

# INDIA, AUSTRALIA TO ELEVATE STRATEGIC TIES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Australia

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is expected to visit Australia in November when both countries are likely to conclude the long-pending mutual logistics support agreement and a broader maritime cooperation agreement to elevate the strategic partnership, defence and diplomatic sources said.

“The mutual logistics support agreement, information exchange and a broader maritime agreement, including maritime domain awareness, are expected to be concluded soon. These will lead to greater interoperability and help in elevating the strategic partnership,” a diplomatic source told *The Hindu* .

## More visits scheduled

There have been a series of high-profile visits aimed at elevating the partnership, the source said, and more visits have been scheduled. Navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh went to Australia and New Zealand early this month.

“Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is likely to visit Australia in November, and the mutual logistics support agreement will be signed then,” a defence source confirmed.

The two countries have steadily expanded cooperation in maritime domain awareness. The information exchange agreement, with a broader mandate, is important for better maritime domain awareness, the source added.

Australia has been keen on a mutual logistics support agreement and submitted a draft after India signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the United States in 2016. But New Delhi said it would consider more such agreements only after the first was operationalised.

India has since signed such agreements, the latest with South Korea early this month.

## Largest contingent

The bilateral naval exercise, AUSINDEX, held earlier this year saw the participation of the largest Australian naval contingent ever sent to India, with over 1,000 men. Officials of both countries said that with more engagement, the mutual logistics support agreement would facilitate cooperation by simplifying paperwork and procedures, which are “pretty huge”.

The Indian Navy and the Royal Australian Navy are partners in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a maritime cooperation construct, conceptualised by the Indian Navy in 2008.

“Both navies are also co-chairs for the IONS working group on information-sharing and interoperability, for which the inaugural meeting was hosted by Australia in June 2019,” the Navy said in a statement earlier.

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