

Singapore's Prime Minister in India: Roadmap to a Strategic Partnership

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Summary

Lawrence Wong's first visit to India as Singapore's Prime Minister laid out an ambitious and forward-looking roadmap to strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. The focus was on eight areas – economic cooperation, skills development, digitalisation, sustainability, connectivity, healthcare, cultural exchanges, and defence cooperation.

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's visit to India from 2 to 4 September 2025 marked an inflection point in the steady evolution of India-Singapore ties over the last three and a half decades. Against the backdrop of a fracturing global economic order and renewed great power tensions, Wong's trip signalled Singapore and New Delhi's commitment to broaden and deepen their partnership.

Coming amid the deepening crisis in India's relations with the United States (US) in the last few weeks, and just after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's widely noted visit to Tianjin to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, as well as his bilateral meeting with China's President Xi Jinping, Wong's visit sought to take the partnership with India to the next level.

The centrepiece of Wong's visit, which was timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with India, was the [adoption of a roadmap](#) to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. At the heart of the roadmap is the focus on the trinity of trade, technology and security. At his joint press appearance with Wong, [Modi said](#) the two sides have decided to fast-track the review of their Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement and Asean Trade in Goods Agreement in a time-bound manner to accelerate bilateral trade.

Facing an exorbitant tariff rate of 50 per cent on its exports to the US, India is looking to diversify its exports away from the US – the largest destination of Indian exports at around US\$88 billion (S\$119 billion) a year. Rebooting trade relations with Southeast Asia has inevitably acquired a new urgency.

In an interview with [Hindustan Times](#), before he met his Indian counterpart, Wong said Asia must be "prepared for a more fragmented global trading system" and emphasised the importance of regional trading arrangements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which binds the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states and their partners in an Asia-wide free trade arrangement. It might be recalled that India had withdrawn from the RCEP talks at the very last minute in 2019. Among its many concerns was that ASEAN would provide the vehicle for deeper Chinese penetration of the

Indian market under the RCEP. India's China ties took a nosedive in 2020 after the People's Liberation Army incursions in the Spring and a June 2020 clash that killed several troops on both sides.

India then had imposed several measures against Chinese entities and sought to reduce its economic exposure to its northern neighbour. The decision by Modi and Xi to ease the boundary faceoff and restore normal relations at their Kazan meeting in October 2024 has begun to produce a [thaw in bilateral relations](#).

Amid the new challenges from the US faced by both countries, Modi and Xi declared in Tianjin that the two countries are '[partners and not rivals](#)'. India is reportedly exploring measures to loosen the economic restrictions on China. It now looks like Chinese investments will be welcomed in India in non-sensitive sectors. Some [Indian economists argue](#) that India should bring down tariffs to the ASEAN levels and rejoin the RCEP. It remains to be seen if Wong's visit to India will encourage India to move in that direction. However, an early decision looks very unlikely.

As the world witnesses a new technological revolution, all major actors are trying to strengthen their national technological capabilities and looking beyond the US. The last couple of years have seen a new bid by India and Singapore to strengthen their technological engagement and team up in advanced manufacturing. India, which is investing big in developing domestic semiconductor capabilities, has turned to Singapore, which has significant capabilities in this domain.

The roadmap to a [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#) issued after the talks between Modi and Wong states that Singapore will "support the growth of India's semiconductor industry and ecosystem including through cooperation under the India-Singapore Semiconductor Policy Dialogue; facilitating partnerships with Singapore companies; advancing resilient semiconductor supply chains". The two sides also agreed to "mutually beneficial research and development collaborations; promoting workforce development; and encouraging business-to-business cooperation". The case for a productive engagement in the semiconductor sector was outlined during [Modi's visit to Singapore](#) in 2024. Cooperation in this domain has now acquired considerable traction over the last few months.

On the security front too, the two sides have unveiled an ambitious framework. India and Singapore are not allies of the US but are major security partners for Washington and have an incentive to promote mutual security cooperation amid mixed signals from Washington on its security commitments to Asia.

During his visit to Asia in 2017, US President Donald Trump surprised the region with his formulation of [a new geography – the Indo-Pacific](#). Trump also revived the Quadrilateral Security Forum which brought the US together with Australia, India and Japan. Trump's trade first policy, arguments with allies on burden sharing, his willingness to negotiate with Russia on Ukraine over the heads of his European allies and the temptation to focus on hemispheric foreign policy have [raised concerns](#) about the US' willingness to defend a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

As Asian countries beef up their security cooperation with each other, India and Singapore too have moved in that direction. The [road map](#) declares the commitment to “deepen defence technology cooperation in emerging areas such as Quantum Computing, Artificial Intelligence, Automation and Unmanned Vessels”. It calls for continued cooperation in maritime security, maritime domain awareness and enhanced engagement between the armed forces of the two countries and greater diplomatic coordination within the Asian regional security institution.

Wong’s visit to India has underscored the resilience and adaptability of India-Singapore ties. Closer economic, technological and security cooperation between the two is a sensible hedge against the uncertainties of the US’ policy and an assertion of their agency in shaping Asia’s security order.

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