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PM Modi Bilaterals with Wong and Motegi on Quad Margins

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WHY IN NEWS:

On the margins of the **11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (May 26, 2026)** in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held separate bilateral meetings at 7, **Lok Kalyan Marg** with Australia's Foreign Minister **Penny Wong** and Japan's Foreign Minister **Toshimitsu Motegi**. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had already called on PM Modi on **May 24, 2026** during his four-day India visit (May 22–25, 2026). The bilaterals showcased India's "issue-based coalitions" doctrine — extracting concrete deliverables from multilateral platforms.

WHY THE MARGINS MATTER

The Quad's strength is increasingly the sum of the bilateral relationships that anchor it. With the Trump 2.0 administration introducing turbulence in the US-India track (25% reciprocal tariff + 25% Russian-oil penalty effective August 27, 2025), Delhi has actively deepened the **non-US Quad anchors** — Japan and Australia — as hedges. The May 26 bilaterals embedded this hedging strategy in formal diplomacy.

INDIA–JAPAN BILATERAL

PM Modi's meeting with FM Motegi reviewed the breadth of the **Special Strategic and Global Partnership** and identified next-phase deliverables in defence, semiconductors, and infrastructure.

Snapshot

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Partnership status	Special Strategic and Global Partnership — elevated September 2014 (Modi–Abe Tokyo Declaration)
Bilateral trade	~ USD 21 billion (FY25)
2+2 Ministerial Dialogue	Institutionalised November 2019
Flagship infrastructure	Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) — Shinkansen technology; ₹1.08 lakh crore project; JICA financing; target 2027 partial operation
Semiconductor R&D	Renesas, Sony, Toshiba partnerships with Indian fabs and OSAT units
Economic security	India-Japan Economic Security Initiative — Camp David Summit August 2023
Trilateral anchor	SCRI (Supply Chain Resilience Initiative) — India-Japan-Australia trilateral, 2021

Discussion Points

- Expediting MAHSR commissioning and identifying next bullet-train corridors (Delhi-Varanasi and Delhi-Amritsar are in advanced study).
- Japanese investment in India’s semiconductor mission, including assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP) units.
- Defence-industrial cooperation including the proposed UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) mast transfer for Indian naval platforms.
- Coordination on Indo-Pacific maritime surveillance under the new IPMSC.

INDIA–AUSTRALIA BILATERAL

PM Modi’s meeting with FM Wong centred on accelerating the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)** and deepening the critical minerals partnership.

Snapshot

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Partnership status	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership — elevated June 4, 2020 (Modi–Morrison virtual summit)
Bilateral trade	~ USD 31 billion (FY25)
ECTA (Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement)	Signed April 2, 2022 ; in force December 29, 2022
CECA (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement)	Under negotiation since 2024
2+2 Ministerial Dialogue	Institutionalised September 2021
Critical minerals	India–Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership (2022); Australia is the world’s largest lithium producer (~52% global share, 2024)
Defence	AUSINDEX naval exercise (biennial since 2015); AUSTRAHIND Special Forces exercise
Education	Deakin University and University of Wollongong campuses at GIFT City — opened 2023–24; Western Sydney University announced GIFT City campus

Discussion Points

- Pushing CECA to closure in 2026, building on ECTA gains.
- Operationalising critical mineral offtake agreements — lithium, cobalt, nickel — under the new Quad Critical Minerals Framework.
- Expanding the AUSINDEX and AUSTRAHIND exercises to incorporate IPMSC interoperability.
- Cooperation on the Pacific Islands undersea cables initiative, where Australia is a lead Quad partner.

TRILATERAL LINKAGES

India’s bilateral ties with Japan and Australia are reinforced by overlapping trilaterals:

TRILATERAL	MEMBERS	FOCUS
JAI	Japan–America– India	Informal trilateral on Indo-Pacific strategic coordination
Australia–India–Japan FM Dialogue	AIJ	Ministerial coordination
SCRI	India–Japan– Australia	Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (2021) — reducing China dependence

INDIA'S INDO-PACIFIC DOCTRINE — BILATERAL CONTEXT

India's bilateral diplomacy with Japan and Australia operationalises the wider doctrine:

- **SAGAR** (2015) → **MAHASAGAR** (expanded successor): the central organising vision.
- **IPOI** (Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative) — launched at the East Asia Summit, **Bangkok, November 4, 2019** by PM Modi; seven thematic pillars.
- **Multi-alignment in practice**: India simultaneously deepens Quad ties while engaging SCO and BRICS, preserving strategic autonomy.

WHY BILATERALS ON MULTILATERAL MARGINS?

India's diplomatic doctrine increasingly favours “**issue-based coalitions**” — extracting concrete bilateral deliverables from multilateral platforms. The logic:

- Quad provides **public commitment** (signalling, deterrence, norms).
- Bilaterals provide **concrete deals** (project financing, trade pacts, defence transfers).
- Japan and Australia function as **non-US Quad anchors** — insulating India from US-policy volatility under Trump 2.0 (tariffs, Pakistan tilt, episodic transactional shifts).
- Hedging is structural, not **contingent** — embedded in long-cycle agreements like MAHSR and CECA.

ABOUT 7, LOK KALYAN MARG

DETAIL	VALUE
Function	Official residence of the Prime Minister of India
Established	Designated as PM's residence in 1985 (PM Rajiv Gandhi era)
Earlier name	7 Race Course Road — renamed to 7, Lok Kalyan Marg in October 2016
Location	Lutyens' Delhi

WAY FORWARD

- **Institutionalise an India–Japan–Australia FM 2+2 platform** — formalising the existing trilateral.
- **Operationalise CECA in 2026** — targeted signing window, building on ECTA's December 2022 implementation.
- **Scale Shinkansen technology beyond MAHSR** — Delhi-Varanasi and Delhi-Amritsar corridors next.
- **Critical minerals JVs with Australia** — lithium offtake under the Quad Critical Minerals Framework, with KABIL as the Indian SPV.
- **Defence interoperability** — fold AUSINDEX and Malabar exercises into the IPMSC framework.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — International Relations:

- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- India's relations with developed and emerging powers.

Analytical hooks for Mains:

- Hedging and multi-alignment as the operating logic of Indian foreign policy.
- The economic statecraft of FTAs (ECTA, CECA) as strategic instruments.
- Critical minerals as the new geo-economic frontier.

FACTS CORNER

India–Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership: elevated September 2014 (Modi–Abe Tokyo Declaration).

India–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: elevated June 4, 2020 (Modi–Morrison virtual summit).

India–Australia ECTA: signed April 2, 2022; in force December 29, 2022.

India–Australia CECA: under negotiation since 2024.

India–Japan bilateral trade: ~USD 21 billion (FY25).

India–Australia bilateral trade: ~USD 31 billion (FY25).

Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train (MAHSR): Japan-financed via JICA; ₹1.08 lakh crore; Shinkansen technology.

SCRI (Supply Chain Resilience Initiative): India–Japan–Australia trilateral, launched 2021.

Australia’s share in global lithium production: ~52% (2024).

PM’s residence: 7, Lok Kalyan Marg — renamed from 7 Race Course Road in October 2016.

SAGAR doctrine: articulated 2015; MAHASAGAR is the expanded successor.

IPOI launched: East Asia Summit, Bangkok, November 4, 2019 by PM Modi.

AUSINDEX naval exercise: biennial, since 2015.

Deakin University and University of Wollongong campuses at GIFT City: opened 2023–24.

India–Japan 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue: institutionalised November 2019.

India–Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue: institutionalised September 2021.

Sources: [MEA](#), [PIB](#), [The Hindu](#)

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