# Key takeaways from Summits in Manila

***Mains:*** *GS-II – International relations and Organisations*

## Why in news?

*The Prime Minister of India took part in three back-to-back multilateral meetings on the sidelines of the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summits in Manila.*

## What are the important international summits taking place in Manila?

- **The November 2026 summits in Manila**—comprising the
  - 7th Quad Leaders' Summit,
  - 23rd ASEAN–India Summit – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam; and
  - 21st East Asia Summit (EAS) – U.S., Russia, China, Japan, and South Korea.
- **Focused on** – Maritime security, supply-chain resilience, cybersecurity, and regional stability amid global geopolitical tensions and shipping disruptions.
- **Key Participants** – U.S. President Donald Trump, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, apart from Mr Modi.
- They sent a deeper underlying message on India's broad-based "Act East" and Indo-Pacific policies, even as the world turned its attention to the Trump-Xi-Putin trilateral later in the week.

## Why were the summits particularly important for India this year?

- **Skipped 2025 ASEAN meeting** – In 2025, Mr Modi skipped the ASEAN summits in Kuala Lumpur over what was seen as a combination of domestic commitments and trade friction with U.S. President Donald Trump.
- **Strengthened India-Philippines relations –** Ties with the Philippines have improved dramatically since President Bongbong Marcos's visit to Delhi in August 2025.
- It was doubly important for Mr Modi to attend the two conferences hosted by him — the ASEAN-India summit and the East Asia Summit.
- **Importance of QUAD summit** – The PM of India also attended the Quad Summit, which was hosted by the U.S. and held for the first time during Mr Trump's turbulent presidency.
- It was considered important amid concerns about the U.S. administration's commitment to the Indo-Pacific grouping.
- **Day of intensive regional diplomacy** – By attending the ASEAN-India Summit, East Asia Summit, and Quad Summit, Mr Modi reinforced India's engagement with both

Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

## What were the concrete outcomes from the ASEAN summits?

- **Support for ASEAN cooperation** – Mr Modi's multilateral ASEAN engagements showed a growing desire to work more closely with the grouping at a time when global powers are working in a more unilateral manner.
- He stressed the need for peace, stability, and predictability in an increasingly uncertain global environment.
- **Message on global tensions** – His remarks were seen as an indirect reference to conflicts and strategic competition involving major powers such as the U.S., Russia, and China.
- These developments have significant economic consequences for India and other Asian countries.
- **Free tourist visas for all ASEAN citizens** – The PM of India has announced free tourist visas for all ASEAN citizens to visit India.
- **New initiatives launched** – A number of new initiatives with the grouping were launched, including agreements on
    - Disaster management and
    - Maritime cooperation.
- **Pending negotiations** – India and ASEAN did not make progress, however, on long-pending negotiations for a revision of the FTA — the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement — which is a concern as ASEAN countries are increasingly drawn into the 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that India walked out of in 2019.
- **Key trading partner** – Even so, ASEAN remains a key trading partner, accounting for about 11% of India's global trade that increased to $128 billion in 2025-26.
- **East Asian Summit outcomes** – The East Asian Summit, held for the first time since the U.S.-Iran conflict began this February, agreed to the
    - Seafarers' Safety Initiative for cooperation in joint training and emergency response, and
    - Cooperation on cybercrime prevention.

## Is the Quad now back on track despite dire predictions?

- **Quad expands cooperation** – The Quad, defying predictions in the Politico magazine that it was on "life support", announced new plans for 2027, including a
    - Quad Business Summit and
    - First Quad naval exercises with P3 and P8 patrol aircraft.
- **India yet to host** – India has still not managed to host a Quad Summit in three years, largely due to the unavailability of the U.S. President for such a meeting.
- The summit in Manila did not provide clarity on whether or not it will continue to chair the summit next year as well.
- **Uncertainty over future chairmanship** – The Manila summit did not clarify whether India will continue as the chair of the Quad next year; this issue remains unresolved for now.
- **Next Quad Leaders' Meeting** – The next time all Quad leaders will be together will

be in December, for the G-20 meeting hosted by the USA, and all eyes will be on a possible pull-aside between them.

## How significant were Mr Modi's ASEAN engagements?

- **India's broader strategic outreach** – India's engagement with ASEAN is part of a wider effort to strengthen partnerships and expand its strategic options.
- It complements India's broader diplomatic outreach aimed at building stronger regional and global relationships.
- **Regional power competition** – Given the intensifying U.S.-China engagement, with four Xi-Trump meetings planned for 2026, it is clear that the region must stand on its own in the face of Chinese economic coercion and U.S. strikes in West Asia with repercussions on food, fuel, and fertiliser security.
- **Diversifying markets and supply chains** – As India seeks to diversify its supply chains involving global powers, especially for critical minerals, technology, and artificial intelligence.
- India is also exploring new export opportunities, especially in the Global South.
- **Building Partnerships** – It can forge a common cause with partners in similar positions — ASEAN and other East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea.
- India sees these nations as important partners for cooperation in trade, technology, and supply-chain resilience.
- **Expanding ties** – New Delhi's engagement with the European Union, with the India-EU FTA expected to be signed when Mr Modi travels to Brussels.
- It is also strengthening relations with countries such as Canada, Australia and other "middle power" formations such as the Partnership for Multilateralism (P4M) that India co-sponsored during the UN General Assembly.
- **Focus on trusted partnerships** – During a visit to Tokyo along with the Defence Minister for the India-Japan 2+2 Dialogue, India's External Affairs Minister set the stage for how India is now approaching relations, with "trusted partnerships as solutions" to the difficult international scenario.
- **Preference for secure supply chains** – India believes that trusted partners and shorter supply chains are becoming more important amid global uncertainties, and such arrangements help reduce risks from geopolitical tensions and economic disruptions.
- **Protecting fair and rules-based cooperation** – India is taking a more practical approach to international relations, with an aim to ensure that global rules and institutions are not misused in ways that disadvantage countries that follow them.

## Reference

[The Hindu | Key takeaways from the Quad, ASEAN-India, and East Asia Summits in Manila]

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering