

INDIA-NEW ZEALANDS DEFENCE TIES: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

NEWS: Working closely with India on defence, security issues: New Zealand Deputy PM

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India and New Zealand are deepening ties through defence cooperation, naval engagements, and a newly announced Free Trade Agreement, highlighting shared Indo-Pacific security concerns. Despite challenges like trade divergences and political sensitivities, both nations are aligning strategically on maritime security, education, and multilateral diplomacy.

Context

- The visit of **New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs to India** in 2025 underscored India's growing influence in regional and global geopolitics.
- During the visit, India was termed a **"geopolitical giant"** and an **"indispensable security actor"**, particularly in the **Indo-Pacific region**, which is becoming the focal point of strategic balancing.

Diplomatic Relations

- **Established in 1952**, India–New Zealand diplomatic relations are based on **shared democratic values, rule of law, and parliamentary systems**, as both are Commonwealth members.
- **New Zealand's 'Opening Doors to India' policy** launched in October 2011 placed India as a **priority engagement partner**.
- This policy was **reaffirmed in 2015**, highlighting long-term commitment to bilateral relations with India.

Strategic and Defence Cooperation

- **Defence Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) – March 2025**
 - A formal MoU was signed between both countries to deepen defence ties.
 - It includes **exchange of military personnel, joint training exercises, staff college linkages, and naval port visits**.
- **Naval Diplomacy and Port Calls**
 - In 2023, **INS Sahyadri** and **INS Kolkata**, two major Indian Naval Ships, visited **Wellington** and **Auckland** respectively.
 - In 2025, **INSV Tarini** under the all-women circumnavigation mission **'Navika Sagar Parikrama-II'** docked at **Port Lyttelton**, showcasing growing naval outreach and goodwill missions.
- **Combined Task Force (CTF)-150 Participation**

- New Zealand contributes to **CTF-150**, a multinational naval task force headquartered in **Bahrain**.
- It works on **ensuring maritime security** in the **Middle East, Gulf of Aden, and Western Indian Ocean**, which aligns with India's interest in protecting sea lanes and countering piracy.
- **Shared Security Interests in the Indo-Pacific**
 - Both countries advocate for a **free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific**.
 - Emphasis is laid on **freedom of navigation, maritime security, and cooperation under the UN framework**.

Economic and Trade Relations

- **Trade Statistics (2023–24):**
 - Total bilateral trade stood at **USD 1.75 billion**.
 - **New Zealand's exports to India** were valued at **USD 0.84 billion**, mainly consisting of:
 - **Wool, aluminum, iron & steel, fruits and nuts** (especially kiwifruit).
 - **India's exports to New Zealand** amounted to **USD 0.91 billion**, which include:
 - **Pharmaceuticals, textiles, mechanical machinery, auto parts, and chemicals**.
- **Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) – March 2025:**
 - Announced with the aim to **reduce trade barriers, increase market access, and strengthen supply chains**.
 - CFTA is also expected to expand **New Zealand's involvement in India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**, enhancing blue economy cooperation.

Educational and Cultural Ties

- **Indian Diaspora in New Zealand:**
 - New Zealand hosts around **300,000 persons of Indian origin**, contributing significantly to its **cultural diversity, economic growth, and public services**.
 - The diaspora plays a critical role in enhancing **people-to-people ties and cultural exchange**.
- **Indian Students in New Zealand:**
 - Around **8,000 Indian students** pursue higher education in New Zealand.

- Popular areas of study include **information technology, hospitality, engineering, science, and architecture.**
- **Cultural and Sports Exchanges:**
 - **Cricket and hockey** serve as strong cultural bridges between the nations.
 - **Mountaineering and tourism** also boost goodwill and shared interests in adventure and ecotourism.

Key Challenges in Bilateral Relations

- **Trade Policy Divergences:**
 - India's **withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** over concerns related to **agricultural and dairy product imports** limited the potential for deeper trade integration with New Zealand.
- **China Factor and Geopolitical Concerns:**
 - New Zealand maintains **extensive trade relations with China** (over **USD 24 billion**), which raises **strategic apprehensions for India.**
 - India seeks assurance that **New Zealand's economic closeness to China** will not compromise regional balance or security partnerships.
- **Political Sensitivities – Anti-India Activities:**
 - India has expressed concern about **pro-Khalistan protests** and other **anti-India propaganda** occurring within New Zealand.
 - While New Zealand cites **freedom of expression**, India insists on the need for **balanced diplomatic handling** of such issues to avoid bilateral friction.

Conclusion

- **New Zealand's evolving foreign policy** shows a shift toward **realism and multipolar engagement**, with India positioned as a **key strategic and economic partner.**
- The growing **defence cooperation, maritime engagement, and educational collaboration** reflect a **deepening bilateral relationship.**
- Both countries can play a **constructive role in ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific** by promoting **rules-based order, sustainable trade, and inclusive security frameworks.**
- With continued dialogue and joint initiatives, **India–New Zealand relations are poised for greater strategic and economic alignment** in the coming decades.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/working-closely-with-india-on-defence-security-issues-new-zealand-deputy-pm/article69638714.ece>

