to support the Philippines' Sovereign Data Cloud pilot project.

Defence and Maritime Cooperation

- In recent years, defence cooperation has emerged as the most dynamic pillar of India-Philippines relations.
- In 2022, India secured a landmark **USD 375 million deal to supply BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles** to the Philippine Navy, making it India's first major defence export in Southeast Asia.
- India and the Philippines have held joint naval exercises and regular dialogues on maritime security, defence logistics, and military training.
- The growing alignment comes amid shared concerns over China's assertiveness in the **South China Sea** and the need for a **rules-based maritime order**.

News Summary

- The bilateral relationship witnessed a transformative moment during the first-ever state visit of Philippine President **Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** to India recently, at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- **Key Highlights of the Visit:**
 - **Strategic Partnership Formalised:** India and the Philippines officially elevated their ties to a Strategic Partnership, signalling long-term cooperation in strategic sectors.
 - **Maritime Security and Defence Dialogue:** Both sides agreed to institutionalise a **Ministerial Defence Dialogue** and enhance defence industry cooperation.
 - **BrahMos Expansion and Joint Production:** The Philippines reaffirmed its interest in expanding the BrahMos missile deal and exploring **joint production and co-development**.
 - **Regional Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific:** India reiterated its support for ASEAN centrality and upheld the 2016 **Arbitral Tribunal ruling on the South China Sea**, aligning with the Philippines' territorial position.
 - **Trade and Economic Commitments:** Both leaders pledged to double bilateral trade by 2030 and signed MOUs in pharmaceuticals, digital payments, and green energy.

- **People-to-People Engagement:** India announced additional ITEC scholarships for Filipino professionals and new youth exchange programs.
- President Marcos described India as an “indispensable partner” in ensuring **regional peace, stability, and prosperity**, while PM Modi lauded the Philippines’ trust in Indian defence capabilities and commitment to a free Indo-Pacific.

Source: TH | IE

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