

India-Philippines Relations Elevated to Strategic Partnership – International Relations

In 2025, India and the Philippines elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership during the Philippines President's state visit to India. The visit reaffirmed the 1952 Treaty of Friendship and aims to enhance cooperation in defence, trade, maritime security, technology, and people-to-people ties.

Key Outcomes of the Philippines President's Visit to India

1.Strategic Partnership Declaration

India and the Philippines officially elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership level, marking a deeper and long-term alignment in political, economic, defence, and cultural ties. This upgrade signals an intent to coordinate closely on regional security, trade integration, and technology collaboration.

2.Adoption of Plan of Action (2025–2029)

A comprehensive roadmap covering the next five years was agreed upon. Priority areas include defence cooperation, maritime security, trade and investment, technology transfer, infrastructure development, connectivity initiatives, and joint climate change adaptation projects.

3.Consular and Legal Cooperation

Visa facilitation

The Philippines granted visa-free entry to Indian tourists, aiming to boost tourism and people-to-people ties. India extended gratis (free) e-tourist visas to Filipino nationals for one year starting August 2025.

Legal treaties signed

1.Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), Enables both countries to cooperate in criminal investigations, prosecutions, and evidence sharing.

2.Treaty on Transfer of Sentenced Persons, Allows prisoners to serve their sentences in their home country, helping in social rehabilitation and family reintegration.

Infrastructure and Investment Cooperation

The Philippines invited Indian companies to participate in major national infrastructure projects, such as ports, railways, and urban transport systems. India offered to share its Gati Shakti National Master Plan for integrated infrastructure planning. India to assist the Philippines in establishing its Sovereign Data Cloud to enhance digital sovereignty and cybersecurity. Philippines invited to join the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC–IOR) to strengthen maritime domain awareness.

Evolution Of India-Philippines Relations

1.Diplomatic Engagement

Diplomatic ties were established in 1949. The Philippines is currently the ASEAN–India Dialogue Coordinator (2024–27), giving it a central role in fostering India–ASEAN cooperation.

2.Economic and Trade Cooperation

Bilateral trade has increased from USD 2.03 billion in 2020–21 to USD 3.53 billion in 2023–24, with India maintaining a trade surplus. India's exports: Pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, rice, and auto components. Philippines' exports: Semiconductors, copper, agricultural inputs, and processed food

products. India accounts for 12% of the Philippines' total pharmaceutical imports, underlining its role as a reliable health-sector partner.

3. Defence Ties

Defence MoU signed in 2006 led to the creation of a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee. In 2022, India agreed to supply BrahMos supersonic missiles to the Philippine Navy — its first major defence export to Southeast Asia. In July 2025, both navies conducted their first joint naval exercise in the South China Sea, signalling deepening security cooperation.

4. International Support

The Philippines supports India's permanent membership bid for the UN Security Council and backs its candidatures for non-permanent seats. India, in turn, supports the Philippines' UN Security Council bid for 2027–28.

Significance of India–Philippines Relations

1. Strategic Location & Security Cooperation

The Philippines' position in the South China Sea makes it a critical player in the Indo-Pacific's maritime security. Cooperation is part of India's Act East Policy and MAHASAGAR Vision for a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

2. Asean Engagement

The Philippines' influence in ASEAN helps strengthen India's regional presence. Closer bilateral ties act as a bridge for India to deepen trade and political linkages with Southeast Asia.

3. Economic Opportunities

Scope for collaboration in IT, pharmaceuticals, fintech, clean energy, and infrastructure development. Partnership in seaweed cultivation for nutrition and industry use is an emerging area of interest.

4. Digital Cooperation

India's offer to build a pilot Sovereign Data Cloud Infrastructure will enhance the Philippines' digital autonomy and cybersecurity resilience.

Challenges in India–Philippines Relations

1. China Factor, India's naval cooperation with the Philippines in the South China Sea could provoke Chinese opposition, risking diplomatic friction.

2. Economic Underperformance, Trade potential remains underutilised due to slow progress on a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and limited connectivity.

3. Implementation Bottlenecks, even after signing multiple agreements, bureaucratic delays and capacity gaps slow down on-the-ground results.

Steps to Strengthen Ties

1. Defence Capacity Building, expand technical training under ITEC and develop naval platforms customised for Philippine needs.

2. Accelerate Trade Negotiations, Fast-track PTA discussions focusing on priority sectors like digital services, processed food, electronics, and pharma.

3. Deepen People-to-People Links, Offer more educational scholarships in medicine, engineering, and IT for Filipino students.

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