

INDIA-AUSTRALIA MEET STRENGTHENS TIES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Australia

Working together: Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking to Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Thursday. AP

India and Australia raised their relationship to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” after a ‘virtual’ summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who concluded nine agreements including a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and issued a joint declaration on a “Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

The two countries also agreed to increase the frequency of meetings between the two Prime Ministers, and took the “2+2” format of bilateral meetings to the level of Foreign and Defence Ministers, who will meet to “discuss strategic issues” at least every two years. The two leaders, who are expected to meet in person at the extended G-7 summit to be held in the United States later this year, spoke for more than an hour over a video link, a first for a bilateral summit for India.

“Both India and Australia share a vision of a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region to support the freedom of navigation, overflight and peaceful and cooperative use of the seas by adherence of all nations to international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and peaceful resolution of disputes rather than through unilateral or coercive actions,” said the statement issued in New Delhi and Canberra.

‘No talks on China’

The summit came amidst tensions between India and China over the stand-off at the Line of Actual Control, and Australia-China tensions over trade issues and differences over handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Ministry of External Affairs officials said there had been “no discussion” on China, and the two leaders had not discussed including Australia for “Malabar” or quadrilateral maritime exercises that would include India, Australia, U.S. and Japan, something that China has opposed in the past.

“Both sides agreed to continue to deepen and broaden defence cooperation by enhancing the scope and complexity of their military exercises and engagement activities to develop new ways to address shared security challenges,” the joint statement added, referring to the MLSA which will allow both militaries the reciprocal use of bases, humanitarian and disaster relief cooperation, port exercises, and passage exercises. Other agreements announced included a framework arrangement on cyber technology, an MoU on mining and processing critical and strategic minerals including Australian rare earth metals used for electronics, governance, vocational training and water management.

Mr. Modi said the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) took on new meaning at the time of the global pandemic. “The world needs a coordinated and collaborative approach to come out of the economic and social side effects of this pandemic. Our government has decided to view this crisis as an opportunity,” he told Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Morrison said the CSP would raise the level of “trust” required to improve the “trade and investment flows” between India and Australia.

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