

Modi comes bearing gifts on trade, defence

BEN PACKHAM
ANTHONY GALLOWAY

Anthony Albanese and Narendra Modi have pledged a major expansion of the nations' defence ties, cleared the way for billions of dollars worth of uranium sales to India, and vowed to fast-track a new free-trade agreement and bilateral investment treaty.

Meeting his Indian counterpart in Melbourne, the Prime Minister declared the nations to be "top tier" security partners, and said Australia would become a "trusted supplier of uranium to India" under a new peaceful-use framework overturning more than a decade of stalled trade.

"Australia's relationship with India has never been more consequential than it is today. Our partnership has never been stronger," Mr Albanese said.

Mr Modi, on a three-day visit to Australia, received a rock star welcome from Indian Australians at Melbourne's Marvel Stadium on Thursday night.

In a rare move, Mr Modi started his speech in English which included an acknowledgment of the traditional owners of the land, before praising the Indian diaspora in Australia.

"All of you are contributing towards Australia's growth, but I know that you continue to keep a close watch on India," he said.

"I was very keen to meet all of you in Melbourne ... so I thought this time I will come and have a flat white with all of you. The enthusiasm and the energy with which all of you and our Aussie friends have welcomed all of us, it is even more amazing. I am very grateful also to my friend, to India's friend, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

"We have all seen that when Prime Minister Albanese speaks, he captivates the hearts and minds of Indians."

Mr Albanese said Australia was a better nation because of Indian-Australians, describing them as the "living bridge" between the two countries. "Your love of this country has made it better, stronger and more vibrant," he said.

Earlier, after 80 minutes of talks with Mr Albanese, he declared the nations' ties had "attained new heights", and revealed India was ready to upgrade the nations' 2022 interim trade agreement to a new comprehensive deal. "We have now decided to work at a fast pace on a comprehensive economic co-operation agreement ... an agreement that will be balanced, ambitious and win-win for both countries," he said. "We will also move forward at a fast pace on a bilateral investment treaty."

The move follows a slower-than-hoped increase in two-way trade and investment under Australia's 2018 blueprint to make India a top-tier economic partner by 2035.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Anthony Albanese at the Melbourne Meets Modi event at Marvel Stadium on Thursday

AAP

Bill for taxpayers to Marvel as Allan aims for an uplift

EXCLUSIVE

ANTHONY GALLOWAY

Victorian taxpayers will foot a substantial share of the bill for Thursday night's Narendra Modi event at Marvel Stadium, as Premier Jacinta Allan seeks to maximise the political dividend from the Indian Prime

Minister's three-day visit.

The Victorian government's financial backing of the event comes as Labor intensifies efforts to consolidate support among Victoria's large Indian-Australian community.

After greeting Mr Modi alongside former home affairs minister Clare O'Neil on Wednesday night, Ms Allan secured a prime-time speaking role at Thursday's stadium event and will hold a private meeting with the Indian leader on Friday.

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Under a new joint declaration on defence and security, the leaders agreed to co-ordinate their responses to emerging security threats, with a commitment to "consult on defence-related developments in the Indo-Pacific that affect shared interests".

The nations' military forces will also undertake more complex exercises, build interoperability, deepen naval co-operation under a new maritime security road map,

and deploy aircraft from each others' territories.

"Maritime security is where Australia and India's geography and security interests most strongly align and intersect," the declaration said.

The commitments came just days after China demonstrated its

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PM's all the way with Mr India



BEN PACKHAM
COMMENT

Anthony Albanese is going all-in on India as Donald Trump upends the rules-based global order and China asserts its military might with alarming regularity.

Among a slew of announcements, he and Narendra Modi have pledged to elevate the countries' defence ties to a level approaching those between Australia and its quasi-ally Japan.

As "top tier" security partners, Australian and Indian forces will undertake more complex exercises, expand naval co-operation and deploy aircraft from each others' territories.

Even more consequentially, they have committed to "consult on defence-related developments in the Indo-Pacific that affect shared interests".

This mirrors a commitment between Australia and Japan in 2022, which was expanded to include the US two years later.

Having the same arrangement with New Delhi expands Australia's eyes and ears more deeply into the Indian Ocean.

Albanese's green-lighting of uranium sales to India will also be critical in bolstering the nations' strategic trust, and will allow Australia to finally reap the rewards of a more than decade-old export framework that stalled amid concerns over safeguards.

Those issues have now been resolved to Australia's satisfaction following sweeping reforms introduced by Modi's coalition government in December last year.

India's energy needs are growing faster than almost any other

major economy's, driven by rapid industrialisation, a rising middle class, and surging demand from data centres and AI.

Modi wants to increase his country's nuclear generation by more than tenfold – from 8.8GW today to 100GW by 2047.

For this it's natural he would look to Australia, a fellow Quad member, which has 28 per cent of the global uranium resource.

As Modi told the Prime Minister on Thursday: "Australia's huge uranium reserves are directly connected to India's nuclear journey."

This gives Australia significant leverage in the burgeoning bilateral relationship. Add to that Australia's critical mineral reserves, and the nation is well-placed to become an indispensable strategic and economic partner to one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

New Delhi's ties to Moscow
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