



India-Australia Virtual Summit

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Why in News

Recently, Prime Ministers of **India and Australia** held their **first virtual bilateral summit** and both **concluded nine agreements** including the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)** and the **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)**.

The two leaders are expected to meet in person at the extended **G-7 summit** which will be held in the USA later in 2020.

Key Points

- **Agreements:**
 - **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:** Upgradation of the existing **2+2 dialogue** to the Ministerial level, elevating the **2009 bilateral Strategic Partnership** to a **CSP**.
 - India already has a **2+2 ministerial-level dialogues** mechanism with the USA and Japan, the other members of the **Quadrilateral grouping (QUAD)**.
 - **India has signed CSPs with** the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) thus far, while **Australia has CSPs with** China, Indonesia and Singapore.

- **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement:** 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.
 - It will **increase military interoperability** through defence exercises and allow both militaries the reciprocal use of bases, humanitarian and disaster relief cooperation, port exercises and passage exercises.
 - **India has such agreements with the USA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement-LEMOA), France, Singapore and South Korea.**
- **Joint declaration on ‘Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific’:** The two sides announced a roadmap to harness opportunities and meet challenges together as **comprehensive strategic partners**.
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA):** The two sides decided to recommence suspended talks over the **India-Australia CECA** which has been suspended since 2015.

This move comes in the wake of **India opting out** of the **ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** (RCEP).
- **Australia-India Strategic Research Fund** to promote innovative solutions for responding to and treating **Covid-19** as well as other jointly determined priorities, to be preceded by a one-off **Special Covid Collaboration Round in 2020**.
- Both sides have decided to reflect on the recommendations of the ongoing evaluation of the international response over the **World Health Organisation’s** (WHO) role in dealing with the Covid-19 **pandemic**.

Both countries will work together to **strengthen international institutions** to ensure they are **inclusive and rules-based**.
- **Framework arrangement on Cyber and Cyber-enabled critical technology cooperation:** Work together in the digital economy, cybersecurity and critical and emerging technologies.
- **Agreement on agriculture and related activities:** Agriculture was identified as an important pillar of both the economies with shared challenges and climatic conditions.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on mining and processing critical and strategic minerals:** Cooperate **on new technologies for exploration and extraction of minerals** including Australian rare earth metals used for electronics, governance, vocational training and water management.

- **Untouched Issues:**

- **Tensions between India and China** over the **standoff at the Line of Actual Control** (LAC) and Australia-China tensions over trade issues and differences over the handling of the pandemic.
- There were no discussions on **including Australia in Malabar exercise.**
- Both leaders had no discussions on **the RCEP**, even though earlier Australia had expressed hope that India would reconsider joining the trade agreement.

Way Forward

- **Shared values, shared interests, shared geography and shared objectives** are the bedrock of deepening India-Australia ties and the cooperation and coordination between the two countries have picked up momentum in recent years.
- Both India and Australia share a vision of a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region and cooperative use of the seas by adherence 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.

Source: TH