India’s power balance in Indo-Pacific

Why in news?

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The visits of Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina and Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull to India exemplify India’s country’s rising global profile but also its growing stakes in the larger Indo-Pacific.

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What is the present India – Bangladesh relationship?

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- **Defence cooperation**: Both stressed the need for greater military-to-military training and exchanges.
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- Both complimented the armed forces for their professional conduct during joint search and rescue operations in the Bay of Bengal leading to the rescue of a large number of fishermen from both sides.
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- The defence relationship was the highlight of Ms. Hasina’s visit to Delhi as it included a MoU on a defence framework, and a **$500 million line of credit (LoC) for defence procurement** by the Bangladesh military forces.
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- **Economic cooperation**: India is extending a $4.5 billion LoC to Bangladesh, over and above the existing $2.8 billion line, **to fund around 17 infrastructure projects** which includes port upgradation works.
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- **Transport cooperation:** Given the critical need for enhancing connectivity in South Asia, India is pushing for early implementation of the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN)** Motor Vehicles Agreement, aimed at facilitating seamless transport of goods over land customs stations.
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- Bus and train services between Kolkata and Khulna have been started, and there are plans to revive inland waterway channels.
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- **Political cooperation**: PM Modi used his political capital to push through

the **land boundary agreement (LBA),** to swap enclaves India and Bangladesh held in each other's territory, in 2015.
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- It is working towards mitigating differences on the critical Teesta water sharing pact.
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- **Terrorism:** Bangladesh is taking serious steps to deal a decisive blow to separatist Indian insurgent organisations such as ULFA and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland.
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- There is greater convergence between India and Bangladesh on dealing with fundamentalist forces such as the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh and Harkat-ul-Ansar.
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Is India planning to shift its power base from South Asia to Indo- Pacific?

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- India is yet to enhance its engagements in the larger Indo-Pacific, thereby getting out of the box of being a mere South Asian power.
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- New Delhi's success in engaging countries such as Japan, Australia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia in recent years is testament to the growing demand in the region for a larger Indian role and presence.
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- **Political relationship:** Australian PM's visit to Delhi showed that India is now widely perceived to be a strong and credible regional force.
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- **Maritime cooperation:** The two countries pledged to enhance maritime cooperation as they underlined the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea).
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- **Defence cooperation**: it is once again is at the centre of this relationship with the decision to hold a bilateral maritime exercise named **AUSINDEX in 2018.**
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- A bilateral exercise of the Special Forces will be held later in 2017, while the **first bilateral army-to-army exercise** will also take place in 2018.
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- **Economic cooperation:** The two countries should now prioritise the conclusion of the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)** at the earliest to give economic heft to their growing security interactions.
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- India emerging as the guarantor of the liberal economic and security order in Asia, there are now new possibilities for reimagining New Delhi’s regional and global role.
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Source: The Hindu

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