

Vol 12 No 1 January 2026

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

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Overview

The closing weeks of 2025 underscored the fragility of the Indo-Pacific as the region grappled not only with shifting security alignments and contested politics but also with the devastating impacts of climate change. The deadly floods across South and Southeast Asia underscore how climate change is no longer a distant threat but a destabilising force that compounds humanitarian crises and strains state capacity. Thailand and Cambodia entered a fragile second ceasefire after weeks of deadly clashes. The Philippines and South Korea deepened defence cooperation through new naval acquisitions. Myanmar's junta pressed ahead with nationwide elections, widely condemned by the international community as illegitimate. Meanwhile, Australia and the United States celebrated 40 years of AUSMIN consultations, reinforcing their alliance. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles visited Tokyo, launching a new defence coordination framework with Japan. Australia also unveiled its National AI Plan, signaling ambitions to lead in responsible AI innovation.

Climate crisis triggers deadly floods across Southeast Asia

In late November and December, severe monsoon rains and powerful tropical storms triggered catastrophic floods and landslides across South and

Southeast Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka, Indonesia's Sumatra region, Thailand, and Malaysia. Cyclones Ditwah and Senyar unleashed prolonged, intense rainfall that submerged towns, destroyed homes, severed transport links, and damaged critical infrastructure. The humanitarian toll was staggering: hundreds of thousands were displaced, millions faced power outages and contaminated water supplies, and livelihoods were wiped out. The death toll surpassed 1,000, with later estimates placing fatalities at over 1,750, making the disaster one of the deadliest weather events in recent regional history. Sri Lanka and Indonesia bore the greatest losses. Scientists emphasised that human-driven climate change supercharged the rainfall. Attribution studies confirmed rainfall intensity far above historical norms, signaling a dangerous new pattern of climate-amplified floods that will increasingly test resilience across the region.

Thailand and Cambodia enter their second ceasefire

On December 27, 2025, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to a ceasefire after three weeks of border clashes that displaced close to one million people. The truce was reportedly brokered with support from China, the United States, and ASEAN (via Malaysia's chairmanship). In a joint statement, the

two countries' defence ministers agreed to hold current front lines, prohibit troop reinforcements, and allow civilians to return to border areas as soon as possible. Thailand had previously resisted a ceasefire, arguing that the last agreement was poorly implemented and expressing frustration over what it viewed as Cambodia's attempts to internationalise the conflict. The durability of the ceasefire according to analysts, will largely depend on political will, as nationalist sentiment has intensified in both countries.

Philippines-South Korea boosting defence cooperation

South Korea's HD Hyundai Heavy Industries signed a contract worth 850 billion won (US\$587 million) to deliver two 3,200-ton frigates to the Philippine Navy by 2029. These ships are part of Manila's Horizon III modernisation program, complementing earlier deliveries such as the BRP Miguel Malvar (2024) and BRP Diego Silang (2025) and several patrol ships. South Korea's Hanwha Systems will supply combat management systems and tactical data links for the new vessels. This latest acquisition is tied to the Philippines' broader military modernization efforts that reflects Manila's push to strengthen its defence posture amid shifting regional security dynamics and tensions in the South China Sea.

Nationwide elections of Myanmar's military controlled authorities

Myanmar's military-controlled authorities pressed ahead with nationwide elections, staged in three phases despite the ongoing civil war. The junta has presented the polls as a step toward reconciliation, but Western governments and human rights organisations have denounced them as a sham designed to entrench military power indirectly through allied parties. Since the Tatmadaw's 2021 coup against Aung San Suu Kyi's government, conflict has killed thousands and displaced millions, and opposition groups continue to call for boycotts. The elections are widely seen as pivotal yet contentious, with uncertain implications for Myanmar's stability and regional relations.

40 years of AUSMIN consultations

Australia and the United States marked forty years of AUSMIN consultations in December, reaffirming their alliance and pledging to expand cooperation in support of a "free and open Indo-Pacific." The consultations are highlighted as a key platform to strengthen defence, security, and diplomatic ties, addressing regional and global challenges while reaffirming their longstanding alliance. The talks emphasised regional stability, economic resilience, and infrastructure projects such as the Luzon Economic Corridor where Australia participates

alongside the United States, the Philippines, and Japan, as well as ongoing telecommunications and economic development initiatives with Papua New Guinea, including projects at Lae Port. Both countries also welcomed the completion of the Vaka Submarine Cable to Tuvalu, funded in partnership with regional allies. Defence cooperation was a central theme, with both nations highlighting the importance of their alliance ahead of the 75th anniversary of the ANZUS Treaty in 2026.

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles visits Tokyo

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles also visited Tokyo, where he and his Japanese counterpart announced a new framework for strategic defence coordination. The initiative, coming at a time when Tokyo-Beijing relations are at their lowest point in over a decade will involve annual meetings between defence ministries, militaries, and intelligence agencies, reflecting shared concerns over China's military

activities. The partnership, which aligns with broader US-led security networks, is “pledged to act” as a central pillar of multilayered cooperation across the Indo-Pacific. The visit coincided with preparations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Japan–Australia Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 2026.

Australian government releases national AI plan

The Australian government unveiled its National AI Plan, outlining ambitions to build an AI-driven economy while safeguarding citizens. The plan focuses on attracting investment in digital infrastructure, promoting AI adoption through workforce upskilling, and establishing a new AI Safety Institute backed by AUS\$29.9 million (US\$19.8 million). The institute will monitor and test emerging AI technologies, share information on risks, and support robust legal and ethical standards. Canberra emphasized its role in providing national leadership and international engagement to ensure responsible AI innovation.