

# INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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## Overview

Security cooperation across the Indo Pacific intensified in November, with Southeast Asia emerging as a central arena for new defence partnerships, technology initiatives, and diplomatic signalling. The Philippines expanded its network of security agreements with Australia and Canada, while Australia and Indonesia concluded a landmark bilateral security treaty. Indonesia and Japan advanced maritime cooperation, and India joined Australia and Canada in launching a new trilateral technology partnership. Amid these developments, Singapore faced an unexpected wave of online backlash following Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's remarks on China–Japan tensions, underscoring the volatility of digital nationalism. Meanwhile, Myanmar's junta continued its crackdown on large-scale cyber fraud operations, highlighting persistent governance and security challenges in the country's border regions.

### Philippines–Australia Defence Agreement Under Preparation

Manila and Canberra are advancing negotiations on a reciprocal access agreement that would allow both countries' forces to operate from each other's military facilities. Expected by 2026, the pact builds on an earlier defence cooperation framework and reflects shared concerns over China's growing military presence in contested maritime zones. The agreement includes plans for new military infrastructure

across five Philippine sites to enhance maritime domain awareness and strengthen the Philippines' ability to protect its exclusive economic zone. It aligns with Manila's broader strategy of diversifying defence partnerships, following recent agreements with Japan, New Zealand, and Canada, and ongoing talks with France and the United Kingdom. Experts say, the agreement contributes to a more interconnected Indo-Pacific security architecture, enhances interoperability, and strengthens deterrence through deeper middle-power coordination.

### Philippines and Canada Conclude Defence Cooperation Pact

The Philippines and Canada have formalised a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA), enabling expanded joint training, operational coordination, and participation in multinational exercises. The pact is widely viewed as part of a broader response to China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. Canada identifies the Philippines as a key democratic partner in Southeast Asia and a strategic actor within ASEAN. The agreement signals Ottawa's intent to play a more sustained role in Indo-Pacific security through capacity-building and defence cooperation. Observers argue the SOVFA strengthens Canada's Indo-Pacific engagement and reinforces Manila's strategy of building a diversified network of security partners beyond traditional alliances.

## Australia, Canada, and India Launch Trilateral Technology Partnership

India, Australia, and Canada have launched a new trilateral initiative, the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation (ACITI) Partnership to boost cooperation in critical and emerging technologies. The framework prioritises cooperation on clean energy, critical minerals, resilient supply chains, and responsible artificial intelligence development. The initiative aims to link government agencies, research institutions, and private-sector actors to accelerate innovation, promote investment, and harmonise policy approaches to technology governance. The ACITI reflects the rise of technology-focused mini literalism. It seeks to reduce strategic vulnerabilities in supply chains, promote standards-based technological ecosystems, and support broader Indo-Pacific objectives of resilience and sustainability in an era where great power rivalry is redefining rules of engagement across geographies.

## Australia and Indonesia Sign Landmark Security Agreement

Australia and Indonesia have agreed to a new bilateral security treaty that expands on their existing Defence Cooperation Agreement. The treaty commits both countries to regular high-level consultations and outlines mechanisms for coordinated responses to security challenges affecting either state or their shared interests. Although the full text has not been released, the

agreement marks a significant step forward in a historically uneven relationship and reflects mutual recognition of shared strategic risks, including maritime security and grey-zone activities. The treaty is highlighted by both sides as key to enhancing the region's capacity for collective crisis response. It also positions Indonesia as a more active security partner amid shifting regional power dynamics.

## Indonesia and Japan Expand Maritime and Defence Cooperation

During their third 2+2 ministerial dialogue, Indonesia and Japan agreed to expand maritime security cooperation, increase joint exercises, and enhance defence personnel exchanges. Discussions included protecting shared military information and exploring defence technology transfers. Japan's Official Security Assistance (OSA) framework will support Indonesia's maritime capabilities, reflecting Tokyo's broader strategy of deepening security ties with Southeast Asian partners. The strengthened partnership is aimed at building a more interconnected regional security architecture, reinforcing Japan's role as a key provider of maritime security assistance.

## Singapore PM Lawrence Wong's Remarks on China-Japan Tensions Trigger Online Backlash

At the 2025 Bloomberg New Economy Forum, Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong urged China and Japan

to “find ways to resolve” their differences over the Taiwan Strait. He noted that many Southeast Asian states have “put the history aside” and are “moving forward,” referencing Japan’s wartime legacy to advocate for de-escalation. The remarks sparked significant online backlash from Chinese netizens, nationalist commentators, and several Hong Kong media outlets, some of whom criticised Wong’s ethnic Chinese background. The incident according to experts, apart from highlighting the risk of rising digital nationalism underscores the sensitivity of cross-Strait and China–Japan issues in south east Asia and the reputational risks faced by Southeast Asian leaders navigating major-power tensions.

### **Myanmar Junta Raids Second Major Online Scamming Hub**

Myanmar’s military authorities conducted a major raid on a large cyber fraud compound near the Thai border, detaining hundreds of foreign nationals. The operation follows a similar crackdown in October and highlights Myanmar’s role as a major hub for transnational online scams, including romance fraud, cryptocurrency schemes, and investment scams. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, cyber fraud operations across Southeast Asia generate an estimated USD 40 billion annually. Myanmar’s border regions, where state control is fragmented, remain central nodes in these criminal networks.